

Working With Transgendered People: Coworkers' Gender Expectations, Conceptions
And Behaviours In The Workplace

by

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ABSTRACT

Classification schemes are embedded into everyday life and people often expect that each category is fixed and stands alone from one another (Bowker & Star, 2000). In terms of gender, this is evident when people focus on gender as either male or female. With the increasing presence of people who are openly transgendered in the workplace (Taranowski, 2008), people's expectations about gender as something 'that just is' are questioned. There is an emerging research literature focusing on people who transition in their work environments, but comparatively little on their coworkers. This research focuses on the experiences of the coworkers' to examine how they interpret the meaning of gender after their colleague transitioned from being a "man" to being a "woman". By analyzing and interpreting people's behaviours in the context of a workplace where an individual reconstructs what it means to embody a specific gender identity, the feelings and behaviours that arise when expectations about gender are contradicted can be examined.

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DEDICATION

To the men and women of society, may you strive to surpass your expectations by
keeping an open mind.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Providing background information shows how a topic fits into broader frameworks applicable to the real world. I will introduce the issues discussed in the paper; demonstrate how it fits into broader gender relation frameworks, and how it is relevant in daily social encounters. I will introduce this discussion using my own background experiences and details about my personal life pertaining to the subject matter. For this introduction, I am incorporating aspects about my experiences as a specific approach attesting to the importance and significance of gender in everyone's lives, including my own, through a contextualization of the material.

My academic career has been daunting, stressful, and unpredictable, but I managed to persevere. The transition from high school to university was unexpectedly challenging both socially and academically. Determining what area I wanted to specialize in, while finding my way around a strange place, made me anxious and apprehensive. Deciding to study a particular subject area that will be financially and personally rewarding is not a minor decision for any young person today. For me, that area was almost immediately, sociology. My passion and curiosity for the subject matter continued to grow from my very first introductory sociology class, nearly seven years ago as an undergraduate student at The University of Toronto.

People, notably friends and relatives, regularly inquire about what sociology is, why I decided to pursue an education in sociology, particularly at the Master's level and what career I see myself obtaining for the future. Sociology, by definition, is the study of society. This definition is simple but extremely broad, pertaining to many issues

involving the individual and society. Similar to every other young professional, I do not have an answer to the question: “What job will a master’s in sociology get you?” I can only respond with what I would like to do including, working for Non-profit organizations (NGO’s), researching at facilities such as CAMh in Toronto, and perhaps even teaching sociology at the college or university level.

I am a very social individual. I like to educate, speak, debate, analyze, question and discuss issues with others. I do not shy away from challenging the dominant discourse on particular issues regarding individuals and the society they live in. The opportunity to write a thesis on any topic I wished, was an opportunity to explore what is understudied and misunderstood instead of topics that have been looked at in-depth already, to push the boundaries and move beyond expectations.

With this in mind, I entered the Master’s program in 2012 and coincidentally that same year I was following up on the Miss Universe Canada Pageant. That year, Jenna Talackova, a woman who had undergone a gender transition from male-to-female had entered the contest. The fact that Jenna was now a contestant in the pageant had created quite the controversy in the media, even more than the pageant itself. “How dare someone like her, someone who was not a ‘real’ lady, try and win a female-based contest?” This was merely one of the comments that consumed the thoughts of a majority of audience members, reporters and pageant organizers. The fact that one individual had the potential to create such a crisis in the media simply for being transgendered and entering a gendered pageant was both interesting and intriguing to me and so I decided to pursue research in this area.

Gender is an aspect of society that is salient and well established, evident in nearly every social space and social relation (Ridgeway, 2011). People have come to understand two genders: male and female as the only existing gender identities, and as a result, those whose self-identity does not conform to conventional notions of male and female, cause people to become nervous and uncomfortable, because we would rather they act the way they are “supposed to” and avoid having to confront our reactions that may label us as ‘bad’ people. After reading all the comments including one that stated, “I am glad a real lady won”, when Jenna was eliminated, I decided to look more closely at gender transitions and reactions to it, in particular: why, when faced with a situation that forces individuals to confront their own assumptions about gender norms, do they express constant struggles and contradictions when addressing it?

Deciding the context to study transitions was a little bit more challenging than simply realizing what I wanted to write a paper on. I needed to look at a gendered space, one that would be relatively easy to access and one where I could acquire participants without being over ambitious with regard to my timeline and resources to complete my Masters. In my initial acquisition of the literature, I noticed several studies had looked to the workplace to study gender transitions, but had solely focused on the individual who transitioned. I wanted to continue to look at the workplace, an inherently gendered space infused with contradictions about appropriate and inappropriate feelings in contrast to behaviour. I wanted to focus more on coworkers’ experiences during a transition rather than the individual undergoing the transition, as this was something that was largely invisible in past research.

Coming to the realization that this would be my topic, I was excited to explore such a controversial issue that was now at the forefront of various newspapers, tabloids and television shows. My choice to pursue the topic of gender transitions gave rise to confusion, deep-rooted negativity and prejudices amidst acquaintances and friends, as well as immediate and extended family. Responses ranged from, “Why the hell do you care?” to “Are you transgender?” to “Does it really even matter” and “I don’t understand these people at all, why would you want to cut off your penis?” Many other responses focused largely on the apparent mutilation of the body rather than of the underlying processes that were occurring. This was not surprising considering that in times of uncertainty and confusion, individuals will try to find an explanation that creates the least friction in their expectations and beliefs (Goffman, 1963), particularly when it relates to the body and its intersection with social spaces.

I began to become much more aware of the distaste and unpleasantness among society with regard to people who are seen as different, or who cannot be confined to the categories that society sets in place to organize people into groups. I started to realize how relatively closed minded people were on issues they had little knowledge about and how quick they were to dismiss my credibility for having chosen to look in depth on transitions in the workplace. In particular, I recall one of my relatives having a discussion with me while we were out one night. He complimented my intelligence before asking me why I would essentially waste this intelligence and capabilities on such an issue he deemed useless and irrelevant. As I listened to him, I realized the extent to which expectations essentially determine people’s feelings and behaviours in everyday social interactions, to a large extent, unconsciously. Just as Goffman outlined, I too needed to

understand the processes that underlies individual's responses to uncomfortable social situations, particularly involving a gender transition to realize that I am not here to make them comfortable or change their views, but instead to address their issues.

This particular topic is relatively new and unexplored, so there is a need for more review, theory and discussion. The need for more research in this area was another reason I chose to explore transitions in work. My thesis is not necessarily intended to force acceptance of the transgender community and of general differences in society among the population. Instead, I wanted to satisfy my own curiosity as well as contribute to the literature in order to better understand the socialization processes within society that construct certain ways as the normal and how people are, often unconsciously, intent on living up to these gendered prescriptions. The fact that members of society become uncomfortable with situations that cannot be immediately explained by societal norms with ease and certainty is interesting, relevant and worth more research.

This paper will begin with a discussion on the literature with regard to gender construction, the stigmatization of the other, performance and appearance and gender as understood in education and work. The literature review is followed by an outline of various theories that were used in past research and that I will utilize now to analyze the content of the interviews with each of the participants, particularly focusing on the performance, yet realness of gender, the importance of the audience in shaping gendered performances and a concept based around the idea that people profess to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations to avoid having to address the true nature of their feelings. My methods of research are outlined, explaining how I obtained, coded and analyzed my data. This is followed by the outline of the results in terms of feelings, behaviours and

expectations. The results are analyzed and discussed with regard to bodies, social spaces and the struggles and dissonance that occur within individuals in relation to their social world. Finally, I conclude with take-home messages, some drawbacks of the study and areas of future research. Through my work, I have come to realize that ‘normal’ and ‘different’ are not people per say, but are instead, two perspectives in need of understanding, modification and reconstruction. My passion and ambition for issues pertaining to gender will hopefully contribute to the continual progression of research in gender categorization and the workplace.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction:

I turned on the television to a reality show called the “Real World,” which films young people in their day-to-day lives. On the screen at that particular moment, was a self-proclaimed lesbian woman who admitted in an interview that she liked to wear boy’s clothes and behaved in a typically masculine demeanor portrayed through her short hair, “beanies”, top hats and khaki pants accompanied by simple t-shirts. She was out and proud with her sexuality and identity until she went on the Internet and read comments from the population of viewers stating that perhaps she was transgendered.¹ She was not expressing her gender in alignment with traditional gender norms and expectations of a “woman”

In terms of what it means to be transgendered, this particular “Real World” woman would not identify as transgendered. However, seeing those comments made her uncomfortable with her established identity. She replaced her hats for a modern haircut and style, her khaki pants for skirts and her loafers for heels. This individual was untroubled by being known as a lesbian, but when she thought that others assumed she was transgendered, she immediately tried to conform to appropriate styles expected for her birth gender as a woman. While a number of things could be at the root of her negative feelings, being transgendered is misunderstood and often coupled with

¹ After being diagnosed with gender dysphoria disorder, an individual may choose to physically and hormonally transition to the opposite sex through a sex change operation and/or hormone drug therapy (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008; Turkewitz, 2013; Taranowski, 2008; Walworth, 2003; Mills, 2013).

Someone whose gender identity is different from her biological sex (Brown et al., 2012).

negativity by the collective as it is associated with persons who challenge gender normativity and destabilize gender categories that are deeply embedded into western cultures (Nagoshi, Bzuzy & Terrell, 2012; Johnson, 2013).

Gender is a primary frame for organizing social relations. People classify others immediately, finding it almost impossible to relate to a person that they cannot fit neatly into the gender binary, as male or female (Ridgeway, 2011). Individuals who seem to break the confines of the gender binary, challenge dominant assumptions about gender and force people to question the scope of gender identity (Rosenblum, 2000; Hines & Sanger, 2010; Rands, 2009). Disorganizing the social situation of gender is unsettling to people who have come to understand a naturalization of gender into male and female through its saturation in our environment (Bowker & Star, 2000). This makes it extremely difficult for people to understand gender as anything other than an either/or version of gender expression.

The power of social influence is immense. People rely on social scripts developed by the larger society, which enforces the idea that gender is something that “just is”. People tend to assume that being told at birth that your child is biologically a boy or girl automatically makes them gendered in such a way (Edmonds, 2010). People tend to assume that gender is fixed much like biology because there are gender norms that guide men and women’s behaviour. This makes certain behaviours and dress appropriate while other actions are deemed inappropriate (Edmonds, 2010). The fact that norms are so strictly followed suggests that gender is indeed fixed and unalterable, when actually, this is not the case. Gender is assumed to just exist a certain way because it is embedded in gender identity norms that are followed according to how they are enforced in each

society (Edmonds, 2010). It was not until recently that researchers are beginning to realize that perhaps instead of being fixed at a young age, gender is quite fluid in people's lives influenced by the social actors themselves.

The notion that men and women are made of "different stuff" (Marshall, 2002) underlies both classical and contemporary social theory. Unconscious acts by men and women continue to perpetuate adherence to this idea that men and women have different bodies, different capabilities and different needs and desires (Holmes, 2007). The belief in the apparent natural differences between men and women in western culture further promotes a clear divide between the sexes along with refusal to acknowledge the existence of people who do not physically and emotionally express themselves in line with their sex at birth. A process of repudiation (Shelley, 2008) in which people reject and deny non-normativity becomes a way for people to cope with the unfamiliar. Since gender is largely involved in how individuals make sense of and engage in the social world (Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012), people would be at a loss about how to 'do gender' in all sanctions of the social environment (Martin, 2003) when they cannot determine how each individual in the interaction identifies.

Within Western Culture, gender is an important aspect of human life as it underlies various relations, so it should be continually studied and understood. With the increasingly visible presence of individuals who are transgendered, attention needs to be brought to gender issues, in order to understand these individuals not as 'the other' or as a divide between 'us' and 'them' but instead as inhabiting a 'borderland' between categories (Meadow, 2010). In one lifetime, they overlap male and female gender categories by living on the edge of one, and eventually transitioning to the other. It is

important to realize that more than disrupting the social order itself, individual lives are being disrupted as they struggle to develop an identity and fit in with those around them.

A transition requires a great amount of adjustment by both the person who is in transition, and those who are apart of their lives such as family, friends and even coworkers. Exploring cis-gendered people's² own experiences and perceptions in relation to the transgendered person can raise important sociological questions to be addressed pertaining to the concept of gender, particularly realizing that gender categories privilege some, while problematize others. Seeing what effect a gender transition from male-to-female has on the broader notion of gendered workplace experiences in terms of gender norms and categorization while assessing behaviours by those around them, is explored further in this paper, beginning with the importance of utilizing the workplace as opposed to other social spaces.

The workplace as a social space:

The workplace as an institution is a social space. According to Schilling (1991), “A space is a resource which simultaneously structures and is structured by individuals in the course of their day-to-day lives” (23). The workplace is a space because it is central to the production of social relationships and it is where interaction among social beings takes place (Schilling, 1991). The interaction among people in the workplace is within fixed barriers of perceptions and activities (Goffman, 1959). These interactions often comply with expectations of roles and status and thus gives rise to a hierarchy with dominant groups situated at the top and marginal groups at the bottom. This hierarchical scheme initiates inequalities, particularly among gender relations as men and women

² Individuals whose gender identity according to socially sanctioned gender categories aligns with sex morphology (Johnson, 2013).

interact in areas such as these (Schilling, 1991). In social spaces such as work, men and women negotiate their identities within interactions to fit societal expectations (Aguirre, 2003). The workplace is not a place where one is free from the constraints of social influence as it is legislated and monitored. Social spaces allow people to act but they also constrain those actions (Schilling, 1991). These constructed social identities promote harmony within the company while avoiding threat of noncompliance contriving an inherently gendered space.

Work as a social space makes it a particularly important place to study individuals' gender transitions as well as coworkers involved because paid work is an prominent part of life for most adults. It is nearly impossible to develop the requirements for a decent standard of living without maintaining a career (Schilling, 2003). As people who are transgendered become visible in the workplace, denial to accept them by the cis-gendered population inhibits a successful transition and fosters worry about the loss of their jobs. Paid work occupies much of our lives because at some point over the life course, a majority of individuals enter the paid labor force (Ridgeway, 2011). Work is a central area where people gain access to rewards and power and as a result, "what happens in the workplace is of enormous consequence to the structure of inequality among us" (Ridgeway, 2011, 92). When searching for a job and then maintaining that job, individuals become susceptible to the confines of work in acquiring power, status and prestige in a limited amount of available positions. The hierarchical ladder in the workplace gives rise to dominant and subordinate positions, and as such, discrimination

ensues. A particular form of discrimination that arises is transphobia³ and although it may not affect a lot of people, it has serious consequences for those it does affect.

The persistence of transphobia could leave both transgender and cis-gender people in a hostile work environment or jobless. Economically, people who are transgendered find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of job availability and lower salaries; however, these issues in the narrowing competitive job market also impact cis-gendered coworkers in a similar fashion. Dealing with a transition in the workplace creates necessary changes in the workplace in terms of policy and behaviour, which may inhibit workers productivity resulting in difficulty finding and maintaining a comfortable work atmosphere. At a societal level, having increasing numbers of jobless people can impose strain on society and on those who are supporting themselves.

For specific positions, gender should have little impact when hiring, because both men and women who are qualified can perform with similar successful outcomes. On the contrary, men and women occupy positions associated with assumptions about gender performance. Men are thought to be strong leaders because of their aggressive nature while women assume roles in HR because of their caring and nurturing demeanor suitable for addressing individuals' personal needs around the office (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Being around people who go beyond traditional expectations in terms of gender can potentially disrupt coworkers' daily activities and they may start to question the treatment and allocation of duties to people in the workplace with relation to gender assumptions of all workers. As Creed and Scully (2000) imply, stakes are high in the

³ This term refers to open and outward dislike/prejudice against transsexual or transgender people (Shelley, 2008).

workplace because it is where people receive shares of resources. Resources are responsible for lesser or greater power and responsibility in workplace institutions.

Coworkers are an important part of the workplace experience during a gender transition because they can either accept or resist what occurs during this time. However, in a majority of the literature coworkers' point of views are not explored directly from their point of view (Schilt & Connell, 2007). This approach neglects giving the coworkers their own voice about the person in transition and the situation as a whole. The inclusion of coworkers in my study will help better understand not only how gender is performed but also how that performance is perceived and reflected upon by the audience. Incorporating coworker accounts will address to what extent gender is embedded in work and potentially uncover hidden forms of gender inequality in the office environment. For these reasons, understanding how working with a coworker who has undergone a gender transition could disrupt, reinforce or simply change others perceptions of gendered behaviours is both interesting and important to the general population. With this in mind, we can address how one person's transition in the workplace influenced her colleagues understanding, feelings and behaviours with regard to their expectations of gender as a fluid experience.

The Social Construction of gender:

From the very first ultrasound, individuals are categorized as male or female based on their genitalia. In contemporary western societies, the dominant gender paradigm constructs these two genders as naturally rooted in two biological sexes (Davis, 2009). Socialization by parents, teachers and peers at school teach people to behave according to their assigned gender to ensure that gender norms are abided by, which may

differ between societies. People accept a gender binary system as something that is natural and fixed without question (Teich & Green, 2012; Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010). Gender is constructed, malleable, open to interpretation, and as shown recently, it can be crossed (Whitehead et al., 2012). The idea of fluidity in gender is demonstrated on a daily basis through visible variations of the same gender in appearance and activities, but when this variation is brought to others' attention and is questioned, they are pushed back into conformity in order to maintain the way things "should be".

The unconscious adherence of these social dynamics entailing only two gender categories: male and female (Devor, 1989) makes it difficult but not impossible to move between the two categories. While not everyone believes that feminine traits including caring and nurturing are central to being female, and being dominant, aggressive and high achieving are typical male traits (Nagoshi et al., 2012), these traits are still learned and enforced. These socially constructed beliefs about men and women's natural traits and abilities then influences perceptions and pushes people to look for jobs that reinforce these traits (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). This implies that gender is constructed and maintained by us (Holmes, 2007) serving as a constant reminder that if you are born male you should be masculine and if you are born female you should be feminine with barely any room to transgress the boundaries (Dietert & Dentice, 2010; Towle & Morgan, 2002).

Gender blending exists everyday but might go unnoticed because it is not extremely overt. There are women who are labeled "tom boys" and men who are labeled "sissies" because they display traits both physically and emotionally that are not typically associated with their gender. The man who stays home and cares for the house while the

woman goes out to work is an example of a less extreme form of moving beyond the gender expectations of male and female without changing their physical body. Everyday forms of gender-blending is evidence that although there is emphasis on what people should be doing or how they should look in terms of their gender, it is not an everyday reality for each individual.

Gender expression that is visible to the general public opens the doors for criticism (Teich & Green, 2012) but at the same time, allows others to assess the realities of the social construction of gender. Disrupting the appearance of uniformity is disconcerting for many when they do not know how to classify a person. In the past, if an individual was born a hermaphrodite⁴, more commonly known today as intersexed, they were often given surgery to be one or the other sex. Being certain about the child's sex alleviates any confusion in the way the child should be socialized (Holmes, 2007). Being unable to clearly define an individual's gender is problematic because people use gender to initially define the self and others (Ridgeway, 2011). This is similar to when people do not perform what they are hired to do at a job and things do not run as smoothly as expected. Violations that seem acceptable are ones, which are not permanent or as visibly disrupting. This permanent change elicits confused responses from people who are unsure of how to treat that particular individual and how to monitor their own reactions (Devor, 1989).

⁴ An individual having both male and female organs and/or genitalia. The term derived in the late 14th century from son of Hermes and Aphrodite, who was loved by the nymph Salmacis. She prayed for complete union with him and as a result they were united bodily, combining male and female characteristics. [(n.d.). Online Etymology Dictionary. Retrieved June 27, 2014, from Dictionary.com website <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hermaphrodite>]

The emphasis on outward appearance is enforced early on in schools when children are told to form a line of boys and a line of girls, based on physical attributes (Rands, 2009). Control of people by physical appearance emphasizes what West and Zimmerman (1987) initially theorized. Genitalia are hidden yet we continue to view a world with two normally sexed persons, which becomes a self-regulating process: if she wears a dress she must have a vagina (West & Zimmerman, 1987) instead of: she has a vagina so she must wear a dress. Sex is regarded as a fixed state (Brewis, Hampton & Linstead, 1997) so physical displays through gender expression becomes the primary way to categorize people and in turn, the primary ways people feel threatened by those who do not conform.

Behavioural features that distinguish masculinity from femininity are not permanently entrenched in biology. As such, concluding that gender identity is not a fixed state enables possibility for reconstruction. It is then necessary to contemplate what will happen when people start questioning their own and others' actions pertaining to the gender binary. Dietert & Dentice (2013), Ailles (2003), Butler (2004) and Preves (2008) discuss this need for categorization in order to preserve societal discipline and maintain social order. They claim that people feel lost without specific categories and labels because there is an apparent need to preserve western values and a strong urge to know what someone is (Poisson, 2013). For these reasons, people are driven into conformity, and anything to the contrary creates disillusion. Ironically, Hakeem (2010) and Preves (2008) proposed that the very need to categorize people into a gender binary might itself be at the root of the need to change one's gender. Less concern about belonging to certain categories would result in less concern about variation (Preves, 2008). Loosening the grip

on tightly bound gender categories would result in less confusion and uneasiness among the population with regards to men and women who present a more androgynous⁵ identity.

The way that gender has been constructed in various institutions and numerous interactions is not permanent and can be altered. Gender is the most pervasive, fundamental and universally accepted way we categorize and separate human beings (Meadow, 2010), so if gender categorization becomes salient and conscious, people will pay more attention to it. The end result is not to deconstruct or remove gender categorization completely. Instead, it is about negotiating identities and challenging conventional heteronormative beliefs about the nature of gender roles that depict it to be natural for men to act masculine and women to act feminine (Garfinkel, 1967). These notions give a perception that differences between men and women are pervasive and inequality persists as people act in ways to reinforce these traits (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). When something out of the ordinary presents itself, it is categorized as deviant, which overlooks individuality and subjective experience (Davis, 2009). An inflexible approach to labeling perceptions of normality and abnormality does not leave individuals to just be themselves (Whittle, 1997; De Beauvoir, 1949, 2009), within and beyond what is proposed as ‘typical.’ This labeling creates a division between groups of people establishing them to identify as ‘us’ or ‘them’, as one or ‘the other’ furthering the divide among groups of people.

⁵ An individual identifying with masculine and feminine characteristics. It originated in the 1620s, from L. androgynus, from Gk. androgynos from andros gen. of aner "male" [(n.d) Online Etymology Dictionary. Retrieved June 27, 2014, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/androgyny>]

The Concept of 'the other':

Categorization separates one group from another based on perceived differences between those groups. This will create a dominant category as the 'one' and based on what is different between them, as 'the other' (Ridgeway, 2011; De Beauvoir, 1949, 2009). This is highly problematic because it creates further division between groups. This system of categorization ignores differences within groups and focuses on the differences between them (Marshall, 2002). An 'us' and 'them' dynamic is formed, in the sense that if you are a girl you cannot be a boy (Ridgeway, 2011) so it is even more difficult for people to adjust to those who are in between, or both in one lifetime. 'The other' then becomes a screen upon which unwanted reactions are cast, reinforcing privilege as the visibility of the minority group enforce gender boundaries by the dominant group (Shelley, 2008; De Beauvoir, 1949, 2009; Ridgeway, 2011). In reality, everything cannot be neatly placed into groups, because there are differences within these groups (Bowker & Star, 2000). A need to have a schema of a dominant group and the 'other' group makes it extremely difficult for people to accept anything else as legitimate.

Reducing everything to an either/or categorical system poses problems for those who are androgynous. These people are seen as posing a threat to the salient groups because they are defined by what they lack in comparison (Devor, 1989; Holmes, 2007). Having this categorical system neglects the fact that some people just do not want to be in a category and reiterates the constrictions that categories place on mankind: "I don't want to be a gender. I want to do what I want to do" (Davis, 2009, 104). Using forty in depth interviews of people who are transgendered over a year time frame, Davis (2009) gives evidence for the notion that people just want to be who they are, acknowledging

expectations but not being unrealistic or trying to neatly fit somewhere: “I have been a female for 32 years, it would be incomplete to say, I have and always will be a man” (105). As demonstrated by this FTM⁶ transgendered individual, they cannot be placed in the “male” category alone because placement in this category would deny her initial female identity.

Similarly, in interviews with 32 transgendered individuals, Dietert and Dentice (2013) found that while some of the individuals conformed to either the male category or the female category, others identified somewhere in between in an attempt to make sense of their own experience and the world around them. In a study by Nagoshi and colleagues (2012), an individual who was transgendered reported that: “I am something else entirely” (415). This is seen as a challenge to the gender hierarchy (Johnson, 2013), framing individuality as a social problem that people cannot label and in turn, fear.

Each experience is unique and categorizing people poses a problem for those who choose an alternative identity as well as for those who are confused by such identities. Looking at the world as black and white neglects the uniqueness of each individual and sustains privilege among the elite or dominant gender groups. When confining all non-conforming bodies, in to a third space, it leaves the cis-gendered⁷ class untouched (Beauchamp & D’Harlingue, 2012). Forming an alternative group accomplishes very little because it implies that there is only one type of variation between groups and fails to acknowledge how distinctive each individual is within the group (Towle & Morgan, 2002).

⁶ FTM: A female who transitions into a male

⁷ The prefix, ‘cis’ in latin means on the side of...as opposed to the prefix ‘trans’ meaning "to go beyond or "to cross" [(n.d.). The Free On-line Dictionary of Computing. Retrieved June 27, 2014, from Dictionary.com

Numerous other scholars address the fact that ‘the other’ is not necessarily the discriminated or ‘different’ group. These suppressed groups may often see themselves as a separate society (Whittle, 1997) further creating a divide between them and the general population. This division between communities draws attention to difference, with intentions to keep out ‘the other’ whether it is the dominant group, or the misunderstood group. This demonstrates that the construction of gender in a binary way strengthens the disassociation between the dominant gender group and the minority gender group. Both groups try to keep the other out of their respective category particularly through physical appearance, which becomes the salient and most prominent aspect of categorization and allows segregation to take place.

The Performance; keeping up appearances:

Some of the best actors in Hollywood make their performances believable to an audience. Gender is a performance and people are judged according to whether or not that performance authentically corresponds to gender role expectations (Stokoe, 2004; Lester, 2008). Gender emerges only to the extent of the performance and ceases to exist outside that performance (Butler, 1990). If one can convincingly dress the part and play the part, they get the part. However, unlike the movies, this is reality. People, as social actors, are constantly doing gender whether they are aware of it or not.

Performing gender comes from within, and it is very possible to cross gender lines to form a hybrid identity consisting of both masculine and feminine traits; however everyone is careful not to go beyond what is acceptable by other people. As De Beauvoir (1949, 2009) mentions throughout her book, “The Second Sex”, you always dress to arouse some sort of reaction from the other. Acting and dressing a certain way establishes

who you are to yourself but more importantly, to the rest of society who are constantly assessing and critiquing one's authenticity. Women put on makeup, and men grow facial hair. Acts such as these are provided for others to understand whether you belong in the category of 'male' or whether you belong in the category of 'female' (Holmes, 2008; Bowker & Star, 2000). Lester (2008) describes through an ethnographic account using interviews and observations of a woman named Arlene who conformed to the tough unemotional masculine role on the construction site where she worked, but over performed femininity in her dress by wearing skirts, makeup and styling her hair. Through this constant overlapping performance, she formed her own identity, one that combined both masculinity and femininity. Initially she only acted tough at work but found that it became a part of who she was outside of the workplace as well, even if this confused people. This narrative is evidence for the idea that individuals do their own gendering in a way that helps them fit into their environment (Hakeem, 2010), while being who they feel is representative of themselves.

Recently, there have been attempts to deconstruct these rigid gender lines separating men and women with the possibility of less segregated gender roles at stake (Hakeem, 2010). People who feel they do not have an identity in line with the gender they physically possess may not necessarily disrupt the gender binary (Schilt & Connell, 2007), but they allow people to assess constructions of gender because they make gender differences prominent in interactions. Those who have undergone a gender transition may be attempting to "do transgender" instead of performing gender according to the binary which is assessed by those around them. They do not always want to be pushed into one category or the other, but they also want to avoid being 'outed' (Taranowski, 2008). A

male-to-female (MTF) transgendered person is essentially told she must now learn femininity. This focuses a lot on the stereotypes of femininity, for example, the musical variation to women's voices and the upward intonation at the end of each sentence, in addition to certain hairstyles, dress codes and makeup applications (Schilt & Connell, 2007; Doan, 2010; Ailles, 2003). Using these as guidelines, authenticity of individuals who have transitioned is questioned and they themselves worry about 'passing' as who they say they are with regard to societal standards amidst trying to portray who they feel they really are.

Through gender construction people express themselves according to what has been taught as acceptable within masculinity and femininity. This emphasizes the need to keep up certain appearances and actions and may lead to hyper or under performances with regards to masculinity or femininity. This is essentially what will cause people to become aware of their own actions and the ways they maintain conventional gender performance stereotypes. By over performing gender consistent behaviour, the stereotypes are exposed and the potential for social transformation becomes a possibility (Lester, 2008). Over performing these behaviours alerts people to the ways in which actions and dress have become naturalized and normalized to define gender roles (Butler, 2004; Hines, 2010), but that may not be accurate of most people's reality in everyday life.

An individual's transition from one gender to the other becomes more about appearance than their internal identity. Physically appearing like the gender one claims to be emotionally proves that they are what they claim (Green, 2010). Society places significant emphasis on the public body because they cannot police the private body (Ailles, 2003). The physical is so important is because it is much more malleable than

inner gender identity and more easily monitored, allowing society to craft bodies within the gender binary (Whitehead et al., 2012).

There are distinct behaviours and physical features that separate men from women. Doan (2010) notes that one cannot just feel like a woman, one must look and act like a woman also. While there are strict limitations on the meaning of gender and the categorization of people based on their physical body, people can craft bodies beyond the walls of the binary too, like the female jock and the male nurse. These discrepancies ultimately create questions, and elicit deeper thoughts about gender in addition to adding certain realness to the perceived performance.

The dominant cultural model of gender, which promotes differences and divisions is not broken down or disrupted by the individual undergoing a transition. Simply being transgendered does not necessarily disrupt the binary of gender like many emphasize (Connell, 2010). Being transgendered is merely a vantage point where questions and alternative thoughts arise in terms of the way the body is constructed and how rigidly people follow the social rules about men and women's actions and dress. In order to change these constructed social rules, people's perceptions about the importance of conformity that facilitates social recognition and acceptance (Davis, 2009; England, 1993) need to be altered in certain social spaces where gender is manifested, in this case, the workplace.

Gender in the workplace:

As I mentioned, the institution of work is salient and an important part of many people's lives. Professions as institutions represent identifiable structures of knowledge, expertise, and work containing distinct norms, practices and ideologies (Leicht &

Fennell, 2001). The workplace has traditionally been organized around gender differences in the division of labor (Lester, 2008). Men have always held positions of authority with emphasis on the heroic male worker who put his responsibility in the workplace above all else (Lester, 2008; Wright et al., 1995). This reinforces the idea that men are far more competent in the workplace particularly in male dominated fields such as Information Technology Sectors (IT), where gendered workplace talk emphasizes a dominant male approach to leadership (Holmes, 2006). This implies that even though women have become more accepted in the workplace since 1995 (Davis & Greenstein, 2009) leading to a dramatic increase in women in the labor force, the workplace itself is still largely based around a male-dominant model.

The IT department, despite changes to the amount of women in work, still lags behind other fields in gender equality. Gender differences in IT are much more salient because of its time-demanding expectations and the need to take mathematics, computer technology and other courses which have typically been thought to be male-based (Ahuja, 2002). Women account for only about 25% of technology workers and are extremely underrepresented in the Canadian IT industry due to lack of role models and family unfriendly work environments⁸ (Maitland, 2001; Ridgeway, 2011). The male discourse of office behaviour makes it difficult for women to obtain higher positions and maintain them without adopting male characteristics (Thomas, Mills & Mills, 2004). In exposing the fact that women are underrepresented, and in addition are expected to progress into the workplace by adopting more masculine characteristics, there is little discussion about how men are failing to move into female based jobs. The progression by

⁸ This includes long work hours and a fair bit of travelling, which strains the work and family-life balance.

women entering male dominated fields, but the lack of men entering female dominated fields results in persisting gender inequality (Ridgeway, 2011) as gender stereotypes and gender roles in the workplace remain within a male-dominant rhetoric.

Negotiations of gender roles have begun to occur in the workplace but hierarchies of men as dominant in such institutions continue to pervade. This preservation of gender 'normals' is safe and legitimate (Schilt & Connell, 2007) and people become concerned about fitting in to the gendered expectations in order to maintain a competent and respected employee as most individuals graduate in hopes of becoming some sort of manager or professional (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). In order to obtain a job of their preference, people are willing to conform to already existing gender constructions, instead of contesting them.

The workplace is infused with gender (Martin, 2003) and gender binary thinking is embedded into social institutions evident in wages, types of work and certain positions occupied by both men and women. According to Hines (2010) the workplace is an important site in which identities are enabled, negotiated and constrained. The fact that women are believed to have a more nurturing demeanor and men believed to have a more assertive one tends to show divergent career preferences, as women aim for more female typed jobs such as in teaching or nursing, while men aim for managerial typed jobs in IT and various other business sectors (Brown et al., 2012; Stokoe, 2004; Wright et al., 1995; Holmes, 2006). This makes it more difficult for people who are struggling with their identity because this division of labor reinforces patterns of dominance and submission (Lester, 2008).

Finding work is difficult for most people due to few relevant positions in their field as well as fierce competition. Jobs have become increasingly scarce to find (Leicht & Fennell, 2001) and according to the Labor Force Survey of Canada, in 2014, 7.0% of the population was unemployed, particularly more females than males (Statistics Canada, 2014). For individuals who are transgendered it is particularly more difficult to find employment and they have twice as much trouble acquiring and maintaining a job. They must work harder to prove or establish their credentials (Doan, 2012; Turkewitz, 2013). This is specifically true for individuals who have transitioned from male-to-female, as these individuals tend to feel the gap in gender earnings and treatment at the workplace because men seem to achieve more workplace rewards that are not carried over after transition (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). In-office transitions offer an innovative way to explore gender in the workplace (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008) that can essentially expose workplace inequalities, which will disrupt the current organization of some workplaces and allow for reorganization.

Coming out in the workplace is a very stressful process for everyone involved because many workplaces still lack experience and the proper protection for individuals undergoing a transition. Now, with the support of Human Resource departments, The Ontario Human Rights Act and The Employment Non-discrimination Act (ENDA) on a global level, larger companies can more successfully help people through a gender transition and adjust to the changes (Belkin, 2008; Taranowski, 2008; Dietert & Dentice, 2009). The choice of coming out depends much on the workplace, the fellow employees and upper management, particularly the Human Resource Department (Walworth, 2003). The workplace provides a rich opportunity to assess how an individual who is

transgendered and coworkers adapt to changes following a transition in terms of their experiences on the job evident through their various reactions evident through their feelings coupled by their behaviours.

Reactions: feelings and behaviours:

Working with people of various dispositions becomes important in shaping one's identity in terms of behaviour and dress. In a number of studies, various reactions were elicited from others in response to their colleagues' transition. In some cases, people were more at ease when people who transitioned conformed to norms. Coworkers in other instances felt the need to discipline them to authenticate conventional norms if they did not do so on their own. To address transitioning in the workplace, Schilt and Connell (2007) conducted a study in Los Angeles and Texas in 2003-2005 regarding transitions in various workplaces where they had remained after transition. Most of the transgendered participants in the workplace strived to create alternative masculinities and femininities, but were met with resistance from coworkers who felt it was not natural.

In interviews with those who transitioned from female to male, Dietert and Dentice (2010) found that most of the participants thought about what other employees would say and what they would do in terms of their transition. Similarly, this feeling led those in transition in Schilt and Connell (2007) study to fear negative reaction and as a result, they often tried to over perform their gender in order to avoid gender trouble and being called out for not 'passing'. In addition, several transwomen were expected to mute emotions and opinions, while transmen were asked to perform heavy lifting even if some of his female counterparts were bigger and stronger (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Similarly, Schilt and Westbrook (2009), during their interviews with people who transitioned at a

worksite, found that others tried to enforce the gender binary particularly those that identified as male. For example, men would slap transmen on the back as a gesture of encouragement, while in Doan (2010) employees would constantly rub against a transwoman's breasts to see how "real" they felt in comparison to natural feminine breasts. This demonstrates how gender trouble arises for coworkers during a transition in as they try to make sense of the situation and avoid persecution by upper management.

To much of the same effect, participants in Connell's (2010) study in which she interviewed 19 participants who had undergone a transition in various workspaces both white and blue collar, recounted that those who were fearful of being discovered, adhered more closely to gender norms: "I put more effort in to what I wear, a lot" (Connell, 2010, p.40). This demonstrates that sometimes transitioning actually brings people more in line with gender norms because they fear negative reaction from employers after noticeable changes in employers' assumptions about their abilities. For example a female-to-male (FTM) transgendered person was able to get into law enforcement after the transition, while another individual received a raise after his transition. Some also held on to characteristics of their previous gender, for example, one transman claims that even with a beard he still may want to wear a dress, while another transwoman chose a gender-neutral name. Unclassifiable people challenge the stability and validity of people's own identity, which they are greatly emotionally invested in (Ridgeway, 2011) while also causing a profound category crisis for social institutions (Meadow, 2010) because many companies uphold a subtle gendered division of work.

In addition to the threat of gender blurring for the institution as a whole, at the individual level, people are threatened by change and may begin to question the way they

have been living their own lives with regards to the gender binary. In reaction to this, they may inflict rules on others. There are several fears and misconceptions that arise because people are just simply unaware, and lack understanding (Brown et al., 2012; Shelley, 2008). These fears and misconceptions can create tension and discrimination, but can also exacerbate into physical harm and violence. At work, due to legislative rules and regulations, fear appears to translate into repudiation, which is often more covert and unconscious than outright transphobia (Shelley, 2008). This is displayed through avoidance or feeling sorry for the transgendered individual to the point where they withdraw from conversations that become uncomfortable in the transgendered individual's presence (Teich & Green, 2012). This creates a segregated and unpleasant work environment, and the transgendered person often notice their differential treatment resulting in legal implications for those involved and the company as a whole.

For those who transition from female-to-male, there is also the question of sincerity. Some coworkers in Schilt and Wiswall (2008) thought that perhaps these females transitioned into males because they anticipate higher earnings post transition. These responses toward these individuals were perceived as a way to guilt them into remaining within the two categories (Bowker & Star, 2000) but they also indicate that people are aware of the gender-wage gap and the pervasive stereotypes of gender in work whether they openly acknowledge them or not. Perhaps by questioning the transgendered person's intentions, they were attempting try and alleviate their own guilt about the gender inequality that still exists in work by emphasizing the wrongness of the intentions of the person in question and maintain their own position as an upstanding citizen.

People are consistently taught that there are two categories of gender and it is what they have known all their lives (Dietert & Dentice, 2010). People look for confirmation, and presume that the gender stereotypes they have come to know are widely shared. This makes people continually act in line with these stereotypes (Ridgeway, 2011). Introducing something contrary to established expectations requires adjustment and understanding because they invalidate previous knowledge by creating new sets of categories that people are not used to (Bowker & Star, 2000). It is hard for people to embrace new classification schemes that are foreign and unfamiliar as, “people just can’t wrap their minds around it” (Gerster, 2014).

Schemas of men and women’s natural differences persist because they are unchallenged and unchanged (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Ridgeway, 2011). Women and men become gatekeepers of their gender identity in order to avoid having to struggle through a new and less rigid version of being men and women that may not feel right or natural. The importance placed on these categories of men and women is problematic (Ailles, 2003) because it allows little room for diversity within those categories without being criticized or questioned for it. Confining all non-conforming bodies and identities to an alternative category leaves the problem of male and female categories untouched (Beauchamp & D’harlingue, 2012). With more transitions occurring in the workplace various responses are elicited and visible through social relations within the institution of work.

Rather than thinking of gender in terms of categories and trying to make people fit into either/or groups, perhaps focus should be about reconstructing the existing categories. Connell (2010) asks the question, is undoing gender possible? In a society

guided by norms it may not be possible to break free of them because according to West and Zimmerman (1987) we can never really avoid doing gender to an extent, therefore, various constructions of gender identity and performance can address the confines of the gender binary in terms of others' and their own adherence to this binary. In bringing awareness to these issues, it is evident that it also uncovers the prejudices among people as they focus on the body within the interaction. Bringing forth the prejudices, negative feelings, contradictions and struggles can open the possibility of confronting them.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Theories offer a way to frame particular questions and findings in a more abstract manner and although they can never be proven, they are either supported or refuted by questions. In analyzing the findings, some theories emerge more saliently than others but they all offer a way to explain what occurred throughout my study. Several theories including, doing gender or gender performativity, transgender theory, expectation states theory and gender-blind privilege played a significant part in my analysis throughout this study.

In the beginning stages of my project, I focused largely on Judith Butler and West and Zimmerman because gender performance was central to my thesis question. When started to analyze my interviews, I began to realize that gender performance would not theoretically encompass the emotional or behavioural reactions of my participants. It was then that I inquired about theories that explained why the participants were feeling certain ways beyond just a physical need to keep up appearances and to perform in a specific manner. I established very early on that various reactions were taking place, but more importantly than understanding that certain reactions simply existed, I needed to know more about why and how they came to be. This chapter will unfold in such a way that not only looks at the existence of the social world as a stage with social actors, but about what is going on behind these performances, within the individual.

I initially began looking quite closely at Garfinkel and West and Zimmerman who were among the first theorists to discuss the idea that gender as somewhat of a performance. Rather than something that “just is”, gender is created and maintained by

actors in social institutions. As I proceeded to look more closely at queer theory, I gravitated more toward transgender theory by Roen (2002), which essentially stemmed from queer theory. Queer theory tended to focus on the either/or of gender, and how those who identify as transgendered are a complete deviation from the norm. Upon further investigation of the literature, I realized that being transgendered does not necessarily mean you are one gender or the other, because one can possess traits of both genders and being transgendered does not mean you are necessarily a deviation.

As I began sorting through my data, I turned to colour-blind racism by Bonilla-Silva (2006), which I later term gender-blind privilege to analyze common patterns in the interview data. Expectation states theory explored in Ridgeway (2011) and dramaturgy by Garfinkel (1959) also became central to my analysis as they explain the reactions by the coworkers in terms of how the situation failed to meet the coworkers expectations of gender, how they attempted to mask or refute their negative feelings, and the general judgments of persons bodies through their performance upon a stage (Goffman, 1959) that continually plays out in social interactions at work.

Gender Performativity: "Doing" Gender

Developing ideas about gender construction leads to empirical research in order to uncover useful data that can be used to build on past research. Work on transgender identity began when Garfinkel (1967), addressed the issue of presentation and performance in his work with transgender/transsexual people, particularly a woman named Agnes. Agnes was a woman who was actually born with male genitalia, but lived her life as female. People believed she was a woman, even before she underwent sex reassignment surgery. Garfinkel (1967) emphasized the importance of impression

management and self-presentation. The performance was up to you; people would believe you were whoever you portrayed yourself to be. Agnes demonstrated how you could create an identity that was accepted if you are careful about how you present yourself to others.

This idea of presenting yourself to others so you are believable was developed by Erving Goffman (1959, 1963) and what he termed, dramaturgy (Anderson, 2012, 222). The world is a stage and people were social actors thrust upon that stage. The front stage was where people try to put on the best performance for a scrutinizing audience with regard to the way things in that particular interaction should be handled. The backstage was a place where the individual was left to his own devices and got to be who he wanted to be. It was a safe haven where what has been suppressed for the purposes of keeping up appearances can now be expressed (Goffman, 1959; Anderson, 2012). He demonstrated that the social self is not naturally possessed nor is it completely left to the individual, but instead is shaped through interaction. It simply appears to come from within but the need for impression management and to perform an idealized version of us in the best possible light makes the performance not only about ourselves but also about the audience.

First impressions are important and so when an individual appears before others, he will be motivated to try and control the impression he gives off with regard to the expectations of that interaction in a particular setting (Goffman, 1959). This personal front, according to Goffman (1959) includes appearance, mannerisms and relies on social setting in order to obtain the most socially acceptable response from audiences that hold a stake in one's performance to maintain expectations of norm-conforming behaviour. According to his view, it is in the actor's best interest to convince the audience of his

‘real’ and ‘proper’ performance in order to avoid scrutiny from the audience who is critically watching, analyzing and critiquing. Although an individual portrays an identity true to who they believe they are, they must also take into consideration the fact that there are terms and conditions of these actions according to gender norms.

Twenty or so years later, West and Zimmerman (1987) continued with Goffman’s idea of the important role of the audience in shaping ones gendered performance and proposed that through gendered social learning (127) we are conditioned to “do gender” according to whether we identify as male or female based on appropriate ways to conduct ourselves. We are not free to act the way we may want to though because we are constantly being judged and disciplined by societal standards. They demonstrated the way in which men and women are held hostage by gender because gender is a salient aspect of various social situations. Through interactions, gender appropriate behaviours become naturalized (West & Zimmerman, 1987), so people do not even consciously acknowledge that they carry out these actions, or that they make excuses and justifications about their behaviour to sustain them. You are required to manage actions and appearances in certain places so you are seen as doing gender appropriately (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Overdoing gender, or lacking to perform adequately according to gender makes individuals susceptible to criticism.

Judith Butler (1990) further builds on this idea of “doing gender” in her performativity framework. While her discussion is theoretical in nature, I am not looking at her concept in-depth as much I am merely drawing on her ideas at the conceptual level. With that said, she posits that gender is reinforced and recreated through performance. We cannot be without doing (Butler, 2004). We are not any specific gender until we act

and behave in order for society to define our gender for us. These definitions of gender come to be through classification. Bowker & Star (2000) depict that we have a broad picture in our minds of what something is and then we try to make sense of what we see through what we have been told. Classification creates homogenous groups having similar ways of dressing, acting and occupying different positions in society. These classification schemas then become validated by society in the form of social norms (Butler, 2004) creating categorization of people in terms of gender. How can someone be categorized if they do not fit into the norm? This question pushes people to reinforce gendered behaviour especially in institutions like work, based on a gendered hierarchical system.

Gender is continually reinforced through the way we act. An individual's identity does not solely exist behind the performance but is also created by the performance (Butler, 1990). With this in mind, it would be possible to reconstruct our performances and create hybrid gender identities based on our performances if we should choose to do so. Towle and Morgan (2002), argued that identities could be produced, negotiated, enforced, resisted and thus transformed allowing us to assess how some cis-persons are negotiating gender in their day-to-day lives and why they have a difficult time embracing unfamiliar identities.

Transgender Theory

Transgender theory, initiated by Roen (2002), was a response to and critique of the either/or categorization of queer theory and feminist theory. Transgender theory tries to break down the idea that being transgendered means people do not fit into an either/or category rather than seeing them as something 'wrong' (Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2010).

Looking at categorization this way allows people to escape diagnosis and find empowerment through multiple identities by not confining them to one category or another. Instead of oppressing those in transition in relation to cis-gendered men and women (Doan, 2010), this theory looks at a transition as more of a transgression of boundaries within the binary rather than consistently being seen as a challenge to it. Heterosexism is questioned as the dominant gender thinking based on the dominant class because this creates a divide between the conventional and non-conventional (Holmes, 2009). Transgender studies attend to the way cultural dominance is exercised to survey and or constrain non-normative gendering (Johnson, 2013). Since gender relies on the gaze of others, transgender theory looks to alert people to the ways in which our often-unconscious behaviours work to continually perpetuate categorization.

Expectation States theory

Joseph Berger and Colleagues originally developed expectation states theory in the 1960's and 70's. According to Ridgeway (2011) Expectation states theory focuses on social relations in which people work toward a shared goal or task. The origins and influence of beliefs about the status of different social groups and the ways people use these beliefs to assess the social situation, is explained. These performance expectations develop as a result of defining themselves and others. The most salient defining characteristic of individuals has the most impact on these expectations, in this case, gender. Gender status beliefs⁹ bias men and women's assumptions particularly in work about how well you will perform and to what extent you are valuable to the group. They are seen, as not contributing to the overall goal of the group and expectations of their

⁹ Status beliefs are ideas about competence that are created by the belief in gender differences (Ridgeway, 2011).

performance is low. Since men and women work together, they often rely on the cultural understanding of one another to see each other as competent in the situation. Expectation states theory focuses on gender and status hierarchies in the workplace and how group interactions are influenced by implicit status characteristics. To hold legitimate expertise, one must align themselves appropriately to the status beliefs of everyone else.

Gender-Blind Privilege

The construction of gender into two categories and the overarching focus on either/or distinctions reinforces patterns of privilege among the dominant group while continually oppressing the minority. Having categories is not the overall issue; it is the importance placed on these categories that is the problem (Ailles, 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2006) in his book, “Racism without Racists” touches on a very relevant and neglected aspect of why inequality persists in the modern world. Although he focuses on racial inequality, the notions behind this theory adequately pertain to gender inequality as well.

To the naked eye, the world appears to have progressed from the overt racial and gender inequality that flooded institutions and people’s daily lives in the past. There is a difference between the simulation of progression and the reality of it. People like to relieve their discomfort in situations by insisting that as a society, we have come a long way in eliminating racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), people tend to minimize the situation by claiming, “it’s better now”. He terms this outward denial and attempt to downplay racism, “Colour-blind racism”. People know racism exists but in an attempt to come across as an upstanding citizen, they will claim they are not racist and denounce their behaviour with excuses, false ideologies and alternative explanations. In keeping with this idea, I apply it to

sexism in the office setting by terming it “gender-blind privilege” for the purposes of this study.

When you are born a boy or a girl, and are comfortable with this, you live a life free of the criticism of transgression by complying with the rules of acting in each situation. As Johnson (2013) states, you are then labeled a cis-gender individual. Cis, in the Latin language means ‘same side’ (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). This is when one’s gender identity aligns with sex morphology (Johnson, 2013). Being a cis-gender individual carries a certain privilege. You never have to fear that you are who you say you are, that you are using the ‘correct’ washroom assigned to you, or that you will be thrown in a male prison when you identify as female (Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012).

Unfortunately it is extremely frustrating for transgendered individuals who are aware of this privilege, but do not have it. In Johnson (2013), she recounts a situation involving a transgendered woman, CeCe McDonald who was put in a male prison after killing a man in self-defense who was physically and verbally harassing her outside a local grocery store for being transgendered. This is an explicit case demonstrating cis-gender privilege. The judge used her identity as a transwoman to justify the violence that was done to her and as punishment throw her in a male prison. This ignores and neglects her identity and offers a way to punish her for not aligning with socially sanctioned gender categories. The perpetrators then feel like they can get away with outward acts of discrimination because they feel the victims ‘should’ have been doing gender appropriately (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). If the blame is placed on the individual who does not conform, it alleviates the cis-gendered person of their guilt over their negative feelings and responsibility in carrying out prejudiced behaviour. These ideologies of the

dominant gender class naturalize and justify discrimination to denounce their own responsibility for acting in ways that they feel they should not or will be looked down upon (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Although there are signs of these acts of privilege it is extremely hard to identify because it is sometimes unconscious, and covert. People with less privilege are always more reflexive about others and their own actions because they are made aware of the existence of privilege (Martin, 2003). People of privilege do not want to be told they have or act on this privilege. They may often try to denounce this accusation by claiming they have friends who are underprivileged, put the blame on the other, try to create alternative explanations such as “its not about gender its about...” and speak with a lot of incoherence to avoid saying something wrong. They often try to appear more concerned about the other individual when actually it mirrors advantages for themselves such as: they should just go where it is easier, or where they belong, much like the idea of “white flight” when “too many” people of color began moving into white neighborhoods. Respondents noted that the shifting racial composition of neighborhoods had nothing to do with whites wanting to leave but that perhaps members of the minority group wanting to be grouped together (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

People have negative feelings but do not want to be displayed as a bigot, or a sexist individual. An outward denial such as Keith Ablow in the article by Taibi (2014) in the Toronto Star, who questions whether being transgendered even exists in the first place, will encourage continual avoidance and false perceptions that there really is no issue at all. People would rather think everything is okay than get drawn into a discussion about gender issues (Trapper, 2012) so they fall under the “principle of abstract equality”

in which they tell themselves equality exists (De Beauvoir, 1949, 2009, 14). This occurs in workplace conversations on a regular basis which are taken for granted by most cis-gendered individuals who are rarely if ever faced with questions about their identity (Creed & Scully, 2000).

According to Ridegway (2011) the problem lies in the fact that what people think most other people assume about gender changes more slowly than people's individual behaviour. On an individual level, people may feel one way, but they want to ensure that they fit in with what they think everyone else is feeling about the topic so they act according to the masses to avoid being scrutinized. This is because people in dominant groups hold advantaged positions in institutions and stereotypical representations that respond to their only beliefs, which they use as a reference.

Cis-gender privilege is an important but underexplored element of gender and conflict (Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012), because it is often invisible and denied. When faced with non-normativity, ways to handle the situation appropriately are either non-existent or extremely scarce, masking the actual existence of prejudices and privileges instead of confronting them. This further perpetuates the internal struggles that people face about how to address different aspects of gender norms regarding the body, behaviour and conceptions that become salient through a gender transition.

CHAPTER 4

METHODS

Research on individuals who transition in the workplace is scarce and the subject remains understudied. Studying people and understanding the effects of social conditions on individuals is difficult (Rohall, Milkie & Lucas, 2014). At the same time, working with people focuses on interactions through an interactional level of analysis (Cecilia L. Ridgeway via England, 1993). This type of analysis is the best way to study gender topics, being that gender is a salient aspect of social interactions. Theory and investigation regarding gender entails looking at gender interactions among people in different social spaces, in this particular case, the workplace.

This chapter will outline my choice to employ qualitative methods of research. I used a case study to carry out interviews, and then analyzed these interviews using content analysis. I conclude this section with a personal reflection on my methodological process.

Qualitative research: Interviews

Qualitative methods, which are valuable in providing rich, thick descriptions of complex phenomenon, looking at unique events and giving those whose views are rarely heard, a voice (Soafer, 1999). Davis and Greenstein (2009) insist that to capture the subjective nature of gender ideology, qualitative methods are essential. These qualitative methods allow subjects to describe their experiences in their own words (Rohall, Milkie & Lucas, 2014). More specifically, interviews allow participants to give meaning to their career and educational experiences (Brown et al., 2012). In order to explore gender

transitions in the workplace, I used qualitative methods, in particular, interviews of a transwoman and her coworkers at an IT financial office in Ontario, Canada.

Numerous studies I came across explored individual workplaces both office type and hands on sites such as construction, but very few, if any of them addressed coworkers. Many felt they attained enough information to conduct studies of transitions in work based on interviews with the transgendered individual alone (Dietert & Dentice; 2009; Schilt & Connell, 2007; Creed & Scully, 2000). This does not adequately capture gender in the workplace as gender is relational and involves many social actors. According to Connell (2010) it would help to interview coworkers who are involved in the gendering process at work and whose perspectives are worth investigating. Gathering transgendered employees and their coworkers to speak about the transition is difficult and sometimes not possible as the population is small, widely dispersed and at times, hidden from the rest of the population (Schilt & Wiswall, 2008). Personal narratives that are exposed during interviews are just the beginning in the quest to understand gender estrangement as narratives mark the possibility of social change (Shelley, 2008). As a researcher, I was able to get in touch with people willing to speak about these sensitive issues, contributing to an interesting and informative study.

The Case study:

Case studies are a type of qualitative research that go in depth on particular phenomena in a specific context and place. This approach aided in exploring a transgendered individual and several colleagues in a specific work environment through interactive methods to explore how being involved in a gender transition in the workplace may shape experiences, interpretations and behaviours with regards to gender norms in

the workplace. The scope of my study is small, very narrow and specific, yet reaches out to the broad phenomenon of gender-related experiences at work. The sample size of case studies is small and findings are limited by a single data source (Nagoshi et al., 2012; Brown et al., 2012), but when researching people and real life experience, it is important to focus less on generalization and more on specific details (Creed & Scully, 2000). Although this study does not explain what occurs in all workplaces, it is an example of a transition in work that touches on issues that are both relevant and useful for other workplaces dealing with similar situations.

Content Analysis:

In order to analyze my data, I took a deductive approach¹⁰ and applied content analysis.¹¹ I read through each interview highlighting common concepts that were evident in multiple interviews, which then helped break the data into categories. Content analysis is useful when trying to identify behavioural responses and intentions along with emotional and psychological states, while allowing you to detect social processes and theories that arise. In order to sort the data, you focus on group codes that continually reappear (Charmaz, 1995). I then made notes about specific issues that were brought up, which coincided with some theoretical frameworks I had been looking at and trying to develop. I took what the participants said at face value, but in some cases, I theoretically analyzed the responses to uncover more abstract meanings, termed, “in vivo” codes (Charmaz, 1995). Once I had all the important information, I grouped the content into reoccurring themes before beginning my analysis.

¹⁰ Something is going on with regard to a particular phenomenon and you try to find out more by conducting a study

¹¹ Content Analysis is a method of analysis that examines social life through words and sentences in conversations or texts. The concepts are then broken down into themes and manageable categories (Writing @ CSU).

Methodology:

For the purposes of exploring gender relations in the workplace setting, I was able to get in touch with a willing group of people despite the difficult odds outlined in much of the literature. I interviewed a transwoman who remained at the same job after undergoing hormone therapy and surgery to transition from a male to a female. Although she is a central part of my case study, I am concerned with the experiences of coworkers, which is significantly absent in past research. I was able to get in touch with my participants through snowball sampling¹². After many months trying to obtain approval from the university of Ottawa ethics committee, and written consent from the Human Resources department of the company both on a local scale and an international scale, I conducted 11, one hour long interviews beginning in January, 2014. The interviews were semi-structured. There were about 16-18 specific questions, but in most if not all the interviews, we also touched upon several issues that were not included in my set of questions. Questions addressed how long they had been working there, what position they held, how the transition process unfolded at work, their relationship with the transwoman and general questions about gendering in work and in their own lives.

Not long after getting consent from the ethics committee, human resources at the company and from the transgendered individual herself to conduct the study, the participants were blind copied in an email sent out by the human resource contact I had made months prior when I approached the company about participating in the study. The initial email notified them of the nature of the study, their right to participate and my contact number. I was told that the email was sent to various members of the department,

¹² Snowball sampling occurs when participants provide contact information about other people who share some of the details about the study (Rohall, Milkie & Lucas, 2014).

who would be able to contact me if interested and from there, we could set up and discuss our own meeting times.

Over the course of the next few weeks following the initial email, those who were interested in speaking with me contacted me. After the first few interviews, some participants then spread the word and put me in touch with other coworkers in the department. I was then able to set up a time to meet with them, if they expressed interest. When each participant contacted me, I emailed them the consent form, asking them to read it over and message me with any questions or concerns they had. We set up a meeting time and the interviews took place in various spaces chosen by the participants to ensure they were in a comfortable environment where they could talk openly. This would enforce much more honesty in their responses. Meeting with many of the participants was relatively relaxed, easy-going and they had no major concerns other than making sure others would not be able to identify them. This was expected, and I tried to make them feel as comfortable as possible under the circumstances by reassuring them that use of their real names would be avoided. All the names used in my study are not the actual names of participants. As Davis (2009) notes, privacy is fully protected by the use of pseudonyms. I interviewed ten coworkers, eight of whom self identified as women and 2 of whom self identified as men. I had initially wanted to acquire an even number of both men and women but it proved more challenging for male coworkers to agree to participate. In addition I interviewed the transwoman, which carried on for a little over an hour. The interviews with the coworkers lasted anywhere from 35 minutes to an hour.

When carrying out research with human subjects, ethical issues could arise so it was essential that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Ottawa made

sure the benefits of my study outweighed any potential harm to my participants. The nature of my study may have caused some anxiety or uncomfortable feelings due to the sensitivity of the subject. The workplace is an institution that relies on the loyalty of its employees and they avoid doing things to risk the company's appearance (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). For this reason, employees are sometimes reluctant to answer questions honestly if they feel it will get them in trouble with other coworkers, employers, or if they say things that are not acceptable according to societal standards, but I did not get the sense that anyone felt this way after the interview. I assured the participants that their identities were confidential and would remain anonymous, and that their work would not be affected in any way. In addition, to relieve some tension, I avoided leading the participants through questions so they did not feel pressured or influenced to answer one way or another. I began with less thought provoking questions about work in general, leading up to more specific and emotionally stimulated questions about the transition at the office and its effect on them as well as the workplace as a whole. The entire interview had less of a formal tone and felt more conversational, as I wanted it to be. They were also given the option to opt out of the interview at any point if they wished. None of them did so, and all were very cooperative throughout the process.

When the interview concluded, they were debriefed and we exchanged contact information for follow up questions if necessary. The interviews were stored on a USB stick, which was then kept in a locked cabinet until I listened to them through the MacBook compatible program "itunes" at a later date in order to transcribe it.

Many of the participants have asked to read my thesis when completed. This creates a certain amount of pressure because they may feel inaccurately represented in

what they meant by their answers. Self-reports do not always capture an objective understanding of a situation, but in order to study gender issues, it is important to interact with participants and study real life scenarios (Ridgeway, 2011; Shelley, 2008).

I had also thought about incorporating participant observation prior to the interviewing process, to add an ethnographic element and view people interacting in the workplace, to compare if what they have told me in the interview coincides with their behaviour in the workplace environment. This may have given me access to information I may not have been told outright in the interviewing process because people cannot always remember past events (Bowker & Star, 2000). The human resources department at this particular workplace was not comfortable with the idea of participant observation, so I was not able to do so, but it would be something to think about for future studies in this area.

Personal reflection of my experience:

In the initial stages of my study, I had no expectations. This was the very first time I had ever carried out my own research study, rather than aiding someone in theirs. I am sure it was naive of me to think that it would all run smoothly, but I was passionate about my research and optimistic that everyone involved, including the ethics committee would be as well.

Upon completing my proposal, I began filling out all the various forms required for the ethics committee who would have to review my plans for my study and allow me to carry it out. The forms were lengthy and detailed asking me certain questions I had not even thought about at the time such as, where I would store my transcripts and the psychological effect my research would have on the participants, particularly the

transwoman. I completed the forms by the beginning of August 2013 before my vacation, because the committee only gathers on certain days of the month. I was extremely nervous because I wanted to begin my interviews in the fall and my colleagues had informed me that the committee would send questions and areas I needed to fix before having it reviewed again. The corrections felt like crossing my t's and dotting my I's but when it comes to working with human participants, nothing can be left unwritten or unaddressed. I finally obtained approval in November 2013, about three months after my initial request.

It was now mid November and with the holidays nearing, I knew it would be difficult to get in touch with participants. I met with my HR contact and towards the end of December she sent out an email about my study to possible participants. I only received one reply that month and was already, perhaps prematurely, discouraged. When January came around, a few more female participants sent me an email and we set up times to meet. Three participants were not even close to sufficient so, I emailed the HR contact to send out the initial email again. The second time around I received a few more responses, but after interviewing several of the initial women who contacted me, they put me in touch with various other coworkers and I went from three participants to ten. I was fairly content with my total number of eleven participants, as I was not even sure I would be able to interview more than five or six.

The interviewing process is not one sided. While most times the focus is on the interviewees, the interviewer has a significant role in the interaction. At various points in my life, I have been interviewed for jobs and as a participant in studies carried out by peers so I am no stranger to this type of interaction. It is nerve wracking, sometimes

uncomfortable and does not always go the way you may expect it to. Each and every interview is very different and you cannot approach every interview in the same manner. This was a learning curve for me because I have only been an interviewer once. I feel extremely lucky that all of my participants were very welcoming and enthusiastic, especially Caroline. She was willing to talk about the uncomfortable issues in order to aid in my research. The coworkers that I interviewed were all brutally honest, which I have to admit, was a bit shocking because I was anticipating most of them to be very protective of themselves and careful not to say something that could be interpreted negatively. I cannot say this was always the case, but the honesty was exactly what I needed after a long and tiring acquisition of participants.

Each interview was treated unique to the personality of the participants. My biggest challenges lied in the way I worded my questions and my reactions to certain answers. My position as an academic leads me to use very academically versed language and I tend to anticipate certain outcomes. To put my expectations aside and to remain neutral in my interactions was challenging. There were things I did not agree with, things I questioned and some things that shocked me. To find the right words for the questions in lay terminology often caused me to stumble, as I did not want to persuade anyone to answer the way I wanted them to. I wanted the participants to be able to understand what I was asking and I wanted them to feel like they could easily talk to me without being leading. I was also extremely concerned about offending anyone, as the subject matter is intense and delicate. I would have to ask them to fill out an evaluation of our time together to be sure, but I am quite certain they were all satisfied with their interviews. I have kept in touch with several of the participants and they are anxiously awaiting the

publication of my thesis. Their support and ongoing encouragement has been nothing short of motivational.

Participant demographics:

Name	Estimated Age Range	Identifying Gender	Job position
Caroline	Early 50's	Female	Developer
Molly	Mid 50's	Female	Collections
Frank	Mid 50's	Male	Managerial
Mindy	Early 40's	Female	Senior Credit Analyst
Kelly	Late 40's	Female	Managerial
Li	Mid 40's	Female	Managerial
Jackie	Early 40's	Female	Quality Assurance Test Analyst
Ronald	Mid 40's	Male	Developer
Sheila	Early 60's	Female	Image Processing Specialist
Claire	Mid 60's	Female	Facilities
Rebecca	Mid 40's	Female	Performance Development Specialist

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Gender goes beyond just the physical aspect of being male or female. Gender, as part of social interactions, evokes reactions within individuals because of what has become expected with regards to belonging to gender categories. When individuals become conscious of gender in their interactions, it elicits certain feelings and behaviours because of what each person has come to expect from men and women in social spaces and social relationships. Emotionally charged reactions and behaviours are key aspects of many of the participants' responses to the gender transition.

The results of this study are organized according to three main themes that reoccurred among many of the interviews: expectations of gender performance and appearance guided by the gender binary, feelings evoked by a visible disruption to these expectations and changes in their behaviour as a result of this. This chapter is organized under the following headings: expectations, expectations/feelings, expectations/behaviours and expectations/feelings/behaviours. Expectations refers solely to the general expectations that the participants explained they were aware of, according to societal notions about what it means to be a gendered being. Expectations/feelings incorporates the emotional aspect of individual thoughts about Caroline, the transition and gender in terms of these outlined expectations. Expectations/behaviour refers to the physical changes of both the coworkers' and Caroline's body language before and after the transition. Expectations/feelings/behaviours is the last major heading, which incorporates the influence that expectations have on feelings and behaviours, tying all three main themes together.

Expectations:

The social construction of gender behaviours:

The participants recalled the way people are supposed to act according to the social constructions of gender, particularly in terms of their performances being consistent with that is expected of certain gendered behaviour. Through talking about it, participants openly realized just how unrealistic it all sounded: “If you are a little boy maybe you shouldn’t play with dolls? Yeah, no, that’s stupid” (Molly). Many of the participants recalled that the way she went about transitioning being gradual instead of all at once, was easier to adjust to in a world where “people are just not accepting” (Molly), and where you “got to do what you got to do to fit in” (Mindy). Later, several of the participants, notably Molly, discussed change as something that people have trouble knowing how to respond to because, “To a lot of people you are put on this earth as what you are you don’t tamper with that, but I mean there is even, and I don’t know in Caroline’s case that this was the fact, but there are children who are born with non distinguishable genitalia and at the time of birth they say, “okay you are going to be a girl.”

With these thoughts in mind, it is clear why people easily conform to the expectations of what defines men and women, and therefore judge the ways Caroline’s behaviour was often inconsistent with the appropriated notions of what it means to be and act female according to the gender binary. Realizing she was now a woman and no longer a man, it appeared that a vast majority of the coworkers began watching Caroline more intently and perceived her to inconsistently perform according to the way they expected her to perform at times, despite her sense that she was conforming to gender norms enough to pass as who she felt she was.

“For example when we go out for training and stuff she maybe feel like a guy should open the door and stuff because her mindset is still probably traditional old age time thing and modern society doesn’t look like that like, you are a guy you should do something, female you should do something and like today women do the same as guys, sometimes more” (Li).

Caroline, herself, even noted the ways in which she was pushed into a “normal” life in regards to what was expected of her: “Once I fell in love and got engaged and married I realized I very much wanted to have the standard issued normal life: wife and kids, house, car in the suburbs etc.” This idea of the “normal” life influenced Caroline to pursue what was expected of her at the time, but not what she wanted for herself. In order to keep up consistent performances according to gender, for some people, conforming to gender norms feels like a dishonest or disingenuous presentation of self.

Performing gender consistently with norms and expectations:

When asked about how she portrayed herself, many thought she tried very hard to fit in, and sometimes that made her more noticeable as performing inconsistently with gender expectations for females. For the most part she tried to appear feminine according to traditional stereotypes in both mannerisms and appearance but at other times coworkers questioned aspects of her performance.

Expecting that she would come back with excessive makeup, over the top wigs and exaggerated feminine clothing, many were shocked to see that she appeared “normal”. Initially it was felt, by most, that sometimes she was trying a bit too hard particularly with her actions such as flipping her hair and batting her eyelashes and her application of makeup initially being a bit heavy. According to Kelly, Mindy and even Li, she has now grown into her own, and “is lookin’ good and fitting in¹³” (Mindy).

¹³ The participants often used this term “fitting in” to mean she was blending in at the workplace physically, as well as getting along well with most people.

As a follow up question, I asked how she was specifically trying to hard to fit in and asked about their claims that she was expecting certain entitlements because she was now female. Kelly and Claire in particular gave examples:

“I remember her telling me like she used to spend an hour and a half getting ready every morning where as now it’s her natural hair and she doesn’t overdue the makeup, not that she necessarily over did it before, but she certainly doesn’t take an hour and a half to do it is what I am saying” (Kelly).

Claire gave a particular example of how Caroline assumed women are entitled to avoid doing certain things:

“Here is an instance: I was going into the kitchen and generally you hold the door open for someone. As a man, Todd used to hold the door open. As a female, um, Caroline held the door open and then realized, “oh I am not supposed to do that anymore” and shut it on my face. As a female I would still hold the door open for someone, but yeah, silly things like that still come through”

Ronald, one of the two males that participated even went into detail about her appearance:

“She does wear makeup but its not over the top kind of thing I would say its *acceptable*. The way she carries herself is very feminine, yes but it’s her appearance that sort of betrays her in that respect. I mean she still has more of the build of a man and the voice of a man so when you start to hear her or take a closer look you start to think like, “well did something happen here?”

Meanwhile, Jackie and Rebecca tried to ponder what they would think had they not known she was a male prior to the transition, and came to the conclusion that because she “played the typical female part with long hair and wearing jewelry” that they wouldn’t have been able to tell her apart from other females. Similarly to Ronald, however, others felt that she had certain aspects that betray her especially when “she doesn’t keep herself up the way a majority of females do, and that’s when you know” (Rebecca).

In addition to the input from coworkers who scrutinized her actions and dress, Caroline addressed the construction of gender and how she felt about this idea of fitting in by dressing and acting the part. She initially claimed that she never really felt like she fit into male society, feeling pressure to conform more to the male role than to the female based on what is expected of men in society. Ironically she never felt like she was performing or conforming to expectations as a woman because she was just simply, in her own words, “being who I am”. For Caroline it was less about trying to study women and perform consistent female characteristics and more about letting go of the male behaviours she had consciously been adopting for a majority of her life. “Once I transitioned, my mannerisms changed but became my true mannerisms instead of acting” making it clear that except for a few of the obvious reasons, she felt just like every other woman at the office.

Caroline was aware that her appearance and mannerisms would be perceived as over the top by some of her colleagues. Without any prompting from me, she self reflected about returning to the office and her new identity:

“I had a bit of an AH HA moment one time when I was in meeting and the rest of the people in the meeting were women and I was looking around the table and I was the only one wearing a much makeup as I had on. Most of them just had a little bit of eye shadow and nothing else and plus I was doing like evening eye shadow...”

The similarities in thoughts about her dress and mannerisms sometimes being over the top by both Caroline and the coworkers demonstrates the period of adjustment on both sides during a transition that results from the initial shock of realizing this person will no longer be the person you have been working with.

Expectations/feelings:

Shock:

To no surprise, the participants were initially very shocked. The shock was initiated by the fact that no one had ever really experienced such a situation, particularly the managerial staff as Frank stated: “Um I honestly didn’t know what to say to him it was a bit awkward for me because I had never ever dealt with this situation with anybody before so this was my first go at it.” Reactions of shock were also evoked when the President told them exactly who would be undergoing a sex change, because in their minds, he appeared to fit the stereotypical male persona in terms of behaviour, dress and traditional nuclear family life that they had come to expect. Jackie in particular noted how he was the typical family man, and they never saw this transition coming.

Others focused more on the appearance aspect of him being true to a man’s demeanor. He was apparently a “big guy” with a deep voice while his dress was also “pro male” (Ronald). He engaged in typical male hobbies such as guitar playing, discussing hockey, and building model airplanes. This belief by most that he appeared to be what he says he was aligns itself with Caroline’s expression of wanting to “hide this fundamental truth about myself.” In order to elude others to her true identity, she over performed what she knew to be typical of a man, avoiding scrutiny from her colleagues.

Adjustment to appearance after Caroline returned to the office:

Once Caroline had returned to the office, many individuals still had a difficult time adjusting to her appearance. They found it difficult to think of her as a woman according to their assumptions about what women are supposed to look like, dress like and what genitalia is consistent with having a female body. This was due to the fact that they had known her when she identified as a man. On the other hand, some individuals

commended her for how well she fit in. Participants noted that in western culture, the acceptance of appearance and behaviour is important. Without convincing others of your role, no one will believe you to be who you are claiming to be (Goffman, 1959) and in turn, it made some of the coworkers hesitant to accept her because she didn't appear like the rest of the females at the office. Knowing her as a man was the main reason stated as to why it was particularly difficult to see Caroline as a "full woman". To Ronald, Sheila and Claire in particular, she was seen as dressing up as a female, but would always be Todd in their minds. With this in mind, they were still willing to respect her wishes to be called Caroline and referred to as a woman. Since you "cannot really see under the covers" as Kelly put it, appearance, the visibility of someone, is important in terms whether or not they are accepted. Even the slightest slip in tone of voice, or physicality, can make passing difficult when under tremendous scrutiny after a transition.

In addition to an adjustment of appearance and physical aspects of Caroline's performance, adjustment to the overall transition was addressed as well. Many coworkers explained that tolerance levels, especially initially, were just not there and it was difficult to adjust their use of pronouns. This inability to adjust made it uncomfortable not only for Caroline but also for others who were around when a slip-up occurred. Caroline even mentioned that she had to address some people about it. For certain team members, they did not want to sit with her at lunch, or in meetings, making it difficult for the team leader, Li, in assuring a smoothly run environment, who also seemed to think that if it wasn't for the professional nature of the work environment, they would have even less tolerance than they do. "What I did find out [at this office] is that people that I thought would be more tolerant were not" (Molly).

Gender in Education/Work:

Education and work are known to be two of the most highly gendered spaces. To uncover this, I initially asked participants to discuss what motivated them to pursue the careers they have now in terms of their educational paths and later their direct career choices, and inevitably gendered compositions and expectations of such paths were revealed. Frank and Molly focused on the fact that when thinking about marriage and having a family, it was imperative that you choose a career that would carry you through family life. Caroline noted that thinking of her place, as a man in the household in particular, pushed her to find a career in order to be able to support her family.

When the participants were asked to reflect on the composition of their classes, although they consciously note that they never really gave it a second thought, their reasoning and explanations appeared to reinforce the gender stereotypes that men tend to lean toward the 'hard' classes of math and statistics, while women choose more classes in the arts. Mindy noted that in her English and Sociology classes there were mostly females, yet in her statistics class there were quite a few men. Ronald explained that in the IT programming route, "it was mostly guys", while Jackie described how she started a career in computers, consisting of mostly men as well after pursuing a more female dominated route encouraged by her mother. According to Ridegway (2011), the workplace remains gender segregated because men and women usually choose careers that are composed of the same gender. Women often look to those who exist laterally in the workplace, which are often females, or their closest female family and friends, while men turn to other men who occupy lateral positions as well. Jackie then second-guessed her choice because as she looked around it was intimidating how the classes were

composed of mostly men, a phenomenon described by Li as well in her mathematical based classes. These male to female ratios in class reinforce gender segregation in work later and makes it more difficult to adjust to potential differences.

Focusing on the current workplace participants went into detail about the gender composition of this particular financial office, which is a factor in how the company dealt with a male to female transition among an IT workplace which is still predominantly composed of men (Maitland, 2001). Rebecca, who now transferred to the HR department described her experience in IT as challenging because she was dealing with men more than with women and that the nature of the jobs are male oriented because of the long hours and travel. She also noted that at the higher levels, “it becomes even more male”. Across the board it was pretty well established that HR has “generally been a woman’s position” (Claire) and that IT is typically all male. Li and Kelly also noted that although you see more women in the work place today, as you move up into more Managerial and CEO level positions, there is still a prevalence of men.

The gendered division of work within the office was important in influencing the response to Caroline’s transition. Mindy noted that because for such a long time it has been men and women doing specific jobs, it will be a harder adjustment after someone transitions because part of the visibility is the presence of a woman in the IT group. Reducing or eliminating a gender division of labor addresses some of the tension around having a non-male in a male dominated job category.

Others such as Frank explained that Caroline fits in to the female dominated group of developers in the office. He noted that there were a significant number of female

workers at the office and the workplace is not like it used to be. This complicates the rationale that some gave that the company is a highly gendered segregated space.

A [False] sense of progression in terms of gender stereotypes:

When asked if the workplace has become any less gendered, many thought it had. They looked around and saw women in the office, not taking into account that the mere presence of women represents only a degree of change, as most women in an office tend to occupy a subordinate role to their male coworkers. As Sheila said, the cost of living requires dual income households, so the woman must also go to work. The polished and sanitized environment of the workplace often masks many of the inequalities that could still persist.

In addition to the workplace, many addressed the culture around sexuality and sexual identity outside these walls as becoming more progressive as well. They referenced gay pride parades, the visibility of people who were openly gay, such as two men or two women holding hands, and the evolved tolerance of people around them. Frank agreed that we are far more tolerant of gay and bisexual people, but for transgendered people it was not quite there because it is something that is *very* different: “Before the whole gay movement when people started coming out of the closet, that was very weird and strange but now if someone comes out its like, “whoopie who cares.” I think eventually the same thing will happen with transgenders, *but right now its different enough* to people that it will continue to be an issue for the foreseeable future.” Some people thus said that they just have not been given enough time to adjust to transgendered people like they have for people who are gay, which affects their interpretation of how they and the company behaved during and after the transition.

Perceptions about how the company addressed the transition:

There were mixed opinions about how the company dealt with the transition. Some felt they spent too much money on the matter, that it was thrust upon them too quickly and that their needs and rights were neglected throughout the process because most of the attention was about Caroline. Others felt that the company facilitated the dynamics in the workplace the best they could do to the fact that the company had never played a part in something like this before. Making sure that they covered every angle, and the importance of emphasizing their “zero-tolerance of prejudice policy” (Kelly), may have made coworkers feel as though they were backed into a corner because they had to sit there and listen to the group session about the transition whether they wanted to or not. They also noticed how much money and time was being put into educating people about transitions and found it to be unnecessary. The company facilitated managing dynamics in the workplace around the transition according to appropriate procedures outlined by HR, but some people still felt that their concerns were not addressed: “It was just kind of in your face like, this is what is happening and you don’t have a say in it, this is what the company is doing, this is what the government says we have to do” (Claire). Claire was not alone in this and many felt that in a non-tolerance policy it meant non-tolerant of their opinions, suggestions, feelings and rights.

It is important to remember that the procedures are generally outlined and need to be adapted to benefit the particular company according to *all* the employee’s needs. In particular, this company appeared to be very proactive, as Mindy confirms:

“Well yeah just because its well, this is a historically agricultural company so its pretty straight cut like there’s... certain people have very preconceived notions about the good way and whatever so it was surprising. It was exciting actually, and it was an exciting

time because the amount of people kind of freaking out about it was interesting to sit back and watch”.

This likely contributed to the misunderstandings that occurred between colleagues, different departments and each other:

Li: Even like HR says we are told not to leave her out and make her a part of the team and I feel like these comments are not fair because people don't really understand that the gap in her behaviour [acting like a female in her 20's] causes people to not like her. Like we go out for lunch and we try to bring her in and we receive the comments from my managers and HR that we shouldn't treat her differently and I am in the middle, so yeah I am glad you are here cuz, like, they didn't really realize.

In trying to promote understanding and smooth out the transition, somewhere along the way, communication was lost. The discrepancy between how Caroline felt the company handled the transition and how well adjusted she thought her coworkers were, compared to the actual feelings fostered by many coworkers clearly demonstrates the miscommunication between colleagues, perhaps leading to less progression in the overall acceptance of difference in the workplace because everyone in some way or another thinks at the surface level, things appear to be okay. “When I came back to work it was really, really low key and I didn't detect any whispering behind my back or anything.” (Caroline).

Although the company took the right steps legally, and had all available options to support Caroline in her decision to transition openly at the workplace,

“I posted a question basically quoting the HR policy on non-discrimination and harassment which lists all the protected categories but doesn't list gender and I said, “would a person who was to transition from one gender to another be protected under this policy?” When I saw the answer to the question my fears were pretty much addressed that I would be protected, not only under corporate policy, but also under the, uh, the Ontario Human Rights Act.” (Caroline)

However, on a more micro-social scale and in terms of the relationships in the workplace, an open dialogue was absent.

Expectations/Behaviours:

The before and after:

a) Demeanor

In assessing Caroline's behaviour around the office, many thought she was more relatable and easier to talk to after the transition. She was much more vibrant and involved, "which made your script naturally change" (Mindy). Apparently as Todd he was very reserved, stand-offish, and you could hardly relate to him. Now, according to Kelly, Li, Frank and Molly, she walked through the halls much more confidently, smiled, and was approachable and open to discussion about work and extracurricular activities, hair, makeup, and clothing styles. She also participated in more company outings such as beanbag tosses and lunches. Caroline seemed to agree, that before the transition, she was closed off but is now more open and willing to engage her coworkers: "... Yeah whereas now I am far more likely to engage people in conversation in the lunchroom and that kind of thing. I am far more relaxed about almost everything."

Others could not help but note that she was too 'in your face' and tried a little bit too hard sometimes, which rubbed many coworkers the wrong way as some of the participants proceeded to explain:

Claire: I had a gentleman fixing one of the doors here and I had to hold it open and Caroline was going out of the door and I said, "Oh you can't use that door right now it's being worked on" and she pulled out, well this is probably silly, but she pulled out a brush and she said "I am just going to brush my hair" (Does very over the top feminine actions including batting her eyelashes, as she imitates Caroline) and it was overemphasized. I think she is very flamboyant and I think it is over the top sometimes. Like you know when you are in the kitchen and you hear her say like, "oh I had my bikini on, on the weekend and my long thigh high boots." I really don't need to hear that.

Frank: Well its like she flaunts it a little bit and my first thought when you began asking that is that people do not like when she flaunts who she is. I don't think she tries to openly flaunt it in your face, but you cant help but think you used to be a man and now you are a woman and it doesn't bother me, but some people it does. She might not be

flaunting, she is just happy to be who she wants to be, like I am happy to be a man. I am not trying to flaunt it; it's me and I think she thinks, "she is her".

Rebecca: I think sometimes it's a little bit too open. And it, it may cause some people to be uncomfortable. But when I look at the work environment, do I think people would be more accepting if this happened again, you know, with somebody else and, you know, and somebody else made the decision? I think we'd still go through the same, the same issues.

b) Quality of Work: Impact on the company

The transition not only had an impact on the individuals and the relationships in the office but it also affected the productivity of Caroline, coworkers and the company at large. The long-term effects of a transition not only impact social relationships on the micro level but also on the macro level. By focusing on the transition on personal levels, this took away from the productivity of the team itself, a concept Goffman (1959) described as focusing more on the absences in the performance instead of finding ways to improve: "She doesn't want me to treat her differently and I don't want to treat her differently, but the reality is that we do treat her differently we have more patience explaining those types of things like even if she does something wrong" (Li). It was explained by Li, Kelly and Frank that they were having problems with Caroline's quality of work and ability to accurately perform to meet the minimal requirements of the job description as a developer. They acknowledged that they put her on a work plan to improve but note now that perhaps her personal life was interfering with her ability to work because when she returned to work she was much more focused. Caroline acknowledged the poorer quality of her work, but also noted how it seems as though many of her coworkers cannot let go of her past mistakes and she feels left out of certain major projects since she has returned to the office:

“My work was starting to suffer so when it came time for my surgery I was told that initially I would be on reduced duties, mainly because they wanted me to get up to speed and they thought it would take me a while. I came back to work in late November of 2012 and from that time until May of the following year, I was meeting with my supervisor every week and she was keeping very careful track of what I was doing. I was given specific tasks and basically I was on a performance improvement plan *even though they were telling me I wasn't* and I was actually afraid for my job at the time because certainly in the years since my surgery, my role has shifted and I have tended to feel that I haven't been given as much to do in particular on projects that have any kind of size or importance.”

This was one of the ways Caroline faced a certain amount of stigma upon returning to the office, based on prior conceptions about her poor quality of work, seeming constantly distracted and confused and slightly rude demeanor. She currently struggles to understand if it is because of how she was or bias because of the transition and who she is.

Gendered interactions with men and women: Facing Stigma

The dynamics of the male and female relationships around the office and how similar or different cis-gendered relationships are in relation to that of relationships with individuals who are transgendered were evident through discussion of some of the personal experiences that were explained during the course of several of the interviews. It seemed as though there was an elephant in the room surrounding her transition particularly with the men in the office. This may have pertained to Caroline ‘giving up’ her manhood in the physical sense: “I mean if they know that somebody is going to have something removed its like, “oh my god” so I mean lets face it, a penis is a very important male thing so to even contemplate having something done with that its very scary for men” (Molly). Caroline addresses both her relationships with the other women and other men in the office, being very much aware of what her presence may mean to both genders:

“Relationships with the women in the office have changed dramatically because I am far better able to relate to them. I have developed a number of close friendships among the women. That’s one thing that really surprised me, like women would include me in the lunchroom in their discussions about, you know, their husbands or their children or whatever and they simply treated me as just another woman in the office, which that did surprise me.”

A majority of the female participants seemed to be trying to be comfortable with the transition, appearing to relate to Caroline:

Mindy: We ended up on the elevator together and so I did the whole like, “Wow you look really good” and instantly she smiled and she you knew that was the response she needed to hear and it was truthful because it was like, “wow you look fantastic.”

Jackie: I have seen where she has formed other types of friendships with other women in the office and they have kind of helped her out like given her clothing that they had if they were the same size you know, suggest shopping places and stuff like that.

Li explained that she still had a difficult time relating to Caroline on a personal level, because they had nothing in common and she found herself unable to have a mature conversation with her, but overall, many of the women were eager and willing to ease Caroline into the “women’s” club at work.

Caroline explained various reasons why there might be a strain on her relationships with men around the office:

“I had a lot of friends through my hobbies but since my transition I haven’t really kept up with any of those hobbies and so as a result those relationships were built on the hobbies on common interests, which at this point really haven’t been active for some time. I did have a number of male friends outside of work and for the most part mostly due to the fact that I don’t live near them, these relationships have pretty much faded away other than my very best friend in the entire world who was best man at my wedding, he and I are still very close.”

Caroline then discussed the threats to forming a relationship with her:

“I think the men might be afraid to develop friendships with me and vice versa because of, first of all, the issue that, um, most of them are married (laughs). So, my friendships and relationships with them are like difficult in that way and also the transition thing like I used to be a guy, I think that would be rather *threatening for most men.*”

“My presence is an implied threat to masculinity, especially in terms of my willingness (eagerness) to “give up male privilege” as well as the fact that knowing I’ve had gender confirming surgery (as many of them do, since they were here when I went on leave) may cause them to imagine “losing their manhood.”

“Another possible layer of threat might be the thought of what it might mean about THEM if they find ME attractive in any way. This is a very well known side of *transphobia*, and is based on homophobia – Since I “used to be a man” if they find me attractive as a “woman”, that must be an expression of latent homosexual interest on their part. For all of those reasons, men might be less than willing to do other than completely ignore all subjects/issues surrounding my gender transition.”

Expectations/feelings/behaviours:

The washroom:

The washroom, particularly the female washroom, was a salient issue during the transition for many of the female coworkers. They felt uncomfortable and were protective of “their” washroom. It posed a lot of unaddressed issues that may still linger today, because many of the women are hesitant to bring up these issues to HR.

Sheila: ... [in regards to the washroom] it was because we still thought of this person as a man dressed in women’s clothing, so it was kind of difficult and not only me but the few of us didn’t really care for him as a man so that kind of, I think had an effect on how we accepted or didn’t accept him being because we didn’t care for him as a man. But it was also more like, well he had the rights to use our washroom and we didn’t so it was kind of, yeah even today, it’s a little...but, uh, yeah.

Claire: I mean I did hear a lot of people say you know, “I am never going to the third floor washroom and I don’t use that booth.” No... a lot of people say that not me, I mean a lot of people say, “yeah I don’t use that booth because that’s the one she uses” and I am going, “okay if you are desperate, you will go anywhere.” But then they get like parts of the anatomy like well that touched that [the seat] and I don’t want...you know so...From my point of view I don’t really care if it is a man or woman because I can go regardless. The door is closed it doesn’t really matter it doesn’t bother me.

Claire then gave examples of particular instances in the washroom that creates uneasy feelings:

I think too there are times when someone has come into the washroom and said, “Oh is that you Claire?” and I say yeah and she says, “Oh I have got this problem that I need you to fix” and we will talk about it in the washroom, you know washing your hands and then all of a sudden we hear this male voice come up and get involved in the conversation and I have been in the stall next to them kind of thinking like, “Oh wait a minute.”

I think too that other people said in the beginning like, “okay if this is happening what else are we gunna have now? Are we gunna have needles in our washroom because people are not drug addicts, but like come out and say they are using that and its legal or whatever. Now we are gunna have to have needles” So it opened up a can of worms.

Sheila: I think it was more in the beginning when he was still a man; as far as we were concerned a man dressed in women’s clothes invading our privacy. Yeah like when you were in there, if he or she walked in people didn’t want to be there. Yeah it was uncomfortable even now she is a woman but you still don’t want to be there and someone was in there washing their hands and having a conversation and you know over the stall comes this man’s voice (haha) and yeah it was not a comfortable feeling.

Mindy: [people were saying] “so I don’t think they should use the bathroom until its completely done” and you are thinking how will we really know? Do you want someone to come in and announce that they no longer have a penis? Like that’s just craziness!

When asked why they felt uncomfortable about her using the washroom they almost all unanimously explained that it was “because they still have a guy image in their mind” but the men seemed to have a different perspective:

Frank: It didn’t really bother me one way or another because in fact, I was running into him in the men’s washroom after he had told me what he was embarking on. It never bothered me. I think he was a bit more self-conscious because if I was turning from the urinal to go wash my hands he was coming into the washroom he would immediately go into the stalls, so maybe it bothered him more than me.

Ronald: Yeah one of the issues, I guess it was anonymous they were saying like, “well is Todd or Caroline gunna be using the male washroom or the female washroom?” I think the answer was that since she was coming back as a female she would be using the female washroom and someone said well like, “okay the cracks in between the door kind of thing you can sort of see.” So I guess the females or a particular female were self conscious about someone peeking in, um, so then they put sort of privacy strips. I don’t know if it was the whole building but at least our floor. For me personally it didn’t really bother me whether it be a girl or a guy which washroom they would use. In my younger days, we used to go to bars and stadiums and of course the female line up was so long so sometimes girls, no shame, they would use the guys washroom and it doesn’t bother me so (laughing).

Caroline didn’t think that the fact that she used the female washroom stirred up any negative feelings. Her lack of awareness of the existing tensions displayed the

misinterpretations on everyone's part surrounding the transition, especially with regard to personal spaces.

Reactions: Cis-Privilege

The concept of "cis-privilege" underlies various responses and behaviours toward Caroline especially in a gendered institution such as work. Caroline explained in depth what she thought this concept meant as it applies to many of the reactions elicited throughout the interviews:

"To be honest, it's something I was never aware of until I no longer had it. I guess that's the way things are for a lot of things. Cis people never have to think about their gender, and how it affects their inner and outer life, and I submit that most people never even give it a thought, beyond the obvious acknowledgement that they are male or female. In fact, this is as far as most people get in understanding gender, that there are only two, and they are male and female, and you're either one or the other, and that fact is determined by what your body looks like."

She followed up with an example of dating:

Further, if a cis-gendered woman is interested in dating men, she has only to indicate her interest, and any man who finds her attractive will seek to date her. If a transgendered woman is interested in dating men, she has to be careful in the extreme, and is expected to disclose her gender history very early in the relationship, preferably on the first date, lest she be accused of fraud or presenting herself under false pretenses because, of course, she's not "really" a woman – she "used to be a man". I well remember feeling like I did not have the "right" to play the dating game at all, let alone by the standard rules. I felt that I would only be of value to someone who would fetishize me, and nobody else.

Reactions: Empathy

Various reactions from the coworkers were noted throughout, beginning with empathy or lack of understanding and concern for her and her family. They anticipated that her family was struggling to deal with the transition, but obviously wouldn't know because they didn't visit her in her private space. They tried to understand what she was going through from afar, without really making an effort to get involved more than they had to.

Interestingly enough, Caroline displayed more understanding towards her coworkers during the whole transition:

“I certainly have the utmost respect for everybody here, even the ones who may be very threatened by the whole idea and harbor doubts about my true identity and what it is that I am really doing whether it may be that I am just sick and deluded. The *thing I have had to keep in mind is that I am not the only one transitioning here.*”

Reactions: Fear of the Unknown

Others expressed their own uncertainty and made reference to a “fear of the unknown” that they noticed in others. They were cautious because they did not know what to expect, having never gone through something like this before, making reference to preconceived ideas about gender expectations. “I think people have a preconceived notion that people who are not either not purely heterosexual or identifying with different genders are sexually deviant in some way” (Mindy). Interestingly enough, she excuses her own prejudice by looking at it in terms of sexual deviance rather than fear of the ambiguous physical body. At the office, it really doesn’t matter and is again, all based on speculation about private matters.

Reactions: Avoidance

Many others preferred to just avoid the situations and their feelings of discomfort. Although this was the case, some expressed that it wasn’t discomfort as much as they just did not care or want to engage with Caroline, “I think it’s more like you do your thing, I am gunna do my thing” (Sheila). Places like the washroom and the lunchroom posed problems because some coworkers noted how they no longer wanted to go to eat their lunch in the lunchroom, or use the same washroom as her. It was as though they felt she did not belong in those spaces, reflecting Goffman’s notion of the need to protect certain social spaces from ‘imposters’. Since the Coworkers knew her as a man before the

transition, Caroline was now seen as posing as a woman, and therefore, particularly in the washroom, they felt as though she did not belong.

Others such as Ronald, Mindy and Jackie were apprehensive about bumping into her because they did not really know what to say or how to say it. Mindy mentioned how she wanted to weigh in on more of the day-to-day things like, ‘oh that’s a nice scarf you are wearing,’ to make them feel like they are doing a good job of dressing up as a woman.” This again is evidence of the tendency to engage or focus on the superficial aspects of Caroline and treat her as someone posing or dressing up as a woman, rather engaging with her as a woman. By talking about the superficial aspects of the transition, it seems that it is “better to just avoid and better not to confront” (Jackie). Ironically by trying to avoid the situation they were in fact engaging in a great deal of speculation and nurturing feelings of resentment toward Caroline.

Reactions: Playing the victim; “she used the transgender card”

According to Bonilla-Silva (2006), because co-workers felt neglected and it seemed, to them, that Caroline was using her position to receive favored treatment by the HR department, she was “playing the transgender card a little bit more now because she is who she is” (Ronald). Frank explained that he was told transgendered people are a protected group so any form of discrimination could be dealt with right up until dismissal of that person. He said he made that very clear; that they could be fired. This may inform their silence, as Ronald expressed, “If you don’t be careful she will yell out discrimination and it will be troublesome for that person.”

Initially, the department sat down in a room and was told about the transition, after which a transgender spokesperson came in to discuss transitions in the workplace.

According to Mindy they really didn't have a choice, they had to sit through the training and although most people came out like, "cool this is good" because she [the transgendered spokeswoman] answered their questions, however there was an underlying sense of "be careful how you act, be careful how you speak, careful what you say in any conversation with anyone whether she is in the room or not, be careful of your pronouns you know, things like that, that probably guided a lot of people to let it slide" (Mindy).

This 'no tolerance' message was interpreted to mean that there could not be an open discussion in the workplace and were afraid of appearing disrespectful. "It was like, oh yeah well she can come in and she is gonna use our bathroom and we can't say anything" (Molly). While this seemed to be the dominant thought among people, both Jackie and Rebecca noted that everyone else has the same rights as an employee to take time off if needed, use particular washrooms and express issues, but they kept reminding people that Caroline was protected under the law. "Nobody wanted to say anything because it had been made so much that this person had rights, so no one wanted to be picked on and I mean obviously I am saying this to you but I wouldn't have said it to HR, but this was the consensus: "Okay no one is saying anything cuz we will be taken up to HR." We felt like we didn't have rights" (Claire & Sheila).

Caroline knew that people felt she was being favoured but felt that if they wanted the same things done, the company would treat their needs the same as hers, so she did not need to remind them of that, nor did they have to tip-toe around the issue.

Reactions: Wanting to appear politically correct

While many of the participants were openly uncomfortable and taken aback by the whole transition, they did not want to appear that way. They wanted to make sure

they said and did all the appropriate things, making a conscious effort to try and hide their negative feelings and not to seem sexist or discriminatory in any way:

Frank: I was very, very self conscious at first because my normal personality is such that if I see you I am gunna say hello so, and so and I continued to do that but when I saw her, I had to immediately think because I didn't want to make the mistake of saying his name but I wanted to make sure I said her name instead.

Later in the interview, when asked about the decision to have gaps in the stalls closed in the men's washroom, not just the female washroom, Frank replied: "Hey I'm not sexist!"

Claire explained this in much the same way that Bonilla-Silva (2006) and Ridgeway (2011) described feelings and behaviours in a situation that is unfamiliar. "Yeah I didn't want to get in trouble I didn't want to be perceived as a bigot or something... *I think like people know how they are supposed to act but sometimes the way people feel doesn't coincide with that.*"

Reactions: Tolerance "I just have to put up with it"

Various participants mentioned that they tried to keep things running smoothly and at the end of the day they just had to work with her. Many said they wouldn't know how to deal with it if someone close to them was embarking on the same path, but they were glad it wasn't them who had to go through the transition directly. For example, Ronald described his own relationship with Caroline and how he went about dealing with the transition:

"Right now my relationship with Caroline is, it's professional in the manner, so it doesn't matter to me what personal things she is going through as long as I get to work with the same person that's okay with me... so for me if Caroline wanted to come back as Caroline I will call her Caroline."

While Molly proceeded to say:

"Be happy its not you." I mean that's something I don't have to deal with I just have to be polite at work.... like if my son, when he was younger or whatever and came out and

said, “you know what mum I am gay” I would do everything that I could to help him because it wouldn’t be an easy road but if my husband came and said to me, “I am gay” well for years he would have been lying to me right, so its different. Todd or Caroline don’t owe me an explanation for anything, nothing because there is not that emotional involvement.”

Claire talked about co-workers in general saying that a lot of people looked at it as they have to endure it at the workplace, but it is not their problem when they go home... “like its not my problem, it’s probably even weirder for her” (Jackie).

Reactions: Leaving the company v. Staying

When asked about her choice to stay at the company instead of leaving, several participants explained that it might have been easier for her if she had just left and went to another office where no one was aware of the transition. It is unclear as to whether they suggest this because it would have been easier for her, or whether it would have simplified things for themselves and the overall work environment. Caroline said she couldn’t have imagined moving workplaces during or after her transition.

“I also desired to lose as little as possible as a result of my transition, being fully aware that I was in fact risking catastrophic loss. If I had elected to leave my job of (then 12) years, I would have been faced with some rather daunting realities. First and foremost, I would have had no work record in my new name. The prospect of leaving my job and THEN asking them to change my employee records seemed rather insurmountable, and I felt that it was almost a certainty that I would have to disclose my gender history to a potential employer.”

Knowing this, but still proceeding to imply that if she left it would have been easier so she wouldn’t have to look over her shoulder all the time is an indication that most would have just wanted her to leave so they wouldn’t have to deal with it. Caroline, and many other transgendered people don’t really stop looking over their shoulder because, unlike the workplace with specific policies, other social spaces are in fact more dangerous and critical. Although people expressed that it may have been easier for her to

move, they did commend her on her bravery in staying and making the best of the situation for herself.

Reactions: Individualizing the situation

In continuing with notable reactions, and with Bonilla-Silva's concept of people trying to justify their feelings, participants insisted that their, perhaps negative, feelings had nothing to do with gender but that it was because of whom it was specifically in terms of personal characteristics that made them uneasy about the transition: "I have a niece that's gay and I have no problem with any of that but with him its, her I'm sorry, its still, yeah its again who she is. To this day I have never called her by her name and it, uh yeah, it comes back to the individual" (Sheila).

Claire proceeded to outline a specific incident to explain why she just couldn't be accepting of Caroline:

"Well it's not Caroline per say it's more of her attitude again. And here is a thought... we are at our department sitting and having our tea in the morning and Caroline will come in. Now, I don't drink coffee, a lot of people don't drink coffee and she comes in and she looks at the coffee pot, hands on hips and she sighs and says, "hm and there is no coffee in the pot." I haven't had it no one else has had it and she walks out and she waits till someone makes it and she will say, "oh did you make coffee?" So these types of things, like okay typically the woman will put the coffee on, but..."

Claire then compared gender issues about people in transition with racial issues against people who are Black, as though tolerance is about invisibility:

"My perspective is if you think about it years ago the Black people were slaves and they had to overcome this BUT do we fly a flag for them? Do we do all sorts of things for them? I am not picking on anyone it just seems like we have gone overboard for this but we haven't gone over board for other people and other races."

Li, Kelly and Ronald thought that in general, your gender should have little impact on the perception of the quality of your work and that the most important thing was that you performed in the workplace. They recognized that if each individual isn't successful there

is not way the company can be successful. “If you *just stick to the idea that this person is this worker* it doesn’t matter what gender they are you will still perform just as good or even better” (Ronald).

Coworkers’ assessment of their own behaviour after the transition

When asked about their own behaviour with regards to the transition, the co-workers reflected on their understanding and awareness toward the transgendered population and the workplace in general. They also noted that they felt that they policed their own behaviour a little bit more now than in the past. They were more aware of their own actions and others’ both within the workplace and in other social domains, which, according to Ridegway (2011) is the first step in actually implementing or seeing social change. When something like this happens, you are more alert to things that you hear on the news and everything else because it doesn’t matter to you until you know someone this has happened to. “I guess you need to take into account that this can happen to anyone at any time so for you to think that you are exempt from such situations would be arrogant because you just don’t know” (Ronald).

The transition also called attention to how slightly unprepared their HR department was to respond to any of this because they probably haven’t had to face a challenge like this. For individuals, there were various things that they noted about their own understanding about transitions:

Molly: I have never seen anyone go through a transition before so that was really interesting to see, you know, just how Caroline did it and because she shares pretty openly, so things I caught on Facebook or whatever like, “wow I didn’t know” like you just don’t make the connection at all like that you are actually going to have your penis removed or your genitals removed she was very open about things, and its true it makes you think of more things you would say with other women you work with.

Rebecca: Um. I didn't find it uncomfortable. The only thing, for me, was remembering to call Todd Caroline now because I mean I worked you know day one from the time Todd started, I worked with him up until that time he made that transition. I think reading things in the paper just, you know if there's something about transgendered... reading it to understand it more, because I now know somebody just, just getting a little bit more of that information.

Claire: It has made me a little bit more aware... I don't think I look at people differently but I think I learned a lot more about transgender people obviously and if its in the workplace its like everything. I think I am a little bit more understanding of transgender people, but I don't think it has actually changed anything and I don't look at people differently either.

Claire also stated:

I think I overcompensate [around her]... I kind of like, if I am to be honest, I don't think I have as much eye contact. I think I go out of my way to help more if I am asked to do something for her and I don't know, I am thinking, "okay I don't want her to think that I am not doing something because of who she is" so I think I overcompensate so she doesn't think I treat her differently.

Ronald: I was very worried. I was worried I would be doing what the other people who had been working with her for a long time were doing: just automatically respond as Todd and to my surprise I was actually pleased with myself because I never once referred to her as Todd. So my first, uh, thoughts were like do I acknowledge her at all in terms of like the switch or the change that she had, so I personally decided to just not mention anything about it and just start referring to her as Caroline.

Later he also discussed policing your behaviour in general:

People police themselves just out of respect like they just don't want to delve into that kind of conversation because they don't feel comfortable about it, that being said I think when they told us there was a zero tolerance for discrimination it just kind of raised the bar and people were now more vigilant over how they act, me included. I ask myself more educated questions like, "why did this person like, maybe they always wanted to do it" as opposed to like blatant random thoughts.

Frank: I was very, very self conscious of what I said, not necessarily what I did because I treat everyone the same, but just in terms of what I was saying. I really had to think before my mouth actually said anything.

Frank then described being conscious of his actions with men and women:

As a guy I would kinda hit ya on the back or, you know, if we were talking, because I am very hand gestured, I would touch a guys shoulder or touch his arm but I never did that with a woman because I am very conscious of HR and what's appropriate for gender. I think the same would fall for her, I wouldn't like hit her on the back or touch her in any

way because my mind thinks she is a woman and I don't do that with women and with men you are more physical, you know, but I wouldn't do it with her. I am more mindful.

When asked about how this experience influenced his perception about what is most important to being gendered, Frank replied:

I think maybe without the session I would have definitely said appearance because like if you don't look the way you say you are it's hard to really tell...yeah I would think now having that session has changed my opinion of this whole thing...made me more aware.

Jackie: I put myself in Caroline's shoes not necessarily about myself but...but more about myself like, well, what if my daughter like comes one day and she is struggling and I really tried to identify what his wife was going through but as far as questioning anything about myself and colleagues, nothing really changed it just brings more awareness to your surroundings.

Kelly: I didn't understand transgender until Caroline explained it to me. I was ignorant as well and what you see on TV is all I really knew and like, I mean the parades and you are like...and my opinion before was like I really don't care what you do, why are you parading and like they need to make a point like WE ARE HERE but my opinion before was like really? You know, and now I see that side of it too but I wouldn't have thought about that until I understood it. I realized how everyone pulls together to make sure everyone under that umbrella is taken care of and I learnt a lot about feelings too. If you don't prepare things it can be really bad. We needed to protect our employees and that included Caroline, you know.

Kelly also reflected on the experience of the transition under her management:

It was my first experience so I did a lot of research on my own so I didn't want my computer to be left up and something like that, like transgender information comes up and both my kids were gonna be like, "what's going on?" I think the more I made them aware of what I was experiencing and what Caroline was experiencing, I think it helped them understand and they really, you know, were perfectly fine. Its not that I didn't accept it before but I was probably one of those people like, "oh that's a man dressed as a girl" and that sort of thing, but now it doesn't even phase on me.

Mindy: My oldest son who is six he would have been maybe like 3 or 4 and he would say "I wish I was a girl" like he would just say things that would catch you off guard and so it got me thinking like oh my goodness is this how it really starts like not really being aware of kids just doing these things naturally, like playing around with their gender roles and whatever. So it sort of had me really thinking like wow I wonder if this is the start of...will we being going through this?

The data demonstrate the major themes that surround a gender transition in this workplace. The following chapter will put these responses into context. Similarities and

differences among participants' responses will be discussed. Various theories will help to analyze and interpret the reasoning behind many of the responses, how it links back to gender and what can be understood from the struggles and contradictions of the participants in their verbal and physical responses to their feelings about Caroline, and the transition at their workplace.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The discussion of my results will clarify my reasoning for breaking down the interviews into the sections laid out in the previous chapter by using certain excerpts over others and what may underlie the reactions by coworker's regarding the body as something physical as well as something symbolic, social spaces, and the struggles and contradictions expressed in the verbal and emotional reactions within people when faced with such a situation.

The body:

The gender binary: social construction of gender expression

The reality of the social construction of gender is that it is greatly embedded into everyday life and it becomes internalized by each member of society (Belkin, 2008) as the 'correct' or 'proper' way to express oneself. According to Dietert and Dentice (2009) people who are transgendered represent a redefinition of gender identity in a non-binary manner. These individuals lie beyond the stereotypical modes of gender expression and roles that are expected of each respective gender (Rands, 2009). Within a social structure that does not tolerate intermediate identities or gender expression beyond traditional male and female (Doan, 2010), it becomes confusing for those involved. As evident by the participants' initial reaction, it was shocking for most participants who explained that Todd appeared to be a "typical family man" with all the appropriate actions, dress and mannerisms to that of every other male colleague: "He definitely portrayed what probably 85% of males do at that age, you know working, having a family, taking the kids to university in September picking them up for holidays stuff like that" (Jackie). Thoughts such as these become pervasive, and become the token scenario of which all

else is compared to.

Men and women are socialized early on as to what is expected of their performances in social relations. The social fronts become institutionalized in terms of stereotypical expectations (Goffman, 1959). People believe in these differences as natural and it becomes difficult to embrace non-adherence to the gender binary (De Beauvoir, 1949, 2009). According to Goffman (1959), despite wanting to accept unique expressive behaviours, we tend to see them as special cases and perform the way that was taught to us, blinding us to anything beyond these collective representations that become fact (Goffman, 1959). To many of the coworkers, the shock did not arise at the mere mention of the transition alone. The initial surprise and shock developed with regard to *who* was transitioning specifically. This particular individual, Todd, displayed nothing to the contrary of what a man *should* be in terms of what is expected of men in society. He had a heavyset stature, a deep voice and a traditional family with a wife and children: “She was forced to basically go in a different direction than what she wanted, because that was how it worked when you had a family” (Molly). While a majority of participants outlined stereotypical traits to that of men, most of them acknowledged that people are often pushed into those. Rebecca, who now works in HR explained: “He was stereotyped into those behaviours.” People are constantly reminded of the dominant ideologies pertaining to their gender, which will continue to influence behaviour about what is socially acceptable (Davis & Greenstein, 2009).

Ideologies about masculine men and feminine women influenced many of the participants to suspect another individual as the person in transition because he apparently displayed feminine qualities even though he identified as a man: “Like this

person is a male right now so I am not really sure, because they have so many female tendencies and also they wear their hair like females; things like that, although they dress like a male ” (Claire). Similarly, Mindy, a credit analyst at the time explained: “...there is another employee downstairs who is a male but is extremely feminine.” Gender role expectations in a western culture that views gender as a dichotomy of male and female creates assumptions about certain people based on whether or not they follow prescriptions of gender within a rigid gender binary (Brown et al., 2012; Malpas, 2011).

When someone does not express themselves within their appropriate category of gender it becomes unexplainable and problematic because it challenges the dominant discourse, which has shamed people into building their lives around the maintenance of a single definition of gender expression (Goffman, 1959). Participants tended to focus on expectations of gendered appearance and performance. This way of thinking made it difficult to acknowledge differences: “because people are just not accepting. I mean if your not status quo then there is something wrong with you” (Molly). This way of thinking severely halts social change among individual relations and larger institutions because it refuses to address privilege and fails to challenge when non-normative identities are labeled as wrong or different (Johnson, 2013). “A Performance is ‘socialized,’ molded and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which is it presented” (Goffman, 1959, 35). Essentially, individuals will always try to act in a compatible way with expectations to avoid any negative reaction with regard to their ego and reputation. “You gotta do what you gotta do to fit in” (Mindy). If one chooses to portray an incompatible expression with regard to their designated gender, the risk of losing social standing in both miscellaneous activities and more importantly in

the workplace, becomes a possible reality.

Fitting in with gendered expectations:

While people understand how things should be according to constructions, it is important to note that they do not always agree with the stereotypes even if they continually carry them out in the workplace and elsewhere: “Today she still behave like in her mind and it’s not how female *should be* but in her mind she feel the female should be this way. For example when we go out for training and stuff she maybe feel like a guy should open the door and stuff. Modern society doesn’t look like that like, you are a guy you should do something, female you should do something and like today women do the same as guys, sometimes more” (Li).

Although Li may feel this way, she and others still criticize Caroline, whether positively or negatively, for not fitting the traditional female appearance and actions. It appears to be an inward struggle with what they believe, what it means if they accept this person while being coupled with a need to fit in with the dominant assumptions. This is a common response to such situations and according to Goffman (1959) people will perform in ways that may not hold true to their beliefs to avoid social punishment. Social ostracism seems to be more costly than contradictions in their thoughts and outward actions. De Beauvoir (1949,2009) raised the issue that biology in particular, fails to explain why the binary is so followed, concluding that individuals are never left to their own devices. People deny or distance themselves from what is beyond socially acceptable and force themselves to fit in so as not to be spotted, criticized or condemned by others who are constantly observing them in all public sanctions because they feel as though they should.

Acceptance of Appearance/performance

“If the performer is to be successful, he must offer the kind of scene that realizes the observers’ extreme stereotypes” (Goffman, 1959, 40). In the presence of others, individuals must be authentic in their performances, particularly in their dress and outward appearance because it is visible to others. At this particular workplace, it was very difficult for many of the coworkers to adjust to the physical appearance of Caroline. Many noted the fact that to them, she will always be a man dressing as a woman, and that the picture in their minds of what she looked like prior to her transition could not be eliminated from their subconscious. Goffman (1959) discusses the transition from one role to another in his book, “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”. He examines the idea of misrepresentation that occurs when people detect false, or questionable aspects of one’s performance. They feel like that particular individual does not have the right to play certain parts. Caroline’s coworkers appeared to question her appearance and actions in that they were rather over the top, and it deviated from what they would do as women. They cannot seem to adjust to Caroline’s identity as a woman, instead hold on to her old identity as a male and focus on what she is doing ‘wrong’ in their eyes.

Since there is no script on how to perform expected everyday roles, a transition to a new gender expression takes adjustment on the part of the individual and others (Goffman, 1959). This adjustment on the part of coworkers appears to lag behind because of their thoughts that Caroline is a sort of imposter and that she tended to overdo female actions, beyond what is expected. In social settings, people perform together to maintain the stability of certain situations by definition (Goffman, 1959). For the coworkers, Caroline represents a disruption to their definitions of what is the ‘real’ way to act and

what is not. Many of the female coworkers often compared their own ways of addressing a situation and their physical dress to that of Caroline and determined from there, that she was perhaps over performing as a female. As a result of their knowledge of the transition, both the male and female coworkers were observing her more intently to be sure she was following the gender guidelines they have been aware of their whole lives. This intense observation is an attempt to keep the situation the same as it has always been and avoid uncomfortable disruption to the social situation.

Over the course of the transition, the coworkers did note that Caroline had progressed since the beginning of her transition and that today she is “much more normal” (Li). Their definition of normal was based on the perception that her actions and dress were more similar to the rest of the females in the office. This occurred because of Caroline’s own realizations, not because anyone was vocal about their judgments. After observing other females in the office she noted that she found she wore a bit too much heavy eye make up in comparison to the rest of the women and decided to tone it down. This likely came from a need to avoid standing out (Goffman, 1963). Individuals as a team, perform together to maintain social expectations of different spaces, in this case the workplace. In doing this, progression toward accepting non-conforming behaviours becomes increasingly difficult because everyone comes together for the sake of upholding the dominant discourse already put in place, “people bring others with them and it just becomes mean” (Molly).

Before and after:

a) Physical and personality changes

When an individual transitions, they are still the same person, there are just key differences in their appearance. This notion appeared difficult for some participants who

tended to look at Todd and Caroline as two different people: "...both Todd *and* Caroline seemed to get along fine with coworkers (Ronald); "Kind of yeah, cuz like she was a new person...it was like a new employee coming in" (Jackie). According to Goffman (1963) this is an attempt to try and explain the transition in a way that aligns itself with the expectation that you can only identify as one gender in a lifetime.

Evident to all the participants, including Caroline herself was the fact that she was much more approachable and outgoing after the transition. She was comfortable to discuss her transition with anyone who had questions and seemed more interested in getting involved with coworkers personally rather than just on a professional level. As Todd, Caroline mentions that she knew people thought she was much angrier and unapproachable, but it was because, as she explains: "I was hiding this fundamental secret about myself and had very early on built this wall around myself to keep everyone at arms length because I couldn't let anyone get close enough to see the truth." This is a common defense mechanism to protect one's secret in a mixed social setting where not everyone would accept certain differences that do not comply with "normals" termed "defensive cowering" (Goffman, 1963, 17). This mechanism is an attempt to avoid being 'outed', which would result in financial, personal and social losses.

After the transition, Caroline was notably more comfortable and easy to talk to. According to Goffman (1963), this should help those around her feel more comfortable. Caroline's willingness to bring the details of her transition to the forefront of many interactions avoids suppressing it and building up unnecessary tension. The problem with this is that the coworkers interpreted it as she was throwing it in their face and being pushy with regards to opening up about her personal life. Much of the responsibility is

put on Caroline to make others understand her transition, and the rest of the coworkers are left to continue to think they have no need to change anything about their approach to the situation. Ridgeway (2011) explained that social change lags behind because those who are considered “normal” are not put in a position where they must question their own way of thinking. Having the stigmatized individual be responsible in making others feel more comfortable in their presence and accept who they are, simply protects the ‘normal’ and leaves the dominant categories unchallenged and unchanged (Goffman, 1963; Ridgeway, 2011).

Since Caroline’s coworkers were aware of her transition, they were confronted with active questions to their longstanding notion of gender categories and expression. Anticipations and normative expectations go unchallenged and remain unconscious until something happens that draws attention to these beliefs (Goffman, 1963). Coworkers then began to use their expectations of what a woman is expected to do to analyze Caroline in relation to this. Passing is difficult. One must be careful not to act differently from what people expect, but at the same time, one must not flaunt their differences either (Goffman, 1963). In Caroline’s situation, coworkers relied on their preconceived notions of what physically makes a female, female: dress, mannerisms, hair, and makeup. When one of these aspects was questionable with regard to societal standards of gender expression, coworkers were quick to bring it up and determine whether it was “acceptable” (Ronald).

Not every undesirable attribute or questionable appearance is an issue but, “those that are incongruent with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be” (Goffman, 1963, 3) creates an uncomfortable situation that is in need of an explanation.

For many of the coworkers they claim it would be easier if she changed this, or did that or wore a wig. These are common responses when trying to explain a situation that does not match the way that situation has been known to be: “We normals want to find an explanation” (Goffman, 1963, 121). As the dominant discourse floods a majority of situations in these coworkers’ everyday lives, it is important that any type of threat to that is eliminated. When a rule is broken, restorative measures immediately arise to maintain it. This necessary condition, according to Goffman (1963) is, “a single set of normative expectations by all participants” (127) that functions to maintain a comfortable atmosphere for those involved.

b) Quality of Work: how the company was affected by the transition

It is important to promote women’s entry and advancement into the workplace especially the IT sector (Ahuja, 2002), understanding that it is not only about incorporating and understanding women and even men in work, but understanding *people* in work. Each person is there to perform to the best of their ability enhancing personal growth and the overall success of the business. Employees who cannot act their authentic selves are likely to spend more time and energy managing their identity and guarding against potential stigma, than contributing more fully to the workplace (Creed & Scully, 2000). This was clear when everyone, including Caroline addressed her ability to successfully perform her duties at work. Before the transition, it was made evident that Caroline was having some issues performing her job to their professional standards. They had contemplated putting her on a work plan until she proved she could work to the level that was needed. Caroline admitted to her distraction at work because of everything that was going on in her personal life, and coworkers similarly assumed that the transition

was the cause of the decline in her quality of work. Caroline's current manager, Li, noted that after the transition her work was much better, and she was easier to work with. Unfortunately, Caroline still feels as though she is being penalized for her past mistakes and left out of many of the larger, more important projects.

Facing Stigma:

In general, Caroline appeared to get along well with and felt more comfortable with the women in the office, but was not as close with the men. It appeared to most that she was getting along well with people, themselves included which seemed genuine from Molly, and Mindy in particular. For others, it may have just be a front to continue the functioning of the workplace as smoothly as before. Caroline was under the impression that her relationships with most people had smoothed over, especially with the women. Although this was the case for the majority, the reason why Caroline may have felt better about her relationships than the coworkers did, is because sometimes individuals who open up about their stigmatized experiences tend to believe they are more accepted than they are (Goffman, 1963). This inevitably relieves tension, avoids possible confrontation and maintains the stability of professional relationships. In the workplace cooperation between employees is better for the company processes.

It was quite difficult to obtain male participants. Caroline touches upon this when asked about her relationships with the men in the office. She explains it in terms of male privilege. Men are threatened by her willingness to give up this privilege. Just as the overall transition makes people question their expectations of gender, it also makes men question themselves. If they engage with Caroline they worry others may think they are

attracted to her, indicating, to them, a form of homosexuality that is not tolerated and inherently stigmatized.¹⁴

Caroline noted that many of her prior hobbies of flying model planes and playing guitar no longer occupy her time. For whatever reason, she has abandoned these activities, which kept her close with male friends and coworkers. This abandonment of male centered hobbies could be a reason as to why she no longer spends time with many of her male friends. Her abandonment of her prior hobbies can be seen as being incongruent with what females are expected to do, and her expression of interest in these things may hinder her attempt to let go of her past identity (Goffman, 1963). She also joined the yoga class offered by her company after her transition that is coincidentally all female, having never attended these classes as a male. The constraints put on people to comply with expectations limits the scope of their activities because the desired route is from stigmatized status to normal status (Goffman, 1963). Certain past activities may hinder this path, which limits change. The ‘normal’ group is seen as the group one should aspire to belong to, further stigmatizing, the ‘other’ group.

Bodies represent both a physical and symbolic aspect of gender. The physical body is just that, our appearance. Based on the physical body, we can categorize people into groups, determine when people are correctly or incorrectly dressing and performing in accordance with their gender and continually judge those who don’t belong. Bodies are also symbolic in the sense that they symbolize society’s need to maintain a certain discourse about gender. The human body becomes symbolic of cultural constructs and everything that we do to our bodies represent meanings and metaphors that are assigned

¹⁴ This term is defined by the Greeks as bodily signs that expose something unusual about someone that shuns them to a group beyond the normals (Goffman, 1963).

significance. Bodies then become representations of meanings in social spaces, more important to society than to us.

Social Spaces:

a) The overall Workplace

As an institution, the workplace needs to uphold a particular work ethic and as such, have certain expectations of their employees, both male and female. The need to have an efficiently run workplace, encourages procedures that treat workplace actors as disembodied skill sets (Ridgeway, 2011) and remains faithful to the socialization of men and women into believing they hold different characteristics suitable to specific careers. This socialization becomes evident in the numerous social interactions that take place in such a space (Schilling, 1991). Men are socialized to be instrumental (goal/task oriented) while women are socialized to be social or expressive, conducive to interpersonal relations (England, 1993). Mindy stated that she was drawn to sociology because of its inclusion of female theorists, while Jackie said she did not want to become a librarian like the rest of the women at that time. She noted that in her computer science courses, which she enrolled in later in her life as required for her to enter IT, it was all men because women tended to drop out, if they even bothered to sign up in the first place. Rebecca, now in HR, made it no secret that the IT sector was predominantly male and it made it challenging for her and other women to advance. She is now more comfortable in the HR environment, which according to Claire is predominantly a women's area, even today.

The two men interviewed and even some of the women claim that the workplace appeared to have an equal portion of men and women, even though at the executive levels, it still appeared to be male dominated. This parallels itself to what McMullin (2011) found while exploring IT firms. She looked at various gender regimes within an

IT workplace and found that the most common was that of a ‘masculinist gender regime’ in which very few women are hired, but when they are, they must adopt a male ethos of work. The second common regime was a ‘balanced gender regime’ in which there was emphasis on a work-life balance and flexibility. The last looked at ‘traditional familial firms’ in which there is a father figure and women in the firm take on a supportive role. The important part of this type of firm is that those who “just don’t fit in, are excluded.” (McMullin, 2011, 13). In analyzing the narratives of the participants it can be deduced that this workplace lies somewhere in between a balanced yet a traditional gender regime. Many participants, notably Caroline, Kelly and Mindy, emphasize the great work-family life balance that the company allows; yet a majority of the higher positions belong to men. There was only one recollection of a female president, but, “other than that all males” (Li). According to Ridgeway (2011), the persistent inequality in the workplace lies in the fact that throughout one’s career, there are constant underlying and often hidden forces continuing to separate men and women such as networks and stereotypes. This is an even bigger problem than the division of genders alone. It also makes it exceptionally difficult to accept those who are different.

The workplace enacts certain rules and regulations to ensure proper functioning of it. Certain people are protected under the law and if you do not abide by the rules, you risk losing your job. Instead of being open about their feelings, coworkers felt they needed to reel themselves in: “People are entitled to their opinion, they just aren’t entitled to express it in the workplace” (Jackie). “I think that the company made it so much like the government says this so we reign ourselves in” (Claire). This inability to outright exclude people, may give off a more accepting workplace environment, than the true

nature and forces behind subliminal segregation within it: “They know on the professional level, they need to behave, but I don’t feel they have tolerance” (Li).

The division of men and women begins early in the educational process. Courses that men and women choose to take differ, even though both are graduating at similar rates today (Holmes, 2007). During course selection, in the back of everyone’s minds, it is still prescribed that being a mom is in opposition of being a professional (Thomas, Mills & Mills, 2004). No matter how balanced work and home life is, there is always a strain on successful professional women to also fulfill their duties as mothers. Successfully balancing both is challenging, and one area may not get the desired attention. This was clear in one case during my study. Mindy, a credit analyst and mother of young children claimed that the company was very lenient and allowed her to have time with her children if she needed. Many of the other women including Jackie and Kelly expressed this same leniency also, however, Mindy resigned shortly after our interview to spend more time at home with her children. Perhaps she could not tend to both a career and her family the way that is often desired and expected.

Gender is a social aspect of the workplace that may be embedded more in people than the actual workplace (Ridgeway, 2011). Employees as social actors continually carry out gendered behaviour that exists in institutions today. There is an image of a preferred worker for each and every position; making it extremely difficult to acquire a job you do not fit the criteria for. The key component of continued gendered workplace experiences is the fact that people have a false sense of progression when they look around and see female workers. Simply seeing females in the workplace makes it appear that women and men are being represented equally in the workplace. Women continue to

hold lower positions than most men despite entering the work environment at a higher rate. Also, women are exploring male careers, while men are not doing the same with regards to more female oriented careers (Ridgeway, 2011). This is akin to the transgendered individual who is expected to make everyone feel more comfortable, while the coworkers are stripped of this same responsibility. The fight for a less gendered workspace in careers such as IT continues to be challenging and progression exists at a much slower rate.

The continued compliance to strict gender roles is a reason as to why those individuals who undergo a transition have such difficulty in finding and maintaining work. There is a strong fortification of the gender binary in the workplace and people's occupational choices rest largely on traditional gender roles (Brown et al., 2012). As a result they would rather ignore the differences and try to continue to enforce a smooth running workplace that keeps up the appearance of being accepting. Certain social spaces, such as work require specific performances (Goffman, 1959) that must be upheld for continued success of that workplace.

In the workplace, gender will continue to be salient in a binary manner because men still look to other men as role models, be it friends, fathers, or grandfathers, while women look to other women for guidance and support such as mothers, grandmothers and friends. These individuals often hold the same positions as themselves (Ridgeway, 2011), and men and women are therefore less likely to encounter one another in lateral work positions. Women turn to other women, particularly their own mothers who are familiar with the stereotypical expectations of women in work. It is easier to continue to assume that gender differences are inevitable in the workplace (Martin, 2003) rather than

to address the enforcement of these differences by the individuals and institutions themselves.

b) The Washroom

Throughout my study, the most notable issue many of the women had with the gender transition was the fact that Caroline would now be using the women's washroom. To explain why this was the universal reaction, I turn to Goffman's theory of Dramaturgy (Goffman, 1959; Anderson; 2012). Washrooms are likely the most gendered space, where similarities among individuals are expected to outweigh differences (Davis, 2009). The very label on washroom doors as either 'men' or 'women' tends to reinforce the gender binary (Shelley, 2008), which in turn, groups genders together, and separates them from the other gender.

In 1959, Erving Goffman proposed the theory of Dramaturgy in which life is like a stage where social actors put on a performance. The front stage is the region where norm conforming behaviour is expected, involving both the individual performer and the spectating audience. In addition to the front stage, there is also a backstage where there is no audience, and the performer is alone. This is the space where people get to be who they are without being judged. The backstage is where the performer can express what he/she has been suppressing in the front stage to fit a certain social role and is usually considered to be a safe space. In an office setting, the washroom is the backstage, while the rest of the office is the front stage. Women saw the washroom as their place to conduct their personal business without having to put on a face. When Caroline was given permission to enter that space, the women felt the need to put their guard up and protect that space. They no longer saw it as a place to relax, but one where they needed to

continue the performance they had been giving outside that space: "...you know washing your hands and then all of a sudden we hear this male voice come up get involved in the conversation and I have been in the stall next to them kind of thinking like, oh wait a minute." (Claire)

Having Caroline in the washroom evoked a lot of strongly negative and defensive feelings. Claire even went so far as to mention that others were saying, "What's next? Is their going to be heroin needles for drug addicts to shoot up in the washroom?" The female washroom is expected to only have female individuals within it, thus when the women felt their space invaded, they reacted quite strongly and dramatically. Caroline's presence in the washroom is threatening to the other women, and in reaction to that threat they compare her to other threatening aspects of social life such as drugs. These reactions protect their [perhaps prejudice] feelings of needing to protect that social space (Goffman, 1959; 1963). The fact that a majority of the women still see Caroline as a man in some aspects, makes them uncomfortable with "him" in their space, to the point that they do not even want to use a toilet that "his" parts may have touched. It can be speculated that many of the women would want to, or used to talk about Caroline in the washroom when she was not present, but they are no longer able to do so because she now uses the same washroom. This brings up feelings of anger and resentment because they cannot relax in the backstage, but must continue their performance that they express while in the front stage (Goffman, 1959).

Many cis-gendered people fail to understand that the washroom is one of the scariest places for a person who is transgendered because it is where they are most exposed and 'passing' as their gender becomes an apprehensive endeavor (Doan, 2010;

Shelley, 2008). Caroline was under the impression that there were no issues and if someone had an issue they could use another washroom. Some of the women expressed that it was not big deal for them, while others felt as though they did not have time to adjust because Caroline began using the washroom right away. To many of the women, this approach felt like more of an overuse of privilege by Caroline and an outright disregard of their own rights as employees.

The way the bathroom issue is handled is up to management and they set the washroom use according to what is best for their employees (Green, 2010; ORC Worldwide). It may not suit everyone, but it is given careful consideration by upper management and they try to incorporate everyone's best interests into the situation while abiding by government rules and regulations. If there is a serious issue, it should and can be reported to HR for further analysis.

The men were unaffected by changes to the female washroom, so they felt the women were overreacting. Even when thinking about it though, both Ronald and Frank noted that it would not be an issue for them. As social beings, we often cannot deduce how we would react in a situation that we have not been faced with directly. Therefore, the men cannot accurately know how they would react if a transman began using the male washroom. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) studied male privilege among cis-gendered men and their reactions to individuals who transitioned from one gender to another, who were seen as a combined threat to gender and sexuality. The men in the study unanimously tried to reaffirm their masculinity when it was challenged, by responding defensively and sometimes, with violence. Reactions evoked and actions taken depend on the person and the situation if and when it may become salient in that particular

individual's life, so it would be interesting to see the male's reaction if the situation had been reversed.

Reactions: struggles and contradictions

Concept of Cis-privilege:

As social beings, largely dependent on the outside world, we internalize and continue to assume that certain roles, jobs and dress belong to certain people. There is a certain standard of realness that everyone must upkeep in order to avoid criticism (Goffman, 1959). Those who, for the most part, fit the stereotype of men and women, rarely, if ever have to worry that they will not pass as who they say they are, as Caroline even mentioned during her interview.

Various reactions were elicited throughout the transitions by coworkers, many aligning themselves with this concept of cis-privilege and a need to appear accepting, even if that is not quite how they felt. Norm conforming behaviour is expected and all else is a threat to our identity (Aguirre, 2003). In an attempt to fix our uneasy feelings, we police the individual who is posing a threat to these long standing constructions of social identity as a male or female. Through these constructions, categories are created that are used to determine whether someone is doing a 'good' job at being who they are or a 'bad' job at it (Goffman, 1963; Bowker & Star, 2000) in order to keep up appearances.

Empathy/Fear of the unknown:

As social actors, we do the gendering (Hakeem, 2010). There is a sense of security we feel when conforming to a gender binary that insists male and female are stable categories, and anything contrary is perceived as a threat to norms within the gender binary (Connell, 2010; Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012). In relation to this, many participants felt "sad" for her family because they would have to directly deal with the

burden of her stigmatization. They also referred to “fearing the unknown” when thinking about their own apprehensive feelings toward the situation. According to Davis (2009) this fear of the transition, and as a result, lack of understanding, creates a preference to separate oneself from this situation because, “accepting the individual who is in question means undermining the hegemonic expectations of the gender dichotomy” (109). If the coworkers appear to be tolerable of the situation, it may separate them from the group.

In particular, there is a direct threat to male privilege. Transgendered women are viewed as giving up male privilege by having their penis removed (Schilt & Connell, 2007). Caroline is very much aware of this, when she discusses cis-privilege and her feeling that she is a “direct threat to masculinity” thus, looking directly at this issue from male perspectives would be something to seriously consider for future research.

Examples of “Gender-blind Privilege”:

1) “Use of her “transgender card”

Although avoiding the situation appeared to be one of the common responses, many others referred to Caroline’s use of her “transgender card.” If the individual’s use of their stigmatization to get certain privileges is emphasized, we can take focus off ourselves as to why we harbor these negative feelings toward certain individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). Ronald directly stated, “yeah I think she uses her transgender card a little bit.” Many of the coworkers felt that her rights were above everyone else’s; most notably in terms of the time she was allowed to take days off work and her ability to use the female washroom right away when she returned. Bonilla-Silva (2006) explains that feelings of threat within people push them justify their discrimination by framing themselves as the victims in the situation. The coworkers convinced themselves that Caroline was receiving preferential treatment, that the company put too much money into

the transition and felt as though they were not given a voice during the transition process.

2) Being seen as politically correct:

As “protectors” of the dominant ideology, many people want to do what they feel everyone else will accept. People claim they are not racist and try to shy away from their negative discriminatory feelings because it’s the right thing to do (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This mentality leads people to frame themselves as not being a sexist, a bigot, or a racist. In some cases they may be truthful but generally if someone has to continually state that they are not a certain way, it calls into question whether they are being sincere or whether they just need to convince themselves and others to believe them.

3) Proximity

Social deviants, according to Goffman (1963) are tolerated only to the extent that they flaunt themselves in their community, and nowhere else. When Caroline discussed her vacation, in particular wearing a bikini, her intimate relationships and other personal aspects of her life to women in the office, many participants most notably Rebecca, Claire and Sheila felt it was inappropriate. If a young woman had been discussing her wardrobe to others around the office it would cease to be an issue, but Caroline was apparently giving “too much information.” This concept of flaunting (Goffman, 1959) comes from the notions that one can continue to do whatever they would like as long as they keep it to themselves and no one has to be made aware of it. The women didn’t have an issue with Caroline wearing a bikini, or thigh high boots necessarily, but the issue lied in the fact that they had to hear about it at which point it became, “disgusting”.

Similarly, many of the participants embraced and did not have an issue with the gay pride parade, but as Goffman (1959) states, Caroline is free to do as she wishes on

her own time, as long as she keeps it to herself. Claire goes as far as to mention how, “we never raised a flag for black people so why should we raise one for transgenders?” As long as cis-gendered people do not have to be constantly made aware and reminded of this, they can ignore feelings they may not want to acknowledge or deal with.

4) Language

Very few, if any, of the participants openly expressed their issues with Caroline in the workplace. They tried to use correct pronouns and avoid stumbling on their words throughout our interviews, but they were not always successful. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006) incoherent conversations including filler words such as “um”, “uh”, “like”, “but” and constant corrections, emphasizes that they may be trying to find the right way to say what they feel. They are conscious of mistakes that may be interpreted wrong and looked down upon (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). These filler words may also be the result of nerves, but several of the participants had a difficult time keeping their pronouns straight, using ‘he’ instead of ‘she’, and referring to Caroline as “they” to insinuate more than one person, perhaps using Caroline to represent all other individuals undergoing a transition in the workplace. Many felt that they were bound by work laws, which prohibited them from speaking their real feelings without being “taken up by HR”, so this may have also contributed to their attempt to use appropriate words and pronouns and the presence of various verbal incoherencies.

5) Individualizing the situation

If you do not like a certain group of people for their association with that group, you are being prejudice. If you claim, instead, that you do not like a particular individual for a specific personality trait, you can avoid being called prejudice. Sheila emphasized

the idea that it had nothing to do with the transition when asked why she was avoidant of Caroline. Instead, she said her avoidance stemmed from the fact that she did not like Caroline prior to the transition, so she had no reason to like her after. It was made known, even by Caroline herself that she was standoffish and unapproachable prior to transition. For this reason, many people were probably genuine in their dislike for Caroline as a person; however Bonilla-Silva (2006) noted that an emphasis on this aspect of the individual is simply another way to denounce their negative feelings. If she is labeled as a “bad person” anyway she can be disliked for this more socially accepted reason and not because of her transition. By initiating this claim, the coworkers avoid having to be outright in their negative feelings about Caroline being transgendered.

6) *“I just have to put up with it at work”*

For the purposes of the workplace, in general, the employees were willing to put up with it, in order for things to run smoothly. The strict rules in the workplace against discrimination, coupled with the rights of protected groups and perhaps a lack of communication between HR and the employees further accentuate the uncomfortable feelings that are brought about by these changes. Uneasy feelings stem from normative gender expectations, which are clearly being challenged. These expectations tend to privilege one group, while oppressing another (Beauchamp & D’Harlingue, 2012). This system of privilege and oppression pins one group against the other. It fails to open the lines of communication between the privileged and oppressed so they are continually segregated from each other. It is necessary to challenge these expectations in order for these individuals to understand their role in maintaining these expectations. Coming to this understanding will lessen the power that is given to one group at the expense of the

other (Thomas, Mills & Mills, 2004).

Some of the responses to the transition may be genuine, and I am by no means grouping everyone as “fake” in their responses or denying their credibility. My job here was to look between the lines of the majority of reactions. In many cases, especially from upper management, there was a genuine concern for Caroline and the employees with regards to the functioning of the company as smoothly as ever.

Genuine reactions can also be coupled by discriminatory, negative reactions that stem from a resistance to accept the longstanding ideals of what is normal and what is not. As such, people try to persuade others into their thinking according to the dominant understanding that certain visible characteristics are normal and others are not (Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012). What would it mean if they accepted this individual who is not like them? The group affect is strengthened because by being afraid of the unknown, “they have to bring a bunch of people along with them and then it just becomes mean” (Molly), further creating a division between groups of people.

6) Stay v. leave: the concept of white flight

Further, many of Caroline’s coworkers seemed to take a paternalistic “for her own good” idea, in that perhaps it would have been better if she began working somewhere else where her previous identity as a man would be unknown. Concretely, it appears that they are trying to look out for her best interests. Bonilla-Silva (2006) compares this behaviour to the “white flight” which began when black people starting moving into “white” neighbourhoods. They started to flee, suggesting that it would be better if black people stayed with their own kind. Similarly for Caroline, the coworkers emphasize how they felt it would be best for her if she left where she could start fresh, and no one knew

her. Abstractly then, their responses could also be interpreted as self-serving. It would have been a lot easier on them if she moved workplaces because they would no longer have to deal with the effects of the transition.

Personal Reflection

Despite obvious obstacles, in addition to various reactions, all of the participants underwent personal reflection because of the transition. For some, it helped them understand what it meant to be transgendered, and allowed them to relay that information to children, friends and other family members. Being involved in a workplace transition gave them a different perspective of certain people they've run into on the street and in the office. This process also made them more aware of their own actions in terms of gender stereotypes and what is considered appropriate and not for men and women in the office such as "slapping someone on the back." Frank realized this was an appropriate gesture toward men but not for women in the workplace. Prior to the transition, he had never questioned this action.

The organization of the workplace was also scrutinized in terms of gender. Many participants realized that there is still very much a hierarchy of gender but that, in their IT department, women were more represented, particularly at the operation/development levels. Participants, including Caroline noted that they were conscious of the gender binary and how it plays out in all aspects of their lives such as work, home and even throughout their education. This reflection is a promising start to unraveling the idea that if you are different, "there is something wrong with you" (Molly). This way of thinking sustains the dominant views, limits acceptance, withholds understanding and prevents progression in terms of gendered expression and gendered social spaces.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Acceptance is protection; therefore, as human beings, instinctual needs drive most of us to “carry gender stereotypes inside ourselves, because we feel bad if we do not behave accordingly” (Malpas, 2011, 467). As soon as we are born, before we have the ability to comprehend our position in groups, our parents do it for us by dressing us certain ways and giving us certain toys to play with. They do this, realizing that those who do not fit in are inevitably deprived of certain privileges. Looking at their child, parents feel they need to protect them from the hardships, which can arise when one does not fit conventional norms of gender. Beyond the individual, at the societal level, there is a need to preserve societal discipline by arranging gender for others (Hakeem, 2010; Dietert & Dentice, 2013) specifically through the body based on performance and appearance.

Social actors are constantly searching for the most real and authentic gender identities (Whitehead et al., 2012). In searching for these particular identities, they justify their verbal and physical behaviours in their quest to know the gender of each and every person (Pfeffer, 2010). Jenna Talackova, the first Miss Universe Canada contestant who is transgendered stated in one of her interviews, “They always want to know what’s down my pants.” She laughed it off, but the reality of this is that people not only want to know, they need to know (Poisson, 2013). It becomes akin to an autopsy of the living body. This was evident in the way participants in this study were constantly criticizing Caroline’s dress, mannerisms and overall physical appearance. It becomes entirely about the

individual's exterior body that is understood to be the only thing that society can police because, "Nobody can see under the covers" (Kelly).

My study has gone beyond previous studies that have addressed gender transitions in work by my focus on the experiences of not only the individual who is transgendered but also cis-gendered coworkers to scrutinize how they dealt with a transition, which highly contrast dominant modes of thinking about gender expression. By broadening the population studied to include both transgendered and cis-gendered experiences with a workplace transition, we can begin to think more widely about gender and identity in ways that incorporate not only the individual who has undergone a transition the workplace, but also the coworkers who are always assessing our gendered appearance and performance (Goffman, 1959). It was evident that the coworkers are very much involved and are profoundly altered by such a transition (Creed & Scully, 2000).

It is apparent that researchers, along with lay people must shake up the rigidity of gender. According to Martin (2003), the gender institution cannot be changed without bringing up some controversial questions. Attempting to un-do decades of rigid conceptions of what it means to be male and female is not easy and will not happen overnight and it would be impossible to imagine or in fact live, in a world without gender (Holmes, 2009).

Simply becoming aware of the categorization and classification of men and women, particularly in the work domain, gives us the ability to recognize that gender classification and expectations have become embedded in the infrastructure of our social world (Bowker & Star, 2000). The entrenchment of gender paradigms has prevented many of us from challenging them because they have become invisible to us. Instead, we

continue to absorb them, making it more mentally taxing to contest the current ways of societal thinking about gender and work.

Looking at cis-gender experiences and conceptions of gender identity in the presence of a transgendered person through an analysis of workplace interactions has allowed me to chip away at the processes that are keeping conformity afloat. Ridgeway (2011) emphasized that social change, particularly in work lags behind because the dominant groups are not active in attempts at progression. Incorporating the cis-gendered population, who hold a certain privilege, can in fact make them active participants in the transitional process, whether they will acknowledge it or continue to deny it. Beliefs about gendered competence and the division between individuals must slowly start to dissipate before we can actually see any of the change that occurs over time. Luring ourselves into a false sense of progression, and denying our negative feelings instead of addressing them is problematic to the future of changes in gender categorization and the stigmatization of those who display contrasting gender expectations.

It has been made clear that open and comfortable lines of communication lag between HR and the rest of the employees at this particular work environment. Upper management and HR took a great deal of time to come up with appropriate measures to be taken as soon as Caroline came to them about her transition. Within the time frame they had, upper management and HR worked together to involve and inform everyone of what was happening. Many responded defensively and questioned how much money went into the overall process, the favoritism toward Caroline and the fact that they could not trust enough in HR to discuss their underlying issues for fear of being penalized and losing their jobs. Many of the participants appear to discuss the issues they are having

with each other, but it never reaches the person or source they are having the direct problem with. Reminding employees that their needs and jobs are just as important as Caroline's will reassure them, they are being considered in the transition as well. Talking behind closed doors where nothing will get accomplished or resolved perpetuates ongoing tension among staff.

Caroline herself mentioned that it is important to remember that the transition is not just about her, but affects everyone involved. Aspects of gender are incorporated in daily interactions and there is more than one individual in every social interaction. This is how expectations come to be, as insisted by Expectation States Theory in that as people work toward a shared goal, definitions of people arise based on certain beliefs. To change this, would be altering group think, not each individuals thoughts as separate. The continued need to incorporate all actors within the interaction encourages the realization that it is also not up to the stigmatized individual to get everyone to see their point of view. More importantly than forcing everyone to be on board with changes on the exterior, it is essential that the social actors involved in a transition act in ways that coincide with their feelings beyond trying to align themselves with the dominant ideology. This thought process will allow the individual to express how they truly feel, and reduce cognitive dissonance. Support from others, especially in a workplace where people are dependent on their jobs for financial survival will facilitate progression.

From these narratives, it can be deduced that people are generally uncomfortable with change, and are perhaps uneasy about having these uncomfortable feelings. According to Bonilla-Silva (2006) this is because change creates a disruption in the consistency of individual thoughts about what gender means to that person. In turn,

having certain feelings could potentially label these individuals as judgmental, which then pushes them to hide how they really feel. This will simultaneously relieve their inward tension, while painting them as accepting and open-minded. The Discrepancy between how people really feel and what they think they are expected to feel makes it difficult for them to accept more complex gender identities. It becomes even more strenuous for institutions to take appropriate action if they are not being told the truth by coworkers. Everything appears to be running smoothly, but behind closed doors, people are harboring negativity and resentment. Researchers need to take advantage of incorporating all social actors who can affect the outcome. This approach is essential to promote understanding, enhance education and bring awareness for people experiencing situations similar to this one in hopes of a more progressive and pleasant work atmosphere.

As with a majority of studies, there are drawbacks. My study was centered on a case study of one financial IT office, where a transwoman recently underwent a transition from male to female. As such, the results of my study are not generalizable to every workplace experiencing gender transitions. In addition, I was quite unsuccessful in acquiring male participants, which severely underrepresents male-centered views in a situation like this, making it difficult to accurately compare men and women's responses. It is important to keep in mind that the individual in my study underwent a gender transition from male to female, and the results could have been quite different if the gender transition was from female to male, particularly surrounding washroom facilities. The women would be relatively unaffected instead of the men in this study. Further, my findings are based solely on personal accounts of the transition and there is no way to tell

to what extent participants falsified or exaggerated their responses as I was unable to carry out participant observation.

Future studies should continue to incorporate both transgendered individuals and coworkers in the workplace. Given more time and additional financial support, looking at several workplaces with both transmen as well as transwomen can aid in comparing similarities and differences within workplaces, in addition to the results being much more generalizable to the population. It would be extremely beneficial to acquire just as many male participants as female participants for accurate comparisons in their varying gendered responses to a similar situation.

Another key aspect of gender and work to look at, given more time and participants, would be age. It would be interesting to see if there is a generational gap in tolerance, and to what extent this affects their openness during interviews. Perhaps younger people are more tolerant or perhaps they are just more careful to avoid offending anyone or being criticized for their negative feelings, knowing how the rest of society would view them.

Lastly, as I mentioned, I was going to incorporate participant observation, but HR was not comfortable with this. Participant observation, in addition to interviews would help determine the realness of the participant's responses. Being able to objectively view them in their day-to-day interactions with both the transgendered participant and each other would be beneficial in assessing whether their responses coincide with their behaviour. This area of study is in need of continual research beyond what has been done. The surface about the discrepancy between actual acceptance and understanding as opposed to the mere illusion of it is addressed in terms of what people may be thinking

when they say “I am fine with it” particularly in situations that evoke issues contrary to popular thoughts and beliefs about gender in society.

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