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Workplace as a Gender Test Laboratory
Gender Transition Experiences from Finnish Workplaces

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Master's thesis

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Abstract

Transsexuality is still considered to be a taboo subject that challenges the taken for granted understanding of gender as immutable and essentialist, male or female category. The fear of discrimination and violence keeps many transsexuals from being able to go through a gender transition process while employed which would, however, be important for the mental and financial wellbeing of these individuals as well as for the society, since the process can take years. My purpose in this explorative study is to gain more information on open workplace gender transition experiences in Finland, and to understand how does the essentialist and binary conception of gender affect interactions in the workplaces during the transition processes.

I carried out this qualitative study by interviewing eight transwomen who have been employed during their gender transition process and conducted an analysis on the interview data. Transsexual individuals can possess a unique insider status in both gender categories during different stages of their life, which provided me with an interesting perspective that I utilized in the analysis. Gender in this study is seen as a social construction and as doing that structures interaction and is also simultaneously structured by it. This study contributes to the currently limited amount of research on workplace experiences of gender minorities.

The context bound nature typical to gender can be seen in the results of this study where the interviewees' experiences varied not only between different workplaces but also within one workplace. The purpose of this study is not, therefore, to draw general conclusions but to examine gendered structures by analyzing single interactions. There were, however, also elements common to many interviewees. The results show that within a gender transition process there are actually two processes taking place simultaneously, physical and social one, from which the latter one was experienced to be more challenging. The findings indicate how the individuals transitioning from one gender to another are treated differently as men and as women. Stereotypical gender roles are reflected, for instance, in how the informants' human capital is evaluated, and what sort of behavior, dress and speech is expected from them. Changes in gender category that is considered as permanent or breaking the gender norms create confusion that unravels as silence, giving advice on gender expression and discrimination. On the other hand, the findings also reveal interactions where the interviewees are encountered neutrally and positively without confusion. The practical implications of this study highlight the importance of inclusive organizational cultures that recognize diversity in gender, along with concrete HR practices such as flexible working hours during the transition process.

Keywords gender, transsexual, transgender, gender transition, workplace

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Tiivistelmä

Transsukupuolisuutta pidetään yhteiskunnassamme yhä tabuna, joka rikkoo itsestään selvänä pidettyä näkemystä sukupuolesta muuttumattomana ja essentialistisena, mies- tai naiskategoriana. Syrjinnän ja väkivallan pelko estää monia transsukupuolisia läpikäymästä useita vuosia kestävää sukupuolenkorjausprosessia samanaikaisesti työskennellen, mikä kuitenkin olisi tärkeää yksilön sosiaalisen ja taloudellisen hyvinvoinnin, sekä yhteiskunnan kannalta. Tavoitteenani tässä kartoittavassa tutkimuksessa on saada lisää tietoa transsukupuolisten työsuhteen aikana läpikäymistä sukupuolenkorjausprosesseista Suomessa, ja ymmärtää miten essentialistinen ja kaksinapainen käsitys sukupuolesta heijastuu sukupuolenkorjausprosessin aikaiseen vuorovaikutukseen työpaikalla.

Toteutin laadullisen tutkimukseni haastattelemalla kahdeksaa sukupuolenkorjausprosessinsa työsuhteensa aikana tehnyttä transnaista ja analysoimalla haastatteluaineiston teemoittelemalla. Transsukupuolisten sisäpiiriläisen asema kummassakin sukupuolikategoriassa elämän eri vaiheissa tarjoaa mielenkiintoisen näkökulman, jota hyödynsin analyysissani. Tutkimuksessa sukupuolta käsitellään sosiaalisena rakenteena ja tekemisenä, joka syntyy kanssakäymisissä ihmisten välillä ja vastaavasti vaikuttaa näiden kanssakäymisten kulkuun. Työni lisää ennestään rajallista tutkimustietoa sukupuolivähemmistöjen työelämäkokemuksista.

Sukupuolelle tyypillinen kontekstisidonnainen luonne näkyy tutkimustuloksissa, ja haastateltavien kokemukset vaihtelivat paitsi työyhteisöiden välillä, myös niiden sisällä. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus ei olekaan vetää yleistettävissä olevia johtopäätöksiä, vaan ymmärtää sukupuolittuneita rakenteita yksittäisissä vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Haastateltavien kokemuksista on kuitenkin nostettavissa myös yhteisiä teemoja. Tutkimustuloksista käy ilmi, että sukupuolenkorjauksessa tapahtuu samaan aikaan kaksi prosessia, fyysinen ja sosiaalinen, joista jälkimmäinen on usein haastavin. Tulokset paljastavat kuinka sukupuoltaan korjaavat haastateltavat saavat erilasta kohtelua miehenä ja naisena. Stereotyyppiset sukupuoliroolit heijastuvat muun muassa siihen kuinka haastateltavien inhimillistä pääomaansa arvioidaan ja minkälaista käytöstä, pukeutumista tai puhetta heiltä odotetaan. Ikuisena pidetyn sukupuolikategorian muuttuminen ja sukupuolinormien rikkominen saavat aikaan hämmennystä, joka purkautuu esimerkiksi hiljaisuutena, haastateltaville annettavina sukupuolen ilmaisuun liittyvinä neuvoina ja syrjintänä. Toisaalta, tutkimustulokset kertovat myös neutraaleista ja positiivisista kohtaamisista, joissa sukupuolikategorian muutos ei näyttäydy millään lailla ja kanssakäyminen on mutkatonta ja luontevaa. Tutkimuksen käytännön implikaatioissa korostuvat inklusiivisen ja sukupuolen moninaisuuden tunnistavan työkulttuurin merkitys, sekä konkreettiset henkilöstöasiat, kuten joustavuus työajoissa sukupuolenkorjausprosessin aikana.

Avainsanat sukupuoli, transsukupuolinen, sukupuolenkorjausprosessi, työelämä

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1 Introduction

At our daily working life, we rarely come to think about our own or our colleagues' gender. There doesn't seem to be any further reason to reflect on it as we are either or, women or men, "naturally, originally, in the first place, in the beginning, all along, and forever" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 116). These seemingly neutral implicit thoughts on gender, however, carry with them fundamental, defining and hierarchical assumptions on the supposed essential natures of women and men. These assumptions, heteronormative gender norms, considered as natural are programmed into our minds and guide our behavior ending up further enhancing the conception of these norms as neutral and natural. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

Gender norms create differences between the two recognized genders, and the category of men is seen as hierarchically higher with compared to the category of women. Repetition of this norm gains a material form on an institutional level, and can be seen in our workplaces, just like in any other sphere of our life (West & Zimmerman, 1987). A growing amount of feminist organizational and management research has problematized the hierarchical nature of the two opposing genders with their materialized consequences at workplaces (see for instance Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 1994; Martin, 2003) but there is still a significant lack of studies on gender minorities at work (DeNisi et al. 2014; Ward & Winstanley, 2003, 1256; Priola, et al. 2014).

Contrasting this common understanding of gender category's status as "in the beginning, all along and forever" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 116), there are people at our workplaces whose gender category can be better characterized with words "across", "beyond" or "on the opposite side". Translations of a Latin word *trans,* these words refer to people who feel like their gender assigned to them at birth does match with their own gender identity, as a result of which many go through a gender reassignment process. Transsexuality, the topic of this research, is still considered a taboo subject, characterized by West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 145) as "presumably, the most radical challenge to our cultural perspective on sex and gender."

Deviating from the existing gender norms is likely to bring with it social consequences as it can be perceived as a threat to heterosexuality (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009). Transitioning from one sex category to another is a physical and most importantly a

social process, which does not happen over night but takes place gradually over a long period of time. Being able to participate in the working life during this process would be important but in reality the taboo status of the subject echoes in the statics, where more than half (51%) of the respondents belonging to gender minority considered discrimination at work as common in Finland (Oikeusministeriö, 2014).

The nature of this study is explorative. With limited research on the topic in the context of worklife, especially from the Finnish context, this study is interested in the experiences of people who have gone through a gender reassignment process while being employed. The specific research question guiding this process is:

- How does the essentialist and binary conception of gender influence interaction:
    - internally, in the minds of transsexual people
    - externally, in interaction with colleagues?

The focus is directed to interaction since in this study, gender is understood as a social phenomenon that takes place between people as they *do* gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Looking at gender in this sort of ethnomethodological manner focuses on observable micropolitical activities such as gestures, body language and speech tracing signs of the realization of social gender norms (Kelan, 2010). Looking at these interactions from the same position throughout one's own perspective leaves only so much to be personally observed about the functioning of the gender system (West & Zimmerman, 1987) where as transitioning from one sex category to another opens up new possibilities to investigate the gender norms by looking at interactional situations that change during the transition. The individuals transitioning have a unique position as insiders in both sex categories that can offer new insights that would otherwise be left unseen (Schilt, 2006).

Workplace as the context of this study is central not only as a traditional institution that maintains and creates gender norms (Acker, 1990) but also as it is socially and financially a pivotal base for the people going through a transition process that may take years. The fear of discrimination keeps many out of working life or at work but stuck in the wrong gender, while at its best a workplace can provide a venue where diversity in

gender is recognized and appreciated, as has been the case with of the interviewees of this study, Senja:

> "This is a very important thing that I say now, my workplace has been one of my most significant save havens and it has been my test laboratory in a way when I have developed the expression of my femininity during these three years. It has been a safe environment where I've always been able to bring out the newly developed womanhood for the first time. It has been a very important and safe place for me and it's an environment made by people, I feel that they are safe and going there every day feels easy -- I have been able to express myself just the way I've wanted to. ″

The spectrum of experiences from transitioning individuals is broad but before turning to discuss them further, let me now, for the sake of clarity, shortly review key terminology and introduce the structure of this report. The term transgender is an umbrella term to refer to individuals whose "gender identity and/or gender expression does reflect the societal gender norms associated with their sex assigned to them at birth" (Dietert & Dentice, 2009, p. 122). Transgender can refer to people who do not necessarily identify as men neither women but it also includes transsexuals. Transsexuality, in turn, more precisely refers to individuals whose gender assigned to them at birth does not match with their own gender. Cisgender, on the other hand, refers to individuals whose gender assigned to them at birth is in line with their own gender identity. (Trasek.)

The structure of this report is the following. In the next, second chapter of this study I will review previous literature on theorizing gender, gendered workplace and on workplace gender transitions. Following that, the third chapter will shed light on the methodological decisions and the method of semi-structured interview that I selected for this study. In the fourth chapter I will introduce and discuss my findings in the light of how they relate to the research questions. The final, fifth chapter, will conclude the study along with covering the limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 Theorizing Gender

In this chapter I will review previous literature on theorizing gender by focusing on the notion of doing gender. In addition, literature on gender and organizations will be reviewed along with examining research on transsexuality and workplace experiences. The notion of doing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) will receive a rather high amount of attention on purpose. This theoretical concept will be reviewed carefully in order to be able to then use it as a theoretical tool for analyzing and examining the more precise research problem of this study, the gender workplace transitions.

West and Zimmerman's (1987) seminal work on doing gender was chosen as the theoretical basis for this study as it is widely recognized in the field of gender studies and sociology and has functioned as basis for a large body of literature on gender (see for instance Connell, 2010; Kelan, 2010; Risman, 2009; Schilt, 2006) that has emerged after their groundbreaking work. Doing gender challenges a traditional understanding of gender in the Western societies as something essentialist that naturally exists independent from the surrounding structures and interactions. The purpose of this following chapter is to challenge this essentialist conception and to examine gender as something that we do, instead of as being (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

2.1 Doing Gender

So what does it mean to do gender? In 1987, West and Zimmerman introduced their ethnomethodological approach of "doing gender" which has then become a popular concept in theorizing gender. They (1987) go beyond the traditional sex/gender categorization where sex is seen as biological and gender as a social status and propose an understanding of gender as "a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (p. 126). Pointing out to the lacking role of interaction in the sex/gender categorization West and Zimmerman (1987) introduce three analytical concepts of sex, sex category and gender that help to understand the interactional work in the process of doing gender and being a gendered person in the society. They argue that individuals constantly do

their gender in a way considered appropriate by others and observe and react to the doings of others based on this similar, normatively appropriate set of actions and rules.

West and Zimmerman (1987) describe their three analytical categories in the following manner. *Sex* means using biological criterion, such as genitalia or chromosomes, when classifying the population into females or males. This criterion does not necessarily imply one another. *Sex category* refers to those visible means that state one's membership in specific category. Often times person's sex may be identified based on these identifiers, but "it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when sex criteria are lacking" (p. 127), meaning that they don not always presume one another. Finally, *gender* refers to the act of managing one's own behavior so that it suits the claimed sex category, so that it is in line with the normative "attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category". (West & Zimmerman 1987, p. 127.)

West and Zimmerman (1987) criticize the sex/gender categorization as falsely portraying gender as *being*, something that becomes a fixed, unvarying and static characterization of an individual that is after all not much different from sex. When they portray gender as *doing*, instead of *being,* the focus of attention shifts from achieved, internal property of an individual to interaction and to institutional arenas. They (1987) state that it is individuals who *do* gender, but it is *done* in presence of other individuals who are expected to assume certain types of doing. Instead of a role, some specific set of traits or a variable they see gender as both "an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society" (p. 126). This is the perspective from which West and Zimmerman (1987) review, criticize and build on previous sociological work on gender by Goffman (1976) for further illustrating their views on doing gender.

According to Goffman's (1976) work on "gender display" when in interaction with others people generally assume them possessing an "essential nature". There are two archetypes for such essential nature, femininity and masculinity. People are thought to convey signs of their essential natures and their behavior is interpreted to function as an expression as well as a proof of their essential femininity or masculinity. Behaving in a way that is conceived as natural for each sex is something that we achieve a tacit

knowledge of via self-regulating learning process, which in turn enhances the understanding of some essential state where our behavior is derived from. As Goffman (1976, p. 75) puts it, we "are socialized to confirm our own hypotheses about our natures."

Recognizing the tendency to assume these essential natures, West and Zimmerman (1987) however, disagree with Goffman (1976) in the optionality of these gender displays in the form of scheduling them, claiming that we cannot choose when or if we let others assume our gender but are constantly being held accountable for our gender category in every area of our life, at all times. Accomplishment of gender is an ongoing process, where individuals must prove their alleged essentially feminine or masculine beings. This constant presence of gender category in the background can be seen as a type of a master identity that overrides other identities across all situations. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

2.1.1 The Case of Agnes

For further clarifying how gender might be done in concrete terms and for illustrating the role of interaction and constant accountability in doing gender let us now turn to West and Zimmerman's (1987) analysis on a transgender Agnes from Garfinkel's (1967) case study. Agnes was born a boy but adopted a female identity at the age of 17, conducting a gender reassignment process later on in her life. Agnes had to manage her gender by legitimizing a gender display different from her sex and learn to do gender in a way biological women do seemingly naturally; Agnes' task to simultaneously display herself as a woman, while learning what is was to be a woman illustrates how gender is created in interaction that is also structured by it (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Utilizing the previously introduced three categories of sex, sex category and gender that overlap in doing gender empirically, Agnes was in a situation where her sex category of a woman was not met by biological properties entitling her to be categorized into the female sex. She was lacking the essential criteria, which would have connected her to the female essential nature, and paradoxically, in spite of genitalia being covered in

social interactions, it would be implicitly assumed that a person claiming a membership in the female sex category has the coinciding organs. (Garfinkel, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

Agnes was able to take advantage of the fact that people generally want to find out the sex category of others and interpret the displayers as they are intended to, unless there is a discrepancy between those identifiers which would make the essential nature questionable (Garfinkel, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987.) As long as Agnes was able to legitimate her membership in the female sex category, her lacking biological criteria would not become questionable. In other words, as long as she would be seen to pass as a woman, she would be passing the "if-can" (p. 133) test which would be enough for others to categorize her as a woman instead of her having to fulfill some pre-defined set of criteria. On the other hand, following a similar logic were sex category seems to stand as a proxy for person's sex, if her accountability was being questioned the doubting would also include her sex. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

In spite of wanting to appear as much as a female as possible also overdoing would have interfered with Agnes being able to pass as a biological woman. With compared to a biological female who would not stop being female in spite of not being feminine Agnes had the challenge to adjust and manage her behavior for making it to be perceived by others as normative gender behavior and to be constantly on look out for possible threats and questioning about her authenticity (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Looking at the world from Agnes' point of view, the emphasis of social interaction in doing gender becomes highlighted as, in spite of many social situations seemingly not being linked to either of the sexes, in all situations a person's sex category may become relevant and their performance held accountable for the appropriate sex category (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

Looking at the case of Agnes with the current understanding there might be some aspect that make Garfinkel's (1967) study questionable. As Connell (2010) points out, the research (1967) was conducted during a time when the possibilities for a gender reassignment surgery were limited and that an access to a surgery was in fact held as a condition for Anges' participation into the research. Having this information now, we

must look at Garfinkel's (1967) analysis with a certain level of caution as it is well argued for that Agnes may have had to overly emphasize her femininity as in addition to the experiment involving unequal power relations, presenting oneself appropriately feminine was a requirement for being able to receive gender reassignment surgery. This being said, however, I still consider Agnes' case a fitting example to illustrate the three components of doing gender in concrete terms for helping to understand the notion of doing gender as well as the social challenge that is present for transitioning individuals due to fundamental changes in interactions with other people.

2.2 Gender Binary and Heteronormativity

The same Western understanding that sees gender as something essentialist, also assumes that there are two and only two recognized gender categories, men and women, that form a gender binary. These two categories are not equal with each other, but constructed as hierarchical binary oppositions. Doing gender creates naturalized differences between males and females and once they are created the stereotypical attributes connected to the respective genders are seen as essentialist to that sex, as if having a certain biological criteria would imply specific psychological and behavioral traits. This view leads to concrete social, structural and institutional consequences in the allocation of power and resources, in private and public domains, that are also conceived to be the logical result of these supposedly natural differences. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.) All this contributes to maintained gender "inequality as opposites - bodies, genders, sexes- cannot be expected to fulfill the same roles and, so, cannot receive the same resources" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 459.)

While doing and thus reproducing gender daily, what is also being reproduced are the hierarchical statuses of these two recognized sex categories (West & Zimmerman, 1987). As gender is done constantly in all aspects of life, broader institutional and societal structures also become to represent this construction of reality, making it look like a natural reflection of the assumed essential gender natures. This means that in all areas of life, men are doing gender on a hierarchically higher position than women. These structures posses "build-in mechanisms of social control" (West and Zimmerman,

1987, p. 147) that, however, go unnoticed in the absence of being able to see the gender structures as a result of doing gender in a specific manner. Then if an individual fails to do gender appropriately and accountably or challenges the gender structures, it is not those structures that are questioned but the individual's conduct that is policed. (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Goffman, 1976.)

The resulting inequality is not limited to that between men and women. Heteronormativity, in addition to recognizing only two sexes from which masculinity enjoys the hierarchically higher status, also assumes the alignment of sex, sex category and gender, and sexual attraction to opposite sex. Heterosexism considers heterosexuality and cisgender, the alignment of sex and, sex category and gender, as the essentialist and natural presumptions and leads to multiple forms of discrimination towards gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans people, ranging from institutional discrimination and hate crimes, to "mundane oppressions of every-day life, such as anti-gay jokes and the social gaffes made by well-meaning heterosexuals" (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 477). Similarly as we are blind to the social construction of masculinity and femininity, when looking at the world from heteronormative glasses we fail to see the value bound charged nature of the seemingly neutral heterogender and heterosexuality (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 477.) With compared to the Western, binary understanding of gender, there are also cultures in which sex and gender are not looked at as strictly dichotomous. An example of this could be the "third sex" of India, the Hijras, whose gender could better be described as fluid rather than being either or from a binary understanding. (Reddy, 2003, p. 163.)

2.3 Undoing Gender

So are women forced to do subordinance and men dominance for good, at work and everywhere else in life? As already mentioned earlier, since West and Zimmerman's (1987) seminal article, doing gender has become a popular concept in organizational research. Even though academics honor their contribution, concerns have also been voiced over the fact that in some occasions the concept has started live a life of its own and became outdated with losing its intended feminist implications (Risman, 2009). While the notion of doing gender that mainly focuses on how the hierarchical gender

system is maintained remains actual, many scholars are calling for attention to be directed towards stepping beyond the gender binary by examining whether or how gender can be undone. Within this type of research interest there are motivations towards the possibility of social change where gender would start to lose its current status as a fundamental categorization criteria of people. (Risman, 2009; Connell, 2010; Kelan, 2010.)

Let us now review what Risman (2009), West and Zimmerman (2009), and Kelan (2010) conclude about undoing gender. Risman (2009, p. 82) states that ”ubiquitous usage of ‘doing gender’ -- creates conceptual confusion as we try to study a world that is indeed changing. The finding that we all do gender, even when we do not do it in easily recognizable ways, is deceptive.” Instead, in Risman’s (2009) opinion, the focus should be turned to studying how gender might be done differently or undone instead of marking all types of behavior as gendered. She sees no point in labeling new ways of behaving as alternative masculinities and femininities only because the people behaving such ways consist of biological men or women. As an example Risman (2009) contrasts labeling young women’s strategic adaption of masculine roles as doing gender with seeing it as the women destabilizing the norms, of which she thinks the latter would better fit the reality as it would refer to undoing gender.

West and Zimmerman (2009) comment on the vivid academic conversation evoked by their article (1987) and expand their theory with reference to Risman (2009). They (2009) see Risman (2009) as failing to understand the key role of accountability in doing gender leading her to see gender as fixed set of actions, and conversely “undoing” gender as deviating from this set. Instead, West and Zimmerman (2009) would interpret what Risman (2009) calls undoing gender as there being changes in the normative environment from where the accountability requirements are derived from. Looked at this way, a woman’s adaptation of masculine roles at work would not be undoing gender as Risman (2009) sees it but rather redoing gender. Also commenting Risman’s (2009) ideas of a post-gender society where sex category would no longer matter, except for when it comes to reproduction, West and Zimmerman (2009) understand it as rather meaning that in such society gender would still not be undone but redone, again referring to changed expectations.

Kelan (2010) sees it problematic how the accountability requirements that West and Zimmerman (1987; 2009) keep referring to form a binary notion of gender. Seeing gender as either or, a man or a woman, in her (2010) opinion always leads to gender having to be done, with compared to problematizing the whole binary in the search of different ways of doing gender As an alternative, Kelan (2010) argues that we should look at how the very binary is created out of social doings in the first place. As an example of this, Kelan (2010) refers to professionalism at work that is implicitly equated with being a man. If a woman would like to be seen as most professional as possible, she would go on trying to construct herself as non-gendered as possible, but this would not, according to Kelan (2010), be considered as undoing of gender but only undoing sex category and would thus not provide freedom from the discriminating gender binary. This way, Kelan (2010) sees it impossible for a single actor to undo gender as it would require a changes in the whole social understanding of the current status of gender as a deeply rooted category.

It indeed seems, in my opinion, like most aspirations for undoing gender are doomed to stay on a theoretical level, as it appears to be very challenging to leave the gender binary behind in practice. I agree with Kelan (2010) and West and Zimmerman (2009) in that in spite of a single actor trying to do gender as neutrally as possible, most people would still read it as either or, implicitly using the gender binary as a reference. As we will come to learn later on in section 2.5 of this report on gendered workplace, often times our actions and behaviors, our doing gender, happen so fast and implicitly that our conscious reasoning does not have time to reflect on it (Martin, 2003).

The importance of interaction and other people in being gendered actors in society surely implies that any changes are likely to be slow requiring elements of ideological change, as also Kelan (2010) and West and Zimmerman (1987) suggest. But when thinking about it from another perspective, in spite of seeming rather utopian, a post-gender society would probably still not erase other categorizations that create unequal power relations between people, such as race or age, which is why I think being able to theorize and problematize gender, instead of looking to demolishing the whole concept, is of high importance. What could be possible, and desired in my opinion, would be to

start seeing the gender binary as a continuum, or even fluid, which would afford more room for different kinds of masculinities, femininities and gender identities.

2.4 Doing Transgender

In our society build around binary understanding of gender, how would it be possible to start recognizing that there might be more to gender than only what is know as being a man or a woman? Stepping a bit closer to being able to look beyond the gender binary, Connell (2010) comments on the concept of doing gender and claims that it does not adequately express transgender individuals' experiences as they disrupt the assumption that sex, sex category and gender are immutable and aligned. This disruption, in Connell's (2010, p. 32) opinion theoretically "opens up an opportunity to undo or redo gender." In other words, transpeople would theoretically seem to have an opportunity to weaken (undo) (Risman, 2009) or alternatively expand (redo) (West & Zimmerman, 2009) the gender norms (Connell, 2010).

Connell (2010) examines this theoretical opportunity in reality by interviewing transpeople in a workplace setting. Based on her analysis Connell (2010) does support the argumentation of West and Zimmerman (1987) concluding that most of her stealth interviewees' and many openly transgender individuals' experiences fit to the notion of doing gender, similarly as the experiences of non-transgender do. Being stealth in this context means that the person has not identified themselves as trans in their workplace, nor are they perceived as such. This means that in spite of being transgender, these individuals are met with similar gender accountability expectations as non-transgender individuals. (Connell, 2010.)

Building up her argument Connell (2010) states that simply *being* transgender does not necessarily carry with it any transformative power in terms of dismantling the gender binary. With limited effectiveness, however, it may be possible to redo or undo gender by adapting a hybrid gender style in interaction with others. Connell (2010) found this sort of resistance to gender expectations to often be politically motivated and/or experienced as the true nature of these individuals. In Connell's (2010) study, she found

out for instance that, in spite of it not matching with his new gender category one interviewee reported keeping feminine aspects in his working style. Another interviewee, identified as genderqueer, reported using gender neutral pronouns of "ze" and "hir" and wanting to maintain certain level of confusion around hir gender identity, which is illustrated for example in hir intention to start using hir girlfriends skirt if a hormonal treatment would make hir appear as more masculine. Another strategy, for instance, has been to select a gender-neutral name that does not imply either gender. (Connell, 2010.)

Connell (2010) recognizes the transsexual employees being sensitized to traditional gender discrimination at work. Intending to return doing gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) to its feminine roots Connell (2010, p. 47) introduces the notion of "doing transgender" to capture the feminine consciousness that many trans people acquire due to their own position. Connell (2010, p. 50) defines doing transgender as it capturing "transpeople's unique management of situated conduct as they, with others, attempt to make gendered sense of their discordance between sex and sex category." This may be "doing gender or "undoing" and "redoing" it, but most central is the consciousness that has feminist power in it. Before turning to review literature on how transgender individuals have experienced their gender transition at work, let us first familiarize ourselves with how the two recognized categories of men and women build of the gender construction at workplaces.

2.5 Gendered Workplace

One crucial venue where the binary gender system and heteronormativity are reproduced and maintained is the workplace. With or without noticing it, every day at work we are doing gender based on the way our gender category requires, creating and being part of hierarchical social structures. Seemingly neutral jobs are actually already gender coded, or why else would we have to specify gender when talking about a "male nurse" or a "female doctor"? (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 129.) In this following section my aim is to gain an understanding of workplaces as gendered institutions instead of neutral ones by reviewing the work of some feminist scholars and by

providing illustrating examples. This section is by no means intended to serve as a comprehensive review on feminist organizational literature but rather to help in establishing an understanding of the context of the researched phenomenon, workplace gender transitions.

Acker (1990) criticizes the mainstream organizational theories as falsely representing organizations and workplaces as asexual and neutral in their gender structure. It was not until the late 1970's that the feminist theorists, coinciding with the start of the second wave of feminism, started to "point out the problematic nature of the obvious" (p. 140). The aim was to create nonpatriarchal, and nonhierarchical organizations by revealing the invisible masculine standpoint and hierarchy in mainstream theories. (Acker, 1990.) The discipline has since then gained more popularity and the gendered organization theory studies how the gender structure is maintained and reproduced (in addition to Acker, 1990, see for example Williams, 1993; Martin, 2003; Lupton, 2000) (Schilt, 2006.)

For being able to see organizations and workplaces as gendered institutions it is necessary to see the organization and its actors as mutually constituted, and gender as an integral part of its structures, instead of them being separate with each other. Gendered processes are not something that emerge by themselves and live in a vacuum but rather they are created and maintained in actions and interactions, that are repeatedly performed, just like are the two recognized gender categories. The seemingly neutral job and employee fitting for that job are actually based on an idealization of a heterosexual man, who, unlike women, is able to rationally control his emotions, and free from physiological constraints of having to bare a child. Women are seen as the second gender with relation to men and they end up in supporting and less valued positions in the work environment. (Acker, 1990.) Especially in male-dominated professions women often have to suffer from discrimination, harassment, glass ceilings and exclusion from informal networks (Williams, 1993.) As this is seen as essential masculine and feminine nature, men and women tacitly do gender accordingly reinforcing these structures and trying to deviate from the norm is seen as causing unwanted and unnecessary trouble (Martin, 2003).

For gaining a more concrete understanding of what doing gender actually means in practice and how it creates differences between the genders at work, I will next review some studies that have been conducted in different types of workplaces and activities. The first example comes from a male-dominated industry, from police organization. Rabe-Hemp (2009) examined how female police officers do gender and make sense of their career in a job that is generally considered very masculine. This inquiry was motivated by the fact that women are understood having to manage a conflict with maintaining a balance between an image of professionalism and femininity, which are thought to form a trade of situation for women especially in male-dominated industries. The attributes describing the archetypical police officer are thought to represent ideal masculine features such as "authority, heterosexism, ability to display force, and the subordination of women" (p. 116), where as the role dedicated to women in the police organization, "women's work", is that of an empathic listener, and soft communicator, a role that ends up maintaining and supporting the hegemonic masculinity of the male officer. There are also power structures in place inciting women to do their gender accordingly as failing to meet this accountability criteria may result in getting labeled as "dyke or lesbian" (p. 125) or becoming isolated or discriminated at their working community. (Rabe-Hemp, 2009.)

Race-Hemp (2009) found out in her study that most of the policewomen she interviewed did gender in a stereotypically feminine way. Many "described themselves as maternal caretakers and even as saviors of the victims, protecting them from undue emotional and psychological revictimization - [and] - attributed these reported differences in police style to their lack of physical size" (pp. 121-122). With referring to biological criteria for having specific traits implies, according to Rabe-Hemp (2009), that these women had been socialized to the common understanding of gender as essentialist and gender differences as a natural result of these differences "which serves to confirm and obscure the process of masculine hegemony" (p. 121).

The study shows how women struggle between wanting to avoid appearing butchy by emphasizing their feminine looks and physical attraction to men, and on the other hand not wanting to appear too soft by highlighting their "hands on-attitude" towards work. Female police officers in a way break the norm as working in a one the most masculine

professions but on the other hand reinforce the masculinity of that profession by taking the role of a female police, or ending up in that role without even noticing it. These findings reflect the existence of conflict in how women police officers should combine doing gender and being a police. (Rabe-Hemp, 2009.)

Similar findings were reported in case a study done in a Fortunte 100 company by Martin (2003) where women in a professional position have to be on alert to being criticized if they by their behavior somehow challenge the status quo of men who are in a more active and dominant position in spite of seemingly non-hierarchical relations with them. Upon observing the way gender was done in the company, Martin (2003) for instance witnessed an incident where a female vice-president was implicitly expected to answer a phone that rang in the middle a conversation with her male colleague, who later regretted asking her ”why don’t you get that?” (p. 346). This incident illustrates how ”the gender institution holds women accountable to pleasing men [and] tells men/boys they have a (gender) right to be assisted by women/girls” . This comment treated the female colleague as if she was the secretary of the male colleague even though those two were equals in terms of their formal position at the company. Had the woman refused to answer the phone, she would have been perceived as ”uppity and overly sensitive” (p. 348), as unnecessarily hurting her feelings from something that is considered normal, which would then again enhance seeing women, and her in this case, as overly sensitive. (Martin, 2003.)

The incident, in spite of illustrating the deeply rooted gender stereotypes and revealing the hierarchically lower role of women, does not seem unheard of and similar incidents take place daily in many corridors and workplaces. In this very case, however, there was an intention to change the situation and a gender work group was founded where the unequal gender structure in this organization was problematized and discussed about together. Still, in spite of actively reflecting on the way he does gender, the same male from the previous example reported to Martin (2003) as never having dinner with a woman alone in a work context, even on work trips, so that the dinner could not be interpreted as there being anything romantic between him and this woman. This rule illustrates how the man sees himself as having an active role in preventing himself from

women who are sexual temptresses, something that he would not have to worry about if having dinner with a male colleague.

The fact that even actively trying to reflect on one's own doing or practicing of gender is necessarily not enough for being able to stop repeating the same patterns of behavior shows how limited our awareness and reflexivity are in terms of doing gender (Martin, 2003). Had the man in the two previous examples really been able to set himself free from the constraints of the gender system he would have been able to have dinner with a female colleague. He, however, was just not able leave the idea of it possibly being interpreted wrong by others. This example also illustrates how we do or practice gender not alone but in interaction with other people and in addition to tacitly behaving by ourselves, we are also tacitly anticipating and interpreting the behavior of others, which in turn affects the course of the interaction. Doing gender happens so intuitively that our conscious reflection fails to catch it (Martin, 2003) and often times the scripts for our action are derived from the binary conception of gender. Instead of seeing his colleague as primarily a human, the man in Martin's (2003) was obviously seeing her as a woman. (Kelan, 2010; West and Zimmerman, 1987.)

The last example illustrating the gendered nature of workplaces comes from a female-dominated industry. Lupton (2000) interviewed and studied men who work in occupations that are traditionally thought to be more suited for women. Working in a female-dominated occupations as so called "tokens" (Kanter, 1977), as belonging to a gender minority that is formed out of less than 15 % of the whole employment base, can be seen as posing a challenge to the masculinity of those "token" men. Lupton (2000) interviewed men working as administrative and clerical staff, and others who were studying to become human resource managers, a librarian and a primary teacher. Those who were yet to have graduated still had working experience from their relevant fields. (Lupton, 2000.)

Lupton (2000) found three different ways how this perceived challenge to masculinity in female-dominated occupations became evident. The first observation had to do with the fact that men now had to make new sense of the meaning of work to them and to their identity. As they were not working in a manly profession with higher pay and

status, they were not able to derive a sense of being a breadwinner from their current job that would traditionally be considered as a man's role in the society. Nor were these men able to use their work status in attracting mates or to participate in conversations at work that would enhance their sense of masculinity. Instead, the interviewees were isolated or isolated themselves from the informal interactions at work. Some were afraid of flirting as it would be interpreted wrong and what is more, many men reported being targets of what they felt like was sexual harassment towards them coming from their female colleagues. An older female colleague putting her arm around a younger male colleague might not seem like sexual harassment but would surely look like it had the genders been to the contrary. (Lupton, 2000.)

The second category of reactions from men in female-dominated occupations in Lupton's (2000) study was the fear of feminization. Some of the men worried that they had picked up some feminine mannerism or tones of voice and that people outside of the working environment might notice this. Some also did not feel confortable in becoming too close with the women, nearly like becoming one of them, and thus invisible as a man. The third observation on how their masculinity might be challenged had to do with a fear of stigmatization. Many men reported worrying that their position in a female dominated-occupation might give them a public reputation of being less masculine or even gay. (Lupton, 2000.)

Many men in Lupton's (2000) study reported solving these internal tensions by reconstructing the significance of their occupation by emphasizing the "hard" masculine aspects of their job and downplaying the "soft" feminine ones. One interviewee, for instance, studying to become an HR-professional, seemed to be rationalizing his position in a female dominated occupation by thinking that he would be doing more demanding tasks than his fellow female colleagues. Distancing himself from the women, by putting femininity on a secondary or supporting position in his profession, thinking that women were not as good in the job as him enabled the interviewee to cling on to his masculinity in spite of working in a female dominated industry. Another strategy, found out by Lupton (2000), was to renegotiate masculinity, which in many cases meant softening or playing down their masculinity to better fit in the female dominated community. There were also interviewees who felt that they had no problems

in working with women with the type of masculinity they had recognizing that not all men are alike. (Lupton, 2000.)

These experiences are somewhat similar, but also differ from those of the female "token" police officers in Rabe-Hemp's (2009) study. Lupton (2000) sides with a view that women in male-dominated industries do not face a similar fear of stigmatization if they succeed in their job that is often evaluated in masculine terms. They could still be women in spite of being tough or professional unlike successful men in female-dominated industries who would be more easily coded as less men or even homosexuals. On the other had, in Rabe-Hemp's (2009) inquiry it became clear that some female police officers were afraid to seem dyke if they failed to do femininity correctly. This, in my opinion suggests that there are probably differences between industries and same expectations do not apply to female and male token across occupations.

Lupton (2000) also draws attention to the fact that men in general, being in a hierarchically higher position, may face stronger pressure towards molding the occupation to suit their masculinity with compared to women in a token situation. It was not the police women (Rabe-Hemp, 2009) who started to reconstruct their occupation but the HR professional (Lupton, 2000) that was creating a narrative where he did more demanding tasks than his female colleagues. Many police women intuitively adopted the supportive role as a police officer while some men in Lupton's (2000) study were actively and artificially trying to create "the other" in to their occupation for enabling them to be the in a hierarchically higher position. As if something softer and weaker was needed to exist for their masculinity to be coherent and existent.

While these observations may apply in occasions also other than these specific studies (Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Lupton, 2000) it is still important to bear in mind that not all men and masculinities, along with women and femininities are uniform but multiple different standpoints and gender identities exist. This was also evident in Lupton's (2000) study where not all the male tokens felt like their masculinity represented the hegemonic type of masculinity and enjoyed working in a female-dominated industry without having to neither reconstruct their occupation nor renegotiate their masculinity. As something

important to take out of this section on gendered workplace would, in my opinion, be to remember that while it is important to challenge and question the taken for granted norms and structures, we should be on alert to not start repeating and enforcing a worldview where men always do dominance and women subordinance by always highlighting it the narratives that we produce.

2.6 Transsexual Employees at the Gendered Workplace

Having learned how gender affects our workplace interactions, let us now examine what may transgender employees be able to reveal us about the gender binary and if there are seeds for change embedded in their possible hybrid gender styles (Connell, 2010). In this section, and three subsections that follow, I will explore previous literature and studies on transsexual workplace experiences. The literature on workplace transitions and workplace experiences is rather limited which is why the following section quite heavily relies on the work of Schilt (2006), Schilt and Connell (2007), Schilt and Westbrook (2009) and Connell (2010).

Transsexual individuals have a unique standpoint in terms of being close to being insiders in both of the sex categories, before and after their transition. This "outsider-within" (Collins, 1986; Schilt 2006, p. 466) position is especially true for transmen, who are often able to pass as biological men quite shortly after starting their gender reassignment process. Thanks to their previous work history and experiences as women, transmen are able to view their new status as men from a genuine outsider's point of view while at the same blending in with biological men. This position provides first hand experience on what happens when their accountability requirements change from one sex category to another, and how all of a sudden the same human capital; exactly the same set of education, skills and abilities are evaluated differently. This is a unique position in a sense that non-transgender people are only able to experience what it is like to live in their own gender category and thus lack the possibility use the other gender category as a point of comparison, which leaves them blind to the social construction of their own position. (Schilt, 2006.)

Research shows that when the transsexual individuals reach the "outsider-within" position or in other words when they pass as a member of their destination gender, the results are likely to follow the binary gender logic where transmen receive more authority, respect and reward with compared to transwomen who lose their male privileges (Schilt, 2006.). Schilt (2006) even found out that not all the transmen received similar upgrading in their status but the increase in authority was the highest for those transmen who were tall and/or white with compared to being short and/or of color. What is more, many transsexual individuals themselves reported being surprised about these changes, which reveals how deeply rooted and taken for granted our gender norms are. (Connell, 2010.)

2.6.1 Threatening Heterogender

There is a lot more to the experience of going through a gender reassignment process than only the unique outsider-within position, and passing can be seen as an end result, that is not necessarily even desired by many transitioning individuals. What happens right after a person starts transitioning from one sex category to another, when the supposed mismatch between sex and sex category becomes evident to others, can reveal us even more about the deeply rooted heteronormativity and heterosexism that are present at our workplaces.

In addition to often times eventually having their share of the traditional binary gender inequality, transitioning individuals are subject to discrimination on the grounds of their status not as man nor as woman but as transsexual. The mainstream heteronormative understanding that implicitly assumes the alignment of sex, sex category and gender in addition to heterosexuality does not have concepts or understanding for the gender identities of transsexual individuals'. Within this discourse ideas of gender and sexuality become intertwined and transsexuality can be seen as a challenge or threat to heterogender and heterosexuality. (Connell, 2010.)

As physical violence at work is not very common, before turning to discuss the implications of transsexuality as a threat to heteronormativity at a work setting, let us

first review an analysis on some violent incidents for gaining an understanding on how profound and at the same time dangerous the heteronormative system can be to those who do not fit those norms. Findings from Westbrook's (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) analysis on the social world created by news stories on reporting violent incidents towards transgender individuals reveal extreme consequences of heteronormativity and homophobia and echo the notion of transsexuality as a threat to (heteronormative) gender system. Westbrook analyzed 7 183 news stories from the American mainstream news media between the years 1990 and 2005 on 232 homicides. The extensiveness of Westbrook's sample makes it representative of all available news stories from that time period. By looking at how the events were explained in these new stories, Westbrook aimed at gaining an insight on the functioning and rationalization of the "sex/gender/sexuality system" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 445).

In many of these news the killing takes place due to sexual encounter where the reason for the violent act is reasoned to be that the victims, transgender women, are stated to have deceived the perpetrators about their "true gender and [tricked them] into a homosexual encounter" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 453). Throughout the sample articles, the murder transwomen are accused of falsely doing gender with phrases such as "secret, lied, tricked, misled, avoid detection, posed as a woman, true gender, really a woman, true identity, double life, fooled, deceit, pretended, masquerade and gender secret" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, pp. 453-454). Based on Westbrook's analysis, "true gender" in these news refers to (biological) sex, which in turn refers to how they should have been doing gender. Apparent in these stories, is also the fact that gender and sexuality are produced in interaction. What also became evident in the analysis was that it was cisgender men, not women who used violence "to repair the breach in gender". - "The extremity of men's responses shows the depth of the threat of transgender bodies to heteronormativity within sexual situations and the need to neutralize that threat through hyper gendered reactions" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 458.)

Similarly as men, being in privileged position, may not perceive the gendered nature of workplaces, heterosexual employees are often blind to heteronormativity (Martin, 1992). The violent incidents against transgender individuals, mainly transwomen, imply that transgender people may be at risk of violence, physical or psychological across

social situations, also at work. In the same vein, it is not coincidental that the violent incidents were directed towards what was considered to be a man faking to be a woman as it is generally more acceptable for a woman to posses masculine features than for a man to have feminine ones. Also, as these "really men" (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009, p. 453) who were killed were considered to be threating the heterosexuality of men who are higher in the hierarchy with compared to women, it makes sense that it was not women who were murdering transmen as this would have been counter to the hierarchical gender binary logic. (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009.) At our workplaces, the understanding of transsexuality as a taboo subject that breaks the taken for granted, seemingly natural order, does not necessarily burst out as physical violence, but can be seen in the actions and words, as well as in what is not said and done, of colleagues, superiors and other stakeholders.

The empirical evidence from open gender transitions shows that similar punishing towards most importantly transwomen with compared to transmen is evident in workplaces. In general, the transition of transmen is considered as more natural and normal as they have been able to express masculinity already as a woman by it being socially acceptable. As women these individuals have maybe been considered as "unattractive women" (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009, p. 448) where it only seems to make sense that they are actually men. Transmen are welcomed as one the guys by biological men, which illustrates how, to the contrary to evaluating the gender of transwomen by their (biological) sex, biological men judge transmen's gender based on their gender expression. (Schilt 2006; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009.)

On the contrary then, the transition of a transwoman may come as unexpected since they have not been able to express feminine traits during their time as a man. This does not contribute to seeing their transition as natural and transwomen can in fact be considered as "committing the double sin of both abandoning masculinity and choosing femininity" (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009, p. 460). Transwomen are often welcomed to the in-group of women as, similarly as with how men code the gender of transmen, women consider transwomen as women based on their gender expression. Upon gaining a membership in the group of women, transwomen at the same time lose their male

privilege of previously possessing access to men's social networks and having more authority and power. (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009.)

2.6.2 Conforming to Heterogender

The impact of the underlying gender binary seems nearly too obvious in the way new interactional boundaries are formed between men and women upon a gender transition. What if these transsexual individuals did not wish to be "outsiders-within", meaning to blend in to the binary gender categories, but would rather want to construct a gender identity of their own, would that be possible? This was the question asked by Schilt and Connell (2007) by utilizing partly the same in-depth interview data with Schilt (2006) on openly transitioning transmen in California, along with interview data on openly transitioning transwomen.

Schilt and Connell (2007) found out that in spite of many transmen and women seeking to break the binary gender categories by alternative masculinities and femininities, their colleagues generally either kept holding "them accountable to their birth gender" (p. 598) or socializing them into the other side of the binary. In other words, while a transsexual employee would theoretically seem to possess power to transform the rigid gender stereotypes, the practice shows that due to explicit and implicit pressure from their colleagues these individuals are pushed into doing gender based on the heteronormative norm. (Schilt & Connell, 2007.)

The transmen and transwomen interviewed by Schilt and Connell (2007) reported the erection of new gender boundaries after their open workplace transition and their crossing to the other side of the gender binary. While some expressed feelings of relief of no longer having to participate in gendered conversation between the members of the same gender, others reported feelings of exclusion and sadness as their colleagues reaction to their previously typical conversations had changed. These reactions reveal how the divisions between men and women are seen as natural and as opposing to each other. (Schilt & Connell, 2007.)

In terms of new same-gender interactions most of the interviewees reported as being taken into the same gender in-group, and openly granted an access to gender specific spaces such as dressing rooms and toilets. Some co-workers took a helpful role interacting in a gender apprentice manner, for example teaching to tie a bow or put on make-up. Among transmen, these apprentice experiences were more common than among transwomen in spite of them perhaps being more needed in case of transwomen as they would have less practice as living in their destination gender with compared to transmen. (Schilt & Connell, 2007.)

In addition to being socialized into the new same-gender group of interactions, the informants also had to re-establish their interactional styles towards the new opposite sex. For instance a transman, publicly identified as lesbian prior to his transition, reported receiving pressure towards changing his previously flirty behavior towards women since it would be interpreted as sexist, now coming from a man to woman. This was true especially in the early phases of his transition but may change after he will become culturally competent in cross-gender interactions. Many transmen also reported receiving surprisingly strong change in expectations where women now expected them to do all the heavy lifting and other masculine-coded duties. Conversely, a transwoman reported a tendency to tame the expression and loudness of her opinions after her transition. And another transwoman received a suspecting reaction from her superior worrying if taking estrogen would affect her programming abilities. These are reactions that do not necessarily match with the person's physical traits of skills and abilities but stem from the naturalized and deeply rooted stereotypical gender assumptions. (Schilt & Connell, 2007.)

Some interviewees also reported having challenges with the authenticity of their destination gender. This feeling stemmed from external reactions where co-workers for instance kept referring to the interviewees with the pronoun of their birth gender, or made comments of the physicality that made the interviewees feel as they were not considered and reacted to based on their own gender identity but as based on their birth gender, so that they were not seen as "real" men or women. (Schilt & Connell, 2007.) Also, the need to rationalize people's seemingly mismatching gender display and sex was evident in one interviewee's, Julie's case, where she as replying to phone as a

customer service representative would receive client's referring back to her as "Julian" or even "George" or "Jake" in the customers trying to make sense of her masculine sounding voice that would not match with a feminine name Julie. (Connell, 2010, p. 41.)

Answering the question whether transsexual employees make "gender trouble" (Butler, 1990) the answer seems to be no. All in all, unlike being able to freely construct their own ways of doing or undoing gender, the experiences of openly transitioned individuals show that the hierarchically gendered doing gender is mirrored in the new interactions and identities they are implicitly and explicitly pushed to adopt. Schilt and Connell (2007) reflect on the findings by accounting for the overly reaction of the co-workers as a way of showing support and acceptance towards their transsexual colleagues. Connell (2010, p. 41) also found out evidence where "coming out as transgender sometimes mitigates, rather than incurs, ambiguity in gender presentation." This means that sometimes it is easier to relate to a person as transgender individual, which would seem to explain the un-normative gender display of a supposedly non-transgender person. Returning to the "outsider-within" perspective, it shows how these reactions, considered as a natural gender behavior are actually based on men repeatedly doing dominance and women repeatedly doing deference, and challenging this hierarchical binary seems to be met with strong pressure to not deviate from the norm. (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Schilt & Connell, 2007.)

2.6.3 Silence

The studies by both Schilt (2006) and Schilt and Connell (2007) were conducted in the context of big cities in California, which are generally rather liberal towards gender and sexual minorities and have employment protections for transsexual employees (Schilt & Connell, 2007). These studies do not represent the collective understanding of transsexual individuals' transitions in the work setting and the experiences may vary drastically. In this subsection I will examine what happens when a transsexual individual's (gender) identity is not acknowledged, for instance by pushing it towards a pre-existing gender stereotype but ignored, silenced or disregarded, limiting these

individuals' possibilities to fully participate and develop their work identity in the workplace (Priola et al., 2014.)

With majority of the employees being blind to heteronormativity in the seemingly asexual workplace, any reference on heterogender is seen as normal and natural, where as bringing up anything non-heterosexual is considered as inappropriate and belonging to the private, not public sphere, as if heterosexuality would not be a sexual orientation at all. As a result, many non-heterosexual employees have to either actively "come out of the closet" or formulate separate work and sexual identities and be subject to silenced identity at work due to fear of discrimination. (Priola et al., 2014, p. 489.) This is especially true for homosexual individuals but also applies to transsexuals and the topic is still considered a taboo in many national and work contexts an it has been only during the recent years that transsexual individuals have been able to openly start a gender transition while being employed. (Connell, 2010.)

Forming a hierarchical dichotomy, similarly as for example men and women; good and bad or black and white, heterosexuality and homosexuality are opposing to each other, where the existence of one already implies the lack of another and also makes the other category possible. Thought in this way, silence towards gender minorities consists not only from unsaid things, of what is not said but also from what is said as it implicitly excludes minorities out of the discourse. Saying nothing does not increase inclusion but the lack of acknowledgement and agency creates otherness and contributes to seeing equality as lack of difference denying alternative femininities, masculinities or sexualities. (Ward & Winstaley, 2003; Priola et al., 2014.)

Silencing is a passive from of discrimination and may be difficult to observe. It can take different forms that stem from ranging motivations (Ward & Winstanley, 2003). Priola et al. (2014) noticed uneasiness; lack of awareness an embarrassment among interviewees on the LGBT issues and terminology. The heterosexual interviewees', whose colleagues included members from sexual or gender minorities would be using euphemisms in avoiding to use the correct terms or not knowing the meaning of words like transsexual. Ward and Winstaley (2003) also suggest that the silence might stem from fear of accidentally saying something offensive or of possibly finding out information that they would feel uncomfortable with. For instance, rather than

supporting his non-heterosexual subordinate a superior protected the other employees from not having to "be embarrassed by homosexual relationships" by avoiding addressing the issue himself (Priola et al., 2014, p. 497).

Silencing can be a conscious decision to oppress the other, the non-heterosexual colleague (Ward & Winstanley 2003), or it can be justified "as a sign of respect and motivated by the irrelevance of sexuality in the workplace" (Priola et al., 2014, p. 495). In addition, silence may also be seen as means of self-protection and as silent resistance to the mainstream discourse (Ward & Winstanley, 2003). No matter what the motivation, however, it contributes to transsexuality continuing to be a taboo subject and does not enhance inclusion.

Interviewing 26 male-identified transgender individuals, in the United States, Dietert and Dentice (2009) found signs of silencing. One interviewee, for instance, working as an HR office manager, received a wish from his boss to not come out as a transgender at work even though he had already started his transition process and the superior was well aware of that. The superior assured his opinion only stemming from the fact that it would be best for the interviewee himself as the superior was afraid of what his colleagues might think. The interviewee was in a position where his task included interviewing new employees for the company. As the interviewee explained, the new recruits see him as a man and refer to him accordingly with right pronouns. The problem is, however, that the superior, along with the colleagues, refuses to use the correct pronouns, which according to the interviewee creates an awkward and confusing atmosphere for everyone at the office. (Dietert & Dentice, 2009.)

Based on the same study, (Dietert & Dentice, 2009) it was many times the superior of the transitioning individual who had a lot power in how the workplace transition would proceed. Many interviewees reported trying to sense the level of acceptance at their workplace before disclosing the news about their gender transition, which would eventually come down to acceptance of their nearest superior or HR manager as they would be the ones hearing the news first and possibly showing example to other colleagues in how to react to the situation. (Dietert & Dentice, 2009.)

To conclude the whole chapter three of this report, we have been building up understanding on how the essential, taken for granted, expectations directed towards single actors' gender identity and gender expression come to form gendered social structures. These structures surround us and take up concrete forms, for instance, at our workplaces. We have learned that gender is structured in interaction that it also structures as we do gender and assume others to be doing it as well, according to binary accountability criteria (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The components creating this gendered social reality come in pairs that are not only opposing to each other but also hierarchical. These dichotomies, men and women, heterosexual and homosexual, cisgender and transgender, form a reality where people are treated based on which of those components their identity is assumed to be formed of. We have seen how actors, who stay with the same set of identity categories are often blind to the construction of our social reality, and how transgender individuals on the other hand have a unique standpoint in being able to see the build-in inequality that is embedded in these gendered structures. Finally, we know now that, in spite of being significant, this insight viewpoint can come at a high price and have negative social consequences as transitioning from one gender category to another is generally still considered a taboo.

3 Methodology

Like in any social research, it is important to bring out how the researcher perceives reality and thinks about the nature of knowledge. Facing such disputed concepts that do not form universally agreed or absolute rules, I find it important to elaborate on my understanding on the essence of things and reality (ontology) and the possibilities for gaining knowledge on them (epistemology) (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). Put in an analogue, it could be thought that knowledge is always a representation of something, like a painting, and such like an artist makes choices on what pencils and colors they use, researchers make certain methodological decisions when portraying their perception of reality.

Feminist methodology best captures my understanding of reality and knowledge. This tradition in itself is divided and does not form a consistent approach to producing knowledge or understanding reality. Typically common to these, sometimes conflicting, feminist schools, however, is that they deal with theories of gender and power within normative frameworks, aiming at transforming the status quo. Feminist approaches take taken for granted phenomena under critical examination aiming at correcting their build-in injustice. (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002.) These are elements that also lay at the heart of this project, which is why this study could be described as feminist research.

Returning to the notions of ontology and epistemology, and following the feminist tradition this study understands gender as social, rather than natural, gaining meaning in interaction with others (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002; Martin, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987.) Knowledge is never seen as neutral, and the research subject and object never as totally distinct but in interaction with each other. This means that it is understood that I as a researcher come to the research setting with my personal assumptions and values and that there are always power relations involved between the researcher and what is researched. (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002.)

3.1 Method of Semi-Structured Interviews

The method of this research was chosen to be semi-structured interview. This method was thought to serve the objectives of this study particularly well thanks to its respect

for the "understandings and experiences" (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 155) of the interviewees. The interviewees are seen as subjects who actively construct meaning and give access to "personal, experiential and emotional aspects of existence" (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002, p. 155). In the quest to gain descriptive data that is rich in detail, semi-structured interviews were considered well argued for since the researcher has the possibility to affect the course of conversation or ask for clarification and thus gain deeper knowledge on preferred topic areas. This is also important in an explorative study as this since it is difficult to know before hand where the directions of the conversations will go and because each interviewee is likely to have a unique experience that makes the conversation follow different path than with other interviewees. (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008; Hirsjärvi et al., 1997; Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000.)

The informants for the semi-structured interviews were recruited by asking a Finnish trans-association Trasek ry to publish my interview announcement on their website. The announcement was further published on the association's Facebook site, from where it was shared on the Facebook pages of some smaller lgbt-organizations and private people. This way the collection method somewhat represents a snowball method as the invitation was shared from one person to another in social media. In addition to the announcement, one informant was contacted based on her appearance on a national television on trans-topic.

The selection criterion was that the interviewees had been/ were employed while going through their gender reassignment process. This criterion was selected so that the interviewees would have experiences on possibly changed social interactions due to their gender transition, which would not be possible for a person who had not started a transition process yet, or had done it previously before being employed. It was also understood that the process of gender reassignment is long and does not necessarily have a specific starting and ending dates which is why the selection criteria was considered to be fulfilled even if the person had been employed at least at some point during the transition process.

Surprisingly, within a two-week period from the publication of the announcement, I was contacted by ten transwomen and only one transman. Due to his transition having

happened already in the 1990's, in addition to him being the only transman I decided to focus on the experiences of transwomen. Two people who contacted me were also not interviewed as their process had not yet fully started, which made the final sample to be eight transwomen. The terms transwomen or transsexual women are used to generally refer to the group of participants for the purposes of this research report, even though I do recognize their gender identities to possibly be more varied. This terminology was selected, as when discussing about it with the interviewees they all were able to identify with it and it best describes the direction of their transition from biological males towards the female gender.

The sampling method is nonrandom, which is likely to include certain biases. Agreeing with Schilt (2006), I concluded that generating a random sample of transsexual individuals did not seem possible. As the call for interviewees was posted on the website of a transgender association, it was probably likely to reach the attention of individuals who are actively involved in the trans-community and possibly share similar experiences. Also, it was not likely to gain attention from stealth individuals, who, in turn, would be likely to have differing experiences from openly transitioning individuals. Law et al. (2011) also discuss that individuals who have had negative experiences due to disclosing a transsexual identity at work may be more likely unwilling to share their experiences or to participate to a trans-community from where most of the interviewees were recruited. In the same vein, Law et al. (2011), however, side with the selection of nonrandom snowball sampling since when dealing with a sensitive topic and limited amount of informants that are difficult to identify, it is often necessary and inevitable. In addition, the relatively small amount of interviewees is a likely result from the difficulty of finding individuals fitting the sampling criteria. Acknowledging these limitations I do not consider them as serious since this study, as it is common for qualitative research in general, is interested in individual stories and experiences with their details and nuances, instead of trying to draw universal conclusions and generations. (Eskola and Suoranta 2008; Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002.)

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted in February and March of 2015. The interviews lasted from forty minutes to two hours. I had preplanned a simple structure

with some themes but wanted to avoid planning the questions too much in order to be able to better listen to the interviewees and ask additional questions. Also, I tried to limit the projection of personal assumptions or biases to the course of the conversation and to avoid affecting the themes and topics discussed by letting the interviewees first talk about their experience before asking specific or direct questions. The informants were asked about personal sense on how their workplace experiences changed as well as about the reactions of their colleagues after the open workplace transition (Schilt & Connell 2007). I had planned to structure around temporal periods during the process, which included the time before and after the transition in addition to the time when the decision to start the process was made and colleagues informed about it. Mainly, the interviewees told about their experience in a chronological order, during which I was able to ask specifying questions.

All, except for one, interviews were conducted face to face, in the interviewees' workplaces, cafeterias or libraries. One conversation was held via phone. All the interviewees' workplaces were located in among the ten biggest cities of Finland. In each interview the setting was calm and there were no interruptions. Each interview was recorded and manually transcribed. The language of the interviews was Finnish as it was everyone's native language. The age when the interviewees had started their gender transition process ranged from 22 to 53 years. Six interviewees had started the process while employed, where as two had just started before getting on with a new job.

To respect the privacy of the interviewees they are referred to by pseudonyms and their workplaces are mentioned only in general terms so that it would not be possible to identify the individuals from any details of their work or experience. The interviewees were also given an option to have the interview done via Skype in which case it would have been possible for them to stay anonymous also to me. The information discussed during the interviews, along with any personal or work related details, was shared under agreement on confidentiality. (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008.)

3.2 Researching a Sensitive Topic

In addition to ensuring confidentiality at all stages of the process it is important to note other implications created by the sensitive nature of this study. Having a cisgender identity makes me an outsider to the trans-community, which is likely to influence the access to the interviewees as well as the course of the interviews (Schilt, 2006; Connell, 2010).

Following the example of Schilt (2006) I wanted to be open and transparent about the motives of my study as well as about my academic background as a student, starting from the interview announcement. At the interview settings I tried to adopt and communicate a role of a learner instead of an academic "expert" and to create and open and relaxed atmosphere where I also welcomed questions directed to me. This helped me to gain rapport with the interviewees with all of whom the conversations went well. Many of the interviewees were very motivated to participate in the project seeing it as an opportunity to increase awareness and visibility of transgender people. In the course of the interviews it also become evident that many of the participants were active in trans community and had participated in similar projects before.

In spite of me openly sharing information, however, I may never be sure of what the interviewees think they were consenting to due to differing experiences, interests, values and understandings of concepts (Ramazanoğlu & Holland, 2002). Also, as it is in the nature of qualitative research process to constantly evolve, the specific objective of this study would continue to become more specific even after the interviews. What is more, looking at an interview as an interactional setting it becomes evident that the interviewees as active subjects do not create meaning alone, but in an interaction with the researcher, who also further interprets the gained data (Hirsjärvi et al., 1997). This is why I paid careful attention to consistent handling of the data at all stages of the research process.

3.3 Data Analysis

After the eight interviews were conducted within a three-week time period, they were manually transcribed. In the transcriptions all the filler words and alike were left out, as they would not be necessary for the analysis. The analysis partly already began when collecting and transcribing the data but a more systematic analysis only started after all the data was transcribed. As a method for the analysis I utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I aimed at transcribing the interviews a maximum of one week after they had taken place and starting the analysis right after all the interviews had been conducted in order to have the issues discussed fresh in my mind for a better quality analysis (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2000). Instead of a linear manner, the analysis proceeded in a spiral like manner that involved going back and forth between the different parts of the data and as well as theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At first, I started the systematic data analysis by looking for themes that would reveal something important about the researched phenomenon in relation to the research question. The themes were not necessarily topics that acquired most interview time or were the most prevalent but rather those that I felt were most important in terms of the research question. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) As help in this process, I utilized the theoretical framework formed by the literature review that included theory for instance on doing gender as well as previous research on transgender individuals doing gender at work. The aim was to focus on changes in interactions as well as personal sense upon claiming a transition from one sex category to another and to examine how heteronormativity and essentialist and binary conception of gender play a role in these changes. The purpose was to understand the researched topic from the desired point of view instead of trying to make generalized causal explanations.

The themes had to be both, connected to the theory and have an empirical representation in the data (Hirsjärjvi & Hurme, 2000.) The analysis would mostly rely on deductive method where inspiration for finding the themes comes from previous theory while there were also inductive elements present due to the under-researched status of the phenomenon in the Finnish working context. (Braun & Clarke, 2006.) In short, I wanted to find out the extent to which the phenomenon is similar to that studied previously in

the American context as well as to be able to find peculiarities to the Finnish environment. It also is important to note that during the analysis, I as a researcher possessed an active role in interpreting the data and looking for themes instead of them somehow just independently emerging (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Stepping beyond merely describing the data, I also looked at its latent layers in a constructionist manner, aiming at identifying and interpreting underlying meanings, understandings and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

What is important to remember here, however, is that the analysis conducted based on the experiences of the interviewees provides a limited perspective as it is never an accurate account of what has happened but their conception, that is further interpreted by me as a researched with my own motivation and research agenda. On the other hand, observation was not selected as the research method purposefully due to ethical concerns of wanting to avoid drawing unwanted attention to the informants at their workplaces. (Eskola & Suoranta, 2008; Connell, 2010; Schilt & Connell, 2007.) I do not consider these limitations as too serious since social situations in general are difficult to capture in language. ”Many gendering practices are done unreflexively; they happen fast, are ’in action,’ and occur on many levels. They have an emotive element that makes people feel inspired, dispirited, happy, angry, or sad and that defies description by all but the most talented novelist” (Martin, 2003, p. 344.) Acknowledging this contributes to understanding the nature of social research.

3.4 Gender Reassignment Process in Finland

It is important to note, that the context of this study differs from many of the previous empirical studies that has for the most part been conducted in the United States. It is impossible to catch the specific context of each interaction but some words on the Finnish context in terms of the gender reassignment process and general situation of trans people will be discussed before moving on to the empirical findings.

For being able to start a gender reassignment process in Finland a person must first receive a medical diagnosis from a psychological assessment period. After this it is possible to proceed to start a yearlong true-life test during which the social role of the destination gender is adopted and hormonal treatment possibly started. Only after this

time period reassignment surgery can be started and the juridical gender changed. Going through this process usually takes several years which, in addition to, being physically and mentally demanding brings with it social challenges in many areas of life. (Trasek, 2014.)

As the interviewees of this study described, the process in fact consists of two processes, a physical and a social one that both proceed at their own pace. The physical part can refer to bodily changes that are a consequence of hormonal treatment or surgery; in addition many transwomen also go through non-surgical voice therapy helping them modify their voice. The social process, in turn, has to do with learning to live in the social reality of the destination gender. In this process, other people become crucial and their role can differ from explicit support to discriminating behavior. The social transition in the workplace context is the specific focus of this study.

Similarly, as it is the case with the United States (Connell, 2010), also in Finland only in recent years transgender individuals have been able to be "out" in their workplaces. The issue can still, however, be considered as a taboo subject. This is evident, for instance, in the case of a former vicar from a small town in Finland, who after publicly announcing her upcoming gender reassignment process from man to woman in 2008 received intense media attention and an imply from her previous workplace, that she would no longer be welcome to continue working for the church. (Jussila, 2013.) It is probably also not a coincidence that all the eight interviewees reside among the then biggest cities in Finland, where people are more likely to have more liberal values.

4 Gender Transition Experiences from Finnish Workplaces

After having learned about theorizing gender in chapter three and being familiar with the methodological choices of this study that were introduced in chapter four, I will now present you the findings from the semi-structured interviews. This fourth chapter is organized as follows; I will first look at gender from the interviewees' self-reflective perspective and go through three themes that emerged from the analysis. After that I will turn the focus to interactional situations and cover four more themes. Finally, I will look at beyond the essentialist and binary gender system by discussing occasions where the taken for granted doing of gender became recognized and undone or redone.

To refresh our memory, the research question guiding the conversation of this chapter is the following:

- How does the essentialist and binary conception of gender influence interaction:
    - internally, in the minds of transsexual people
    - externally, in interaction with colleagues?

Before moving on to discuss the above mentioned themes, I will briefly describe some of the interviewees' general thoughts on the process aiming at making the starting points of their experiences, as well as the analysis that follows, easier to understand. All in all, it became clear in the course of the interviews that the transition experiences did not only differ *between* different workplaces but also *within* one workplace. There was also a lot of variance in the personal thoughts on the process between the informants that possibly varied during the transition process. The process itself also typically takes several years and there are no watersheds implying when a person stops being a man and becomes a woman but the transition is gradual and best mirrored and reflected from changes in interactions with other people.

This illustrates the context and person bound nature of the phenomenon researched as the people entering interactions all come in with their own beliefs, values and understandings on gender, which in turn affects the micropolitical situations (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This being said, it is not fruitful, not even possible, to draw general conclusions or causal explanation on the results of the analysis but the significance lies

within the examination of single encounters, interactions and the conceptions of gender that are embedded in these situations.

4.1 Transwomen Self-Reflecting on their Transition Process

In this first section of chapter four I will focus on discussing the transition from the perspective of the interviewees' self-reflection. Contrary to the reactions that the interviewees received from their colleagues that will be discussed later, there were a lot of similarities between the eight interviewees on their thoughts about the process from their own perspective. It became clear that there are actually two transitional processes, physical and social ones, which do not necessarily proceed at the same time, but gradually, and slowly within their own respective speeds. The physical changes produced by estrogen were reported to be very slow, and noticeable for instance when looking at old photographs instead of being able to pinpoint specific changes on daily bases or in a detailed manner. This did not only lead to a vide range of reactions from other people, but also made the interviewees themselves confused about their own gender and identity. This is a time where on the other hand it is crucial to receive feedback from the environment but also it may be a cause for high stress and anxiety. This is also a time where a workplace can function as a "save haven and a test laboratory" like one of the interviewees had experienced, or where there are no other choices but to resign.

The following three themes that I will next discuss have in common that in all of them the interviewees reflected on their own behavior and doing of gender. This was especially true when talking about their working life as a man, where that gender appeared as something that they had to play a role in, instead of being able to be truly themselves as was then later the case with being able to come to work as a woman. An interesting Finnish archetypical construction of specific type of masculinity, *äijä*, was mentioned in the conversations so many times, most of the times as means to reflect their own position, that I decided to give it its own theme.

4.1.1 Doing Dominance, at Work as Man

A role, construction, self control, censorship towards own behavior, protection factor… these were all words used frequently among several interviewees when talking about their working life prior transition. This era of their life received a lot of explicit pondering on gender, on how being held accountable as a man at work meant doing gender in a very deliberate and conscious manner for them: ”how would a man act in this situation, how would he ask, what would he say?” (Susanna.) Motivation towards this sort of self-awareness in the case of many interviewees stemmed from the fear of accidentally exposing their true gender identity. In the midst of gender dysphoria, not being able to be themselves lead to trying to absorb the gender normal role of a man instead of being able to be their true selves.

One interviewee, Susanna who worked in a sales position, described looking at her father as a role model for being a man in the following manner:

> ”I was building a construction. My father is very masculine. He is like, naturally like, very charismatic and people will instantly start listening to him and are enchanted by him when he talks. He is very masculine. So then I tried to think how he would behave, and he would probably do this and he is very social, like a fish in the sea with people, well he works in business. So I tried to pick up things here and there on how he acts.”

As Susanna continued, another option for her would have been to choose her father-in-law, that she had known for years, as a role model since in her opinion he was a soft, and feminine type of guy who reminded Susanna of her own personality. But it was the fear of becoming exposed and high expectations posed towards her by her superior in a sales position that lead to her having to build up a very masculine and tough construction of a man at work that was created through carefully planning each doing. In her words, her superior was ”a man with a big M” who had said to Susanna after hiring her that ”now we got a master (isäntä) in the house who knows what to do, tells it and shows initiative”.

In some cases, the social expectations for men at work, led to situations where the interviewees altered their gender expression depending on whether they were at work,

in a public sphere, or at home, in the private sphere. Being able to meet the accountability criteria of a man was done reluctantly and reported to feel disgusting and unnatural. This sort of a double life helped in maintaining the relationships at work as they were but led to confusion inside as Senja, working as a Head of Finance, describes her last months at work as a man:

> " I spent all my free time, holidays and evenings as a woman (feminiininä) and went only to work, grocery store and other public places as a man (maskuliinina). Especially at work the uniform consisted of pants and a button-up shirt – and after a workweek when I was able to change my clothes I nearly threw up. It felt so bad that I had to wear something so ugly that didn't represent me. All this led to a situation where I had no more choices [than to start the transition process]."

Also Susanna shares similar a similar experience:

> "I was not able to be a soft man. For my family yes, but not at work. There I was really… I have felt scared afterwards when many told me that I was very masculine and that some of the female colleagues experienced it as threating and thought that I was a chauvinist, even though, as far as I remember I've been a feminist."

These examples reflect the hierarchical status of gender categories, where feminine attributes in men are generally disapproved with compared to masculine traits in women that are more acceptable. This logic can be applied to transsexual individuals and as studies show, transmen are often able to express masculinity more freely prior transition than transwomen femininity which enables them to in a way be closer to their own gender. (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009.) It seemed that many of the interviewees had become rather sensitized to this norm and paid very careful attention to not showing any feminine sides in them, in spite of considering them to be part of their true selves.

On the other hand, not all the interviewees experienced similar fears of being able to show feminine attributes at work, and nor did the fear always match with the assumed male or female-dominance of their industry (Lupton, 2000.) In Susanna's case it seems that the ideal employer for her job was a very masculine man as was even articulated by

her superior, which is probably why she experienced such fear of showing any feminine sides at work. There were, however, other interviewees also working in what could be understood being a male-dominated industry, whose experiences did not reflect the masculine expectations. Elli, for instance, working as a technical writer, stated always having been a ”feminine man” at work and not having to ”learn out of being a man” after starting her transition and Noora, working as a janitor, explained having been able to use make up and put on nail polish at work prior making her colleagues aware of her upcoming transition. What is more, Senja working as a Head of Finance, also reported feeling pressure towards presenting herself as a masculine man in spite of her working in a third sector, in a female-dominated organization where he represented a male-token (Kanter, 1977), with only one other man that worked for the organization in addition to her.

To conclude, the fear of showing feminine sides while working as a man was generally highly emphasized in several the interviews, and many interviewees reported keeping up masculine appearances, even at the cost of their own mental well being. These findings, indeed, seem to support previous understanding in a sense that it is generally considered more acceptable for women to show masculine attributes than it is for men to show feminine sides at work (Lupton, 2000; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). On the other hand, however, it also became very clear via some exceptions that it really is not possible to draw general conclusions, as there were male-dominated fields where the interviewees were able to act in a way they considered feminine, and female-dominated sectors where the interviewees still experienced pressure towards preserving the stereotypically masculine roles.

This, in my opinion, suggests that while we should not make stereotypical assumptions based on people’s gender category, we should also be on alert of judging a specific workplace’s gender expectations only based on generic industry information as the institutions are formed by the specific people working in them. In addition, we might not be sure in which cases the pressure towards building up a masculine construction was self-created and when enforced by the working community, or if it was both of these at the same time. Understanding the implicit and tacit nature of doing gender

(Martin, 2003; West and Zimmerman, 1987) we cannot expect the correct answer either to be coming from the interviewees themselves, as they might be without rational explanation for their practicing of gender that was done in interaction with others, who in turn posed their expectations in the interactions.

4.1.2 Äijä as a Reference Point

While reflecting on their time prior transition and also after it, there was one specific type of masculinity that was brought up multiple times in several interviews. A lot of the meaning of the Finnish word *äijä* is likely to be lost in translation as there is no equivalent in the English language. Äijä, however, as Sarelin (2012, p. 163) describes it, refers to a tough and anti-modern Finnish guy, who's opposite representation could be found in a soft, even feminine, metrosexual man. The informants seemed to use äijä as some sort of a reference point; as an opposing category; set of attributes, appearances or values, to that of their own status as a woman. Some interviewees even used äijä to describe their own construction of masculinity prior transition. What is interesting here, in my opinion, is the interplay of opposing attributes in the construction of äijä, with inclusions and exclusions, and the extend to which this even stereotypical construction of masculinity seems to be part of deeply rooted common knowledge in the Finnish culture.

It became clear from the interviewees' stories that it is not common for an äijä to possess feminine attributes. If this were the case, it would be enough of a reason for somehow addressing the issue stating it as a exception or attributing the deviation from the norm to the specific person, instead of questioning the norm itself (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Susanna, the same interviewee mentioned earlier of having adopted the role of a super masculine man at work prior transition, also described being an äijä, "with a capital Ä". Her, apparently more feminine than it is typical for an äijä type of, behavior received a comment from her female colleague rephrased by Susanna as follows:

> ”I’m brave enough to tell you, as you seem to be so sure of your masculinity, that you actually have a very feminine way to carry a conversation and to interact with people. I would not dare to say this to other men, but I can see that you’re so confident.”

Afraid that her true identity would become revealed, after the comment Susanna then tried to be even ”even more äijä” and avoid breaking the norm.

In other cases, unlike considering a person as an exception, as “an äijä with feminine features” like Susanna, the status was replaced with that of a homosexual if references to feminine attire or communicational style were seen while considering the person as an äijä. This was especially true with two informants when they had started the transition process and described a sense of liberation from the strict norms of doing masculinity. This, changing the behavior, added with the sex category of a man lead to many colleagues coding them as ”a homosexual who is now coming out of closet”. These perceptions again support the notion of a common heteronormative gender norm where it is not acceptable for a man to posses feminine features, especially not for an äijä type of a man in the Finnish culture. And if they can be observed, the person is typically downgraded from a hierarchically higher position of a heterosexual man to a lower one of a homosexual man, who, of course cannot be an äijä. (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009; Lupton, 2000.)

The opposing status of the categories of men and women was present in many äijä-related narratives where the existence of a category of men becomes possible due to there being a category of non-men, women that is. These two categories are formed up of borders, which create exclusions and inclusions. Maria who worked as a salesperson at a supermarket during her transition explained how it was the ”two basic äijäs” (perus äijä) of the meat and bakery department, who at a summer party of the company contacted the workplace steward wishing that Maria would stop using the men’s dressing and toilet facilities and move to those of women. Maria herself considered this as a tactful gesture and understood the reaction, even though it came to her as a slight surprise since she herself had not yet told her colleagues about the transition, nor noticed clear signs of changes in her appearance. It was the äijäs, who communicated

that Maria no longer was part the same group with them and as a result wanted her to stop using the men's dressing facilities.

This incident can be read from many perspectives and as Maria stated, she sympathized with the two men, understanding their confusion in new situation. There could also be noticed signs of avoiding "unwittingly engaging in homosexuality" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 452) as it has found to be common for the cisgender people who share the birth gender with the transsexual people. If these men saw Maria as "really a man" there were probably some, even latent, elements of homophobia present, as a motivation for their wish to Maria to move to another dressing room.

On the other hand, claiming those two men as homophobic can also be seen as creating and strengthening the norm and telling more about the analyzer than about the people being analyzed. The stereotypical assumptions can be deeply rooted as can be seen for instance in Riikka's discussion on her superior at work:

> "My closest superior really seems like this traditional äijä when you meet him; äijä like clothing and a protruding belly (pömppömaha) but then he's not like that at all. So when I told him that I will be going to a hairdresser to do something quite crazy, he was just like… 'hm, interesting'…"

It is interesting to see how Riikka had categorized her superior based on his appearance and looks as an äijä and according to this stereotype expected him to show strongly heteronormative, even homophobic reaction towards her. Describing her work amidst light and sound technique as an "äijä work" Riikka, had received neutral and normal, but also inappropriate reactions from her male colleagues in spite of her possessing breasts and not having told about her transition to everyone. This shows the social construction of the äijä type of masculinity and that not all the "äijäs" are the same.

Even though not finding absolute representation in reality, the stereotypical understanding of an äijä as highly masculine, unfeminine character seems to live strong and Riikka, for instance, has tried to imply to her colleagues that in spite of her not being too strict whether people refer to her to as a woman or a man at this early stages of her transition, she would prefer the word äijä not being used when referring to her.

Riikka has let her colleagues know that she does not like the term for instance by trying to emphasize the absurdity of calling a person with B-cup breast an äijä:

> ”So I kind of play around with that position. If I say that I’m the most äijä that there has ever been but when they clearly know and see that it is not the case it breaks [the norm].”

In short, based on the interviews it could be stated that the äijä type of masculinity was rather common in the workplaces of this study and it was actually the only type of masculinity that was described by the interviewees. This representation of an archetypical Finnish man was present in several different stories and often times seemed to serve a function where the position or identity of the interviewee was reflected and compared to that of an äijä. The interviewees would *not* be like äijäs, *used to be* äijäs, where *treated badly* by äijäs, where *no longer welcomed* to the category of men by äijäs and *would not want to be called* äijäs and *were expecting homophobic comments* from äijäs. For some reason the word *äijä* was explicitly used instead of just referring to men. Possibly there is more tension between an äijä and a woman than just with “a general man” and a woman, which is why the existence of äijäs serves in a function constructing the existence not just any women but feminine, social, and non-homophobic women.

4.1.3 Being Female at Work

With compared to the interviewees’ thoughts on their time at work as a man, doing femininity did not receive as much explicit pondering on conscious actions but was described with phrases such as ”I’m just me”, ”natural selfhood”, and ”what happens happens naturally”. Or like Riikka put it ”the point of the process to me has been that I can finally be myself, so I won’t start pretending at this point” and added that the only conscious and purposeful thing that she has been doing upon the start of her transition process has been practicing her voice, everything else, she states, has been going on naturally at their own pace. Overall, being a woman was in many cases portrayed as

very natural, as *being* instead of as *doing* something conscious like a role or a construction, and as coming from inside and characterized in the early phases with sensations of relief and liberation thanks to the ease of gender dysphoria. This does not seem surprising after finally being able to identify with their real gender and to claim membership in the desired gender category.

These internal feelings of effortlessness and naturalness, however, paradoxically do not necessarily radiate outside and lead to natural and effortlessness interactions with colleagues. Unlike when being at work as a man, now the colleagues do not automatically start holding these individuals accountable as women, but the social transition is slow and takes time. Being legitimized or held accountable as a woman does not simply happen upon own personal decision but requires socially accepted, credible doings of female gender. Simply being a woman is not enough, but being an interactional phenomenon by nature, doing (female) gender requires legitimization from other people and the way to reach this is to do femininity gender appropriately (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Before being able to start doing female gender, the interviewees had to reach a situation where they would pass the so called ”if-can” (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 133) test, meaning that their colleagues would consider them as women if they can be seen as woman. Lacking the socially accepted identifiers implying a membership in female category, combined with behavior normatively considered feminine, would not pass the if-can test but lead to others seeing these individuals possibly as homosexual men, as had happened to several interviewees. (West & Zimmerman, 1987.)

The need for concrete expression of gender in addition to internal identification was present in many interviewees’ thoughts on coming out at work. When starting the transition while employed, many felt hesitant to disclose their identity too early as thinking that it would require something tangible for others to be able to better understand and comprehend the future changes:

> ”It somehow felt very early to tell them and I somehow thought that for this type of a thing people need something concrete for that thing to become real. So somehow I did not find it necessary to tell about it yet.” (Maria.)

> ”I had actually put together a collage of photos where I had four pictures of me as a man (maskuliinina) with my old name and then there were five pictures of me as a pretty woman (feminiininä), and the name that I currently have. So I showed it to everyone, it was nice to be able to show how I would look then when I would start to come to work like that.” (Senja.)

Similarly as when starting to loosen the position of man, upon starting to go to work as a woman, the interviewees reported gradual changes in how their femininity and womanhood developed. In concrete terms this often meant experimenting with clothing and make-up trying to find a comfortable way of being. Again, as much as the interviewees were trying to feel confortable with themselves, the presence of others played an important role. It was the case with many interviewees were they in a way tested new styles and looks at their working environment when taking first steps as a woman. Silja describes her start at a new job as a woman:

> ”At first I was quite careful with it, I put on more make-up and dressed more femininely, wore push-up bras and stuff. But then bit by bit I started to reduce it and to see others’ reactions and there were no changes so now I’m quite jovial with what I wear, whether it’s jeans or a skirt.”

To sum up, unlike working as a man that was seen as a role, construction and as fake, being at work as a woman was considered natural, effortless and as coming from inside. The time at work as a woman, on the other hand, clearly shows how important other people are in the transition process. In spite of feeling that the womanhood naturally comes from inside, like the interviewees reported, it does not necessarily lead to being treated as a woman unless they can be seen to pass as women by others. To be able to examine these experiences in a more multifaceted manner, and to turn from internal

feelings on being a woman towards more structural consequences from doing femininity that requires other people we can now turn to look at interactional reactions that the gender transition has brought with it.

4.2 Transitioning among Colleagues

This second section of chapter four turns the focus of the examination from the interviewees' self-reflection towards the interactional situations at work. Many informants stated that social transition, with compared to the physical one, has been maybe the most difficult part of the process, referring to the fact that it includes other people and their reactions to the transition. No matter how relieved or liberated the person transitioning may feel, they indeed have no control over the fact that other people will hold them accountable for doing gender; as being a member of a gender category that is decided by those other people (West and Zimmerman, 1987). As was stated by one interviewee "gender is not what you have between your legs but inside your brain".

For being seen as woman, the transwomen would have do femininity in a credible manner, that in many case seemed to be defined by the standards of the binary gender logic. The important role of other in terms of gender identity is visible in Maria's case, where going through the gender reassignment process was most importantly motivated by being able to be perceived by others in a way that would not happen if she was a man:

> "My diagnosis is transsexual but I don't feel that it describes my own experience. – I realized that I want that diagnosis in 2002 when I was a young adult and tried to make sense of how to fit myself to this social reality where we live in. – My own experience is more like, I find it more confortable to be interpreted in our binary gender world as a woman than as a man. I think that in that interpretation I am seen in a way that feels more confortable to me, which gives me more space socially. I see the change more as social, also the physical change, I see it as supporting the social one, that's all it matters to me." (Maria.)

The experiences that I will next discuss seem to be paradoxical in many ways. While feedback and acknowledgement, just like they are important for anyone in order to be recognized as an active actor, are important for the people who are transitioning, in many cases there was only silence. This lack of recognition could be understood as positive, as there is nothing special to be acknowledged, or as totally passivizing making the transitioning individuals feel invisible. Heteronormativity is echoed in most of the reactions that the transitioning employees received from their colleagues and stakeholders. In the background there seems to be an assumption of how a man and a woman should act, look and be while this assumption may not be stated explicitly or even be explicitly conscious to the giver of that feedback. The four themes that now continue the analysis and discussion focus on the time period when the informants had started their gender transition.

4.2.1 Elephant in the Meeting Room

Silence, distance, passivity, avoidance… or as Susanna thinks that her colleagues being in a same meeting room with her must have felt: ”I just pretend that that elephant is not here, we all see it but let’s just stay quiet now”. Silence was among the most common reactions that the informants received from their colleagues after starting the transition process. Silence in this context would not only refer to lack of (re)action but is also understood to be present in what was said and done. In many cases, something in the way colleagues interacted with the transitioning employees changed creating negative space, lack of recognition and uneasiness around the informants. (Ward & Winstanley, 2003.)

Half of the interviewees had noticed considerable difference between the average reaction from male and female colleagues. In many occasions, the negative space was created by male colleagues by them distancing themselves from the informants by, for instance, no more inviting them to after work activities; by calling them pedophiles or by commenting on the interviewees’ too close relations with the female colleagues. Senja, who in addition to her work as a Head of Finance is a member in several boards noticed some radical differences in the way she was welcomed to a board meeting for the very first time as a woman. One of the boards, where she in fact has had a role of a

chair for four years prior her transition, consists mainly from executive level, middle-aged men, while the other board has only women. Senja described walking to the meeting room mostly consisting of men as ”icy”:

> ”everyone was quiet and then they started talking quietly to each other, no one looked at me, no one talked to me and I felt like I was invisible. I’m the head of the board and have received positive feedback during the years and now I’m invisible, what the heck does this mean?”

The silence was at last broken when one of the members finally approached Senja in an ”easygoing and natural manner”. This gesture gave Senja the courage to try to actively encounter each individual in the meeting afresh, and in her opinion within a passing of one hour, the atmosphere in the room had changed from invisible to visible.

Senja herself thinks that this silence stemmed from homophobic attitudes, and she has observed that it seems to be more difficult for men than women to encounter a transfeminine person. This coincides with previous studies, and can have several motivations. Schilt and Westbrook (2009) found out that the reaction tends to be stronger from those who share their birth gender with the transitioning person. If the men in the meeting considered Senja as really a man who is just dressed as a woman, there were probably some homophobic elements present leading to the silence. They would be coding Senja’s gender based on her sex, where as women would judge her gender by her sex category. As my sample did not include any transmen, we are left without being able to reflect on possibly similar experiences between women and transmen.

What may also be a cause for such strong reactions of silence, is that it may be more shocking for people to learn that the man that they used to know is actually a woman, since unlike for women to posses masculine traits or looks, it is generally considered bizarre for men to have feminine attributes, which is why the transition may come as unanticipated (Schilt and Westbrook, 2009). This may lead to a situation where a transman’s transition is considered somehow more natural than that of a transwoman, like it was the case with Susanna who explained how the news of her transsexuality were received by one man: ”what, you? But you don’t seem like gay at all! Sorry, I

didn't mean, I don't have the words, I mean you're not girly." This example also again illustrates how sexuality and gender often times become confused with each other and men can consider a transwoman to be a homosexual man and thus a threat to (their) heterosexuality.

It may also be that the gender of the board members had nothing to do with their uneasiness as, in general, when the binary conception of gender, that is programmed such deep in our minds, somehow breaks it is likely to cause confusion and astonishment. People may have never come to think about gender on any deeper level and once their taken for granted understanding is challenged it seems reasonable for it to cause bewilderment. Still, it was in my opinion peculiar, how in Senja's case, her seemingly authoritative position as the head of the board did not protect her from being put on or ending up in an unpleasant situation. The other board members did not try enough to get over their confusion in the name of respecting Senja and the meeting but it was Senja herself who had to take an active role in breaking the silence. Another interviewee, Inka, on the other hand, conversely thinks that her role as teacher has indeed protected her from some negative reactions, as people have to respect her as the leader of the learning situation.

Another, in a way active, form of silence was also brought up by two interviewees where their status as an active subject was explicitly dimished by their colleagues referring to them with their old name. Similar findings were also common in previous studies (Dietert & Dentice, 2009; Schilt and Connell, 2007). The colleagues using the old name were still holding the interviewees accountable for their birth gender, with or without realizing the consequences of their action. Inka thinks that hearing her old name repeatedly from her students has been the most difficult thing at her work since it "returns or actually erases [her] existence so radically". Both Inka and Senja say that they understand, to some extent, how using the old name may come out of an old habit and be unintentional, but they've both had to confront the people who have kept using the name by explaining what it really means when it is used. It denies subjectivity from them by subjectifying someone that does not exist anymore and creates passivity and silence around them.

In addition to being negatively charged, there were also a lot of situations in which the silence was experienced as neutral, as everyone just continuing business as usual without paying unnecessary attention to changes in the interviewees' changing looks or gender expression:

> ”It was mostly neutral silence. It is in a way understandable since when people come to their workplace their primary function is to execute tasks that are based on their employment contract. So the primary function of the workplace is not a chatting venue.” (Senja.)

Some of the interviews described sensing that they were accepted and that the fact that people did not address their gender transition did not mean that they would have a problem with it but was just considered as normal and polite behavior. There, however, seemed to be a clearly noticeable difference between the negative and neutral silence and the informants were able to sense it as, for instance this quote by Silja illustrates:

> ”and there hasn't been anything like 'let's now highlight how we accept and do not discriminate this person', I do get to hear if I do something wrong -- it feels okay, it would be a bit distressing if I was put on a pedestal when I am a human being such like everybody else, so if I was treated somehow differently, in a positive or negative sense, it would feel strange”.

On the other hand, and paradoxically, while many considered the neutral silence as good, probably as the best possible scenario to happen at work, for everything to continue as normal, still a strong need for feedback and to have a human mirror were explicitly present in many interviews:

> ”Sometimes I've been very frustrated; don't they realize anything? That is it really that they don't… my voice has changed radically, my body has changed quite radically, and face has changed radically and they really don't seem to get it. But on the other hand it is the best possible situation.

> There is a contradiction. –My work personality is excited but on a personal level not so much.” (Riikka.)
>
> ”I would have needed it, I as a transperson would have needed social support and enhancement from people around me, for being able to feel that I’m heard.” (Senja.)
>
> ”It is difficult to get any feedback, it is a subject that no one talks about. Then I’ve even asked many people when I’ve tried to understand how my process has proceeded externally – that how I pass as a woman” (Elli.)

The strong need to receive feedback illustrates how gender is created in interaction. Especially those interviewees to whom it was really important to pass as a woman desired receiving explicit feedback. As time passed, and they became more confortable with themselves, the role of receiving feedback decreased.

To conclude, a broad spectrum of silence was among the most common reactions that the interviewees received upon starting their transition process. This silence ranged from passive and negative form of silence to confortable and neutral atmosphere where there was no uneasiness experienced by the interviewees. Also, in some cases an active form of silencing was present that was done by questioning the authenticity of the interviewees’ destination gender or by dimishing their subjectification by referring to them with their birth names. What was noticeable among the interviewees’ observations was that the strongest reactions of silence came from male colleagues and in many cases starting the gender transition meant being excluded from the male colleagues’ social networks and groups.

The way the interviewees reacted to the different sorts of silences and silencing also ranged. While some really longed for receiving explicit feedback on their gender expression and womanhood, others would have felt uncomfortable if their transsexuality was brought up in any way, even in a positive manner. In many cases the need for feedback seemed to decrease upon the advancement of the transition process and was more common for those interviewees to whom it was important to pass as a woman soon.

4.2.1 New Same Gender Group of Women

”Nearly everyone hugged me in the first meeting and rejoiced, it gave me fabulously positive feedback, it was wonderful.”

This was how Senja reminisces of going to a board meeting that consisted of solely women for the first time after her transition had started. Where as male colleagues might see a transfeminine colleague as a gay man, the new same sex group of women tends to be more supportive based on previous studies (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) as well as according to my findings. Many of the informant’s reported being ”at gender’s length” (Susanna) from their female colleagues prior transition since there was thought to be a border between men and women at work that should not be crossed with having too close or familiar relations with a member from the opposing gender category. Inka who works as a teacher for adults reports having similar thoughts, and in teaching female students prior her transition she remembers there having a been some extra tension where she had to beware of not unintentionally being too close to the women, as that would have possibly been interpreted wrong. Now, as she is teaching as a woman, this ”male-female-tension” (Inka) is no longer there to take up extra energy.

In the case of transwomen, it indeed seems to be easier for female than to male colleagues to find new ways of doing gender ”naturally” with them (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009, p. 447). This naturalness means that women quickly adapt to treating transwomen as they were just one of the girls and start engaging them in homosocial gender rituals. While these rituals are intended to be positive towards the person who is transitioning, working as means to support their gender expression and the process in general, they gain their form from the binary gender system and include expectations on how a woman should look and behave. Also, encouraging the transitioning individual to a specific direction, to that of a stereotypical woman, might serve as naturalizing and rationalizing the untraditional situation where a person’s gender category changes. (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009.)

Among the informants, different sorts of gender rituals were familiar and they strongly reflected that there is a barrier between the social groups of women and men and that these transwomen had now passed the line and were welcomed to a new in-group of women. Examples of such gender rituals were inviting the interviewee to have lunch

with other women colleagues, talking about things that would be only discussed amongst a group of women or giving advice on how to wear make-up:

> ”And they were like, you’re actually one of us now, and we don’t need to be afraid of you anymore. – And women started to be like hey we’re going there to have lunch, do you want to join us?” (Susanna.)

> ”Some colleagues all of a sudden started talking to me about their own bra, one of the most important things that they had never spoken to me before.- [Now] we are talking about confidential women’s things. For example, a 35-year old female colleague would not show to any man how her stomach has grown from eating too much and say ¨oh no, look at this!¨ This seems to be illustrating the qualitative change of my gender identity on a social level.” (Senja.)

Senja has even formed a close relationship with one of her colleague who was going through a breast cancer at the same with Senja’s transition process. Senja explained how these two found something in common as both had lost their hair in the process and were now growing to be kinds of people (women) that they had not been before while their hair was growing back. They were able to sympathize with each other and provide support thanks to their similar experiences, something that Senja thinks would never have been possible had she been a male.

To sum up, many interviewees reported crossing a gender border at some point of their transition. The crossing became evident in the fact that now female-colleagues were welcoming them into the same gender group with them, where as men would no longer feel comfortable in approaching the interviewees, as was seen in the previous theme. The female colleagues utilized gender rituals in engaging the interviewees as one of them, and examples of these gender rituals included taking the interviewees as inside members in feminine spaces and topics of conversations. The gender division, along with the gender rituals seemed to be following heteronormative logic where the gender binary was used as a point of reference and was implicitly guiding the colleagues’ behavior.

4.2.2 The Need to Rationalize Unnormative Gender Behavior

In addition to silence, a confusion from a situation where sex, sex category and gender are not aligned, may become apparent as hyperawareness in doing gender and as exaggeration in emphasizing the femininity in the transitioning individuals', overly holding them accountable as women. Again, this sort of confusion and trying to deal with it in a socially acceptable manner seems understandable and was symphatisized with by many interviewees. Still, it reveals a strong binary understanding of gender that guides the behavior of the hyperaware colleagues'; it serves as their toolbox from where they can derive their behavior from, with or without noticing it. Being seemingly neutral, this sort of behavior often enhances the conception of gender as essentialist and binary, and in aiming at naturalizing and normalizing the deviating gender behavior it does not really leave room for alternative doing, redoing of gender. (Martin, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009)

Especially during the transition when the informants would not yet pass as a woman, and passing was in fact not even the goal of everyone, their gender expression would be under an attentive scrutiny from their colleagues' part. Coinciding with findings from previous literature (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009), it sometimes seemed that the colleagues were the ones having more anxiety about the transition than were the informants themselves The hyperawareness when doing gender with a person who is going through gender transition would externalize in noting and complementing even a small changed detail in the person's looks. Susanna remembers how one of her colleagues would remark every little change to the point where Susanna would feel annoyed even though she did also understand that this colleague was just trying to be polite and supportive. The colleague would:

> ”notify me about every positive feminine feature in me, like 'hey, you've got your nails done very nicely', I had see through nail polish on and she would say that about every little thing, and I was like 'yeah, I know…' and she would go 'have you groomed your eye brows?' and I said 'yes, I have…' she had a good intention so I did not get offended but it was very tiring” (Susanna.)

The need to somehow rationalize unnormative gender expression also became evident during the time when the informants would be still in the process of transitioning. In many cases, the unnormative gender expression, or not passing the "if-can" test (West & Zimmerman, 1987) would require an explanation from the interviewee, instead of the norm being questioned, and be considered as failing to do gender appropriately (Martin, 2003; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In addition to attributing the failed male behavior to that person being homosexual, that was discussed earlier, learning that the person is in fact transsexual was considered to be an appropriate explanation to the deviation from the norms in some cases. For instance, Inka remembers how her students were wondering her hairstyle without yet knowing about her transition when after Inka later told them about her transsexuality they would be embarrassed and start complementing her hairstyle. As if the students needed to know the sex of the person in order to be able to gender them correctly and when the sex was not known there was thought to be something wrong with the person even though what they did didn't change at all.

Still, on the other hand, while being a transsexual was in many cases considered as an eligible excuse to deviate from the traditional gender norms, it was often times, at least tacitly, expected in the passing of time from the transitioning the person to start to do their gender in a manner appropriate to their destination gender (Connell, 2010). In Senja's case, this became evident by her receiving custodial advices from colleagues where, for instance, the amount of make-up she used at the early phase of her transition was considered to be too much in the opinion of one of her female colleagues. This colleague felt entitled to policing Senja's gender expression in the form of tips because "she had lived decades as a woman and seen how it goes".

These findings, the colleagues need to actively make sense of the deviating gender expressions in the form of naturalizing and normalizing it coincides with previous findings (Connell, 2010; Martin, 2003; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009) where, even though the transition might make the colleagues rethink gender, they won't reach the rethinking to question the whole existence of the rigid norms but just update the gender category of the transitioning person from one to the other out of the two existing categories. Coming out as a transsexual this way eases the situation, as now the person causing gender

trouble can again be read as gender normal since the transition process explains the otherwise bizarre doing of gender as is expected to be only temporary (Connell, 2010).

Sometimes the deviation from the norms just cannot be rationalized and accepted in the eyes of some people and if they happen to posses enough power in the company, the results may be dramatic, like was the case with one interviewee who was pushed to leave her job. This interviewee attributed the signal of her no longer being welcome in her workplace as originally coming from one specific person in the company, her superior, who would be a very masculine man by appearance. This same man was just a few years earlier hired the informant and super excited about "his" skills and professionalism but upon learning about her transsexuality the evaluation downgraded to him now calling her a pedophile or saying that "that kind of a freak cannot be in association with our clients!" In spite of the interviewee having heard the same superior previously joking about "faggots and trannies" in a company party and saying that in spite of one of the board member being is gay he is still an okay person, her treatment still came to her as a total surprise.

Even though among the informants there was only one person who had experienced such open and strong discrimination, it should be remembered that the nonrandom snowball sample of only eight individuals is not representative of all the transsexuals' experiences and these sorts of unfortunate incidents are likely to be more common. The fact that only one person wanted to share the story also tells about the taboo status of the subject. This example illustrates the important position of supervisors as important role models and powerful figures who may have the transitioning individuals' faith in their hands (Dietert & Dentice, 2009).

All in all, it was common that, especially during the early phases of the transition process, colleagues had to find out or come up with explanations and rationalizations to clothing, way of talking or other identifiers or behaviors that were not gender normative. It was even observed that at times the transition seemed to be more difficult for the colleagues' to react to, than it was for the people going through the transition. The need to rationalize unnormative gender behavior would come out as, for instance, policing or giving advice on how to dress or speak, or by altering assumptions about the interviewees' sexuality. Sometimes the hyperawareness towards the interviewees'

gender calmed down upon learning about their transsexuality or at latest when the interviewees started passing as women and thus returned to a gender normative position where their assumed gender category would match their assumed sex. Transsexuality was many times considered as a rational and acceptable explanation for changed gender expression, but there were individuals to whom being able to tolerate or accept transsexuality was beyond them.

4.2.3 ”It’s a good thing that a woman can use tools”: Passing as a Woman

For many of the informants, in spite of not all, passing as a woman was one of their goals at the end of the process. The calming down of the negative silence or custodial advices dates towards the end of the transitioning process when many of the interviewees were in a situation where they would often pass as a woman at work. And even if the colleagues would know about their background, in many cases it seemed to be easier for them to know how to act with the informants when they could be categorized as women instead of considered ambiguous in their gender expression. Many of the interviewees who had had mainly positive reactions from their colleagues thought that the high degree of passing must have a lot to do with it. These observations seem to match with Connell’s (2010) study, where she found out that it is easier for cisgender colleagues to deal with transgender people who pass in their destination gender or are stealth.

Elli, to whom passing was most important among the interviewees thought that it is the only way for her to be a proper woman:

> ”My opinion is that you can only be a woman if the environment can see you as one. If you receive negative feedback about it, it just does not work. – Passing is the most important thing and it can be seen everywhere, at work and during free time. The best way to reach that is surgery to which I’ve spent quite an amount of money; to take out the features brought by teenage, to surgically take away the manly bone structure, to choose proper clothing, and this way reach the level of passing that is

possible to be reached. The opinion of others is the most important as it is the best [in terms of passing].”

Similarly as other changes during their transition process, the interviewees did not just wake up one day as an ”outside-within” (Schilt, 2006), as passing as women, but were able to sport changes in interactional situations that implied that they had now passed the ”if-can” test (West and Zimmerman, 1987) and were considered as women:

> ”In some occasions I receive help, for instance if I’m carrying something heavy, and it is quite good because I’m not as strong as I used to be. But sometimes I feel like asking them to leave and saying that I don’t need to be interfered with in this. Last week, one of my students, Matti 85-years, said to me that ‘it ’s a good thing that a woman can use tools’ and I said that I agree. (Inka.)

> ”I can see it from the way that my male colleagues look at me and from the way they talk to me that nowadays they consider me as a beautiful woman. When I walk by they are like ’wow, what a fabulous woman’” (Senja.)

Also Elli explained spotting via mirrors at her workplaces gym how a man gazed at her butt thinking that she wouldn’t notice, while Elli remembers thinking that this man must have not know what he looked at. These incidents show how the interactions with colleagues start going back to follow gender normal scripts that follow the binary gender logic and the transwomen are included in gender rituals. This eases the situation for many colleagues as now they know again how to interact with the transitioned individual.

While many of the interviewees enjoyed this new position, that they were now able to blend in to the society as women, some were feeling anxious about the fact that there did not seem to be a category of trans where they would have been able to stay. This position, being trans, based on the reactions of the colleagues, was many times seen as temporary and not the final state of affairs, and the individuals faced pressure to fit into the box or category of woman. For instance Noora was hoping to be able to publically identify and be recognized as a woman with trans background, instead of having to try

to blend in with biological women in way she would not feel comfortable: ”the thoughts are quite stereotypical in away, that if you are a woman you should be a specific kind of woman.“ The fact that the interviewees had started to pass as a woman could also be observed from a phenomenon that surprised many of them. In spite of being familiar with gender inequality and feminism, many had not been able to realize before the privileges that they possessed as men. So in a way doing transgender brought with it more feminine consciousness, like was argued by Connell (2010).

Even though the experiences of lack of authority and privilege in the working life were not emphasized in the interviews and did not emerge as being among the main themes, there were still incidents that could be considered as signs of lowered position in the gender hierarchy. The informants that most of the time passed as a woman had now climbed up in the hierarchy from being a trans person that is a threat to the whole gender system to being a woman, that still, however, lacks the full authority with compared to men, and is always the second gender:

> ”The men’s world, it’s quite rough, I even myself did not realize it before how rude men are. – If previously I was able to go anywhere and say that I want this, it was given to me where as now, when I’m in interactions with people its harder when I’m even lower in the categories of acceptance since transmisogyny is so strong. – The fact that I’m professionally competent and know about things, it is so difficult to tell to men nowadays, they like roll over you and won’t listen to you, it takes much longer to appear credible in their eyes.” (Inka.)

> ”Before when I’d say something they’d be like ’yeah, that’s good’ and all of a sudden I was totally ignored. This happened with the social transition - I started to receive mansplaining and I would be explaining something to my supervisor and he would then explain me the same thing in his own words, and I was like holy **** I just said the same thing ten minutes ago and now you’re explaining it to me” (Susanna.)

In spite of not having transmen as informants in my study, some of my interviewees had had conversations about the male privileges that they had now lost with transmen, whose experience had been quite the contrary:

> ”I was talking with some transmen about male privilege and they were wondering if they even exist in Finland. And I said yes they exists, and it feels like even though I know about it most of the men don’t, neither do women. They don’t realize that this is what we always do.”

Referring to the same transman, Susanna continued:

> ”And he said ’Susanna, guess what, you were right, I have crossed the border that would have never believed existed. All of a sudden people get out of my when I walk, they listen to me and my opinion is very important. He was laughing how he never would have guessed and I said ’Don’t worry, I’ve lost all my licenses’ and he was wondering, that now that he has the licenses what he should do with them, that it felt wrong and unfair to have such privilege. ”

Referring to the loss of male privilege and status, many interviewees reported having built up a feminist attitude after realizing how absurd some of the gender structures and norms seem, as Riikka reflects:

> ”I’ve become a feminist, I’ve always been, but now I start to realize how absurd some things are, I’m the same person and nearly the same body and – all of a sudden I have to behave differently, I’m treated differently, and I cannot dress the same way, cannot marry the same person.”

To summarize, many interviewees experienced that strange and uneasy, tacky or awkward reactions form their colleagues calmed down after they started to pass as women. Upon passing as women, many of the informants noticed that the way people interacted with them had changed with compared to how they were encountered as men. Following the binary gender logic, the interviewees, for instance received admiration towards their looks and degrading approaches to their professionalism or skills. Unlike traditional understand suggests, however, not many interviewees had experienced

situations where the appreciation of their human capital would have been decreased after starting to live as women, while these sorts of experiences were not totally unheard among the interviewees. Some interviewees expressed their frustration towards rigid gender norms and felt that they were pushed away from being able to be trans women towards being women.

4.3 Towards Post-Gender Workplaces?

In this final, third section of chapter four, I will discuss the possibilities of being able to step beyond the essentialist and binary gender norms. As it was discussed earlier in this study, the possibility to undo gender has been debated by many academics without a consensus, and not least because the question already includes many definitions that can be understood in varied ways. It would be, however, interesting to see how the informants in my study have found ways to adapt a hybrid gender style (Connell, 2010) or in other words been able to redo (West & Zimmerman, 2009) or undo (Risman, 2009) gender and possibly make use of the feminist insights that they've gained by being "outsiders-within" (Schilt, 2006).

Upon the start of their gender transition many interviewees explained having feelings of liberation which in turn had encouraged them to abandon a strict following of gender norms that had previously been shackling them during their time as a man. As we know now, the transition won't happen over night which left the interviewees in a situation where they for some period of time would be having stereotypical attributes of both genders, for instance, wearing a men's suit and earrings in both ears. Already the fact that this very combination, worn by Susanna at work, required a sense of liberation and letting go and received a surprised reaction from her client wondering whether it is normal for a man to wear two earrings, tells us how deeply the norms affect us and cannot easily be changed let alone forgotten. There has, however, been some incidents initiated by the interviewees at their workplaces that can in my opinion be considered as small steps away from strict gender norms towards undoing or redoing gender. Some have maybe taken place on a sensible level in the form of making people to question

their taken for granted schemas on gender, but some have indeed been concrete changes.

In two different workplaces the transitioning individuals have initiated a change where there would no longer be sex segregation when it comes to bathrooms. In other three workplaces there has already been unisex bathrooms when the transitioning individuals started working there. While this change makes sense on a practical level when people do not have to wait for the appropriate bathroom to be vacant, it also eases the situation for those who do not necessarily identify as men nor women. Still, one interviewee, Maria, explained feeling anxious about voicing her wish to have unisex bathrooms and in the fear of becoming rejected or ridiculed she asked her colleague to suggest the unisex bathrooms to their superior. In Senja's workplace, in turn, a female colleague was wondering how the only man of the community would now feel when his bathroom was "taken away from him". In Senja's mind this question seemed ridiculous as this man now in fact had two bathrooms! These incidents reveal how deeply rooted the understanding of sex segregation is and they function as an example of the materialization of the supposed essential differences between the two genders (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Concrete and in a way empowering changes have also taken place at Inka's classrooms where her example has showed to the female students that they too can use tools. Inka used the term "women handicapped" ("naisvammainen") referring to the phenomenon that she had noticed during her classes where women would refer to their gender and thus avoid having to use the utensils and gadgets needed in sculpturing. Inka feels like being a role model for her female students when they see her for instance changing blades to a drilling machine and then follow her example.

Humor was another means that was used to question the rigid gender norms and many informants also used it as a coping strategy during their transition. In the interviews it became clear that it often consisted of elements making the gender binary questionable, absurd or ridiculous. While using humor without a doubt has helped many of the interviewees it has surely also evoked thought processes in the minds of the colleagues.

Riikka, who I would characterize as having a somewhat hybrid gender style at the time of the interview (Connell, 2010), explained that humor and sarcasm are the main resources she uses when people wonder about her looks or gender. One time Riikka was present in a situation where a female colleague of hers was inquiring details about her salary from their boss. The workplace having a relaxed atmosphere in general, Riikka spontaneously participated in the conversation by saying that this colleague's salary would of course be 22 % less than men have and her own salary to be 11% less since they cannot be sure which one she is. She also tells about jolly misunderstandings at work where her estrogen is sometimes being confused with Viagra, when in fact "it actually does a totally opposite thing" (Riikka.)

It was already briefly discussed earlier, how the category of trans was missing from many of the colleagues' mindsets and worldviews. While many of the interviewees wanted to pass as a woman, some indeed expressed a desire and need for being able to have the identity of trans as better acknowledged. Within this hope there were needs for of freedom and space for being able to be who they really are and this sort of thought can also be considered to have political implications with it. In Connell's (2010) study some of her interviewees used "outness" as a political strategy for gaining visibility to trans people aiming at expanding acceptance and loosening rigid gender norms. One of Connell's (2010, p. 46) interviewees referred to this strategy as "*trans*parency" which clearly catches the politization of transgender or transsexuality.

On the other hand, being able to establish a new recognized gender category won't solve the problem, as not all the interviewees wanted to be considered as trans seeing it more as being "an incomplete woman, that is externally a man" (Senja.). These thought highlight the fact that gender identity is always a personal matter and what is problematic is that in spite of everyone being free to build up their own identity they cannot choose how they are encountered by others. Having one category more does not solve the issue but reminds us of the danger in relying too much on categories, which is why I would favor a more fluid understanding of gender.

Understanding gender as a social structure means that it is subject to social change (West & Zimmerman, 2009), but as Kelan (2010) puts is at "the moment we seem to lack the vocabulary through which to imagine a post-gender world, in which gender

ceases to be always relevant." As we have seen, gender indeed is a "powerful ideological device" (West & Zimmerman, 1987) that limits and legitimates the choices people can make based on their sex category. What the experiences of transsexual individuals can offer at least, is being more critical in terms of why we do certain things, wear certain clothes and speak in a certain way. At least in our own little contexts, we should be able to alter the way we do gender towards more aware, respecting and equal towards other people without looking at their gender.

5 Conclusions

My purpose in this explorative study was to find out what sorts of experiences have transsexual employees had when going through a gender transition process while employed in Finland. I was motivated to investigate this issue because transsexuality is still commonly considered to be a taboo subject, which in turn limits the possibilities for being able to openly transition at work in the fear of discrimination and even loss of employment. This study contributes to the very limited amount of research that has been conducted on open workplace transitions and transgender employees, in Finland, as well as globally.

I selected semi-structured interviews as the research method in order to be able to gain descriptive and detailed information from the eight transwomen that I interviewed. All the interviewees had gone through or were in the process of open workplace gender transition. Before progressing on to the interviewing stage of this research process, I first built up understanding on the possibilities for theorizing gender. This helped me to understand the researched phenomenon in theoretical terms where gender is seen as both the result and structurer of social interactions and people as gendered actors who do gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987). By getting familiar with previous literature I also understood that gender is a binary construction that only recognizes two genders, men and women, that are assumed to posses essentialist natures that can be derived from the person's sex, that is expected to match their gender. Finally, before heading to the interviewing phase, I also reviewed previous literature on the gendered nature of workplaces and understood that the taboo status of transsexuality stems from the fact that transsexuality confronts the understanding of gender as essentialist and binary and can thus be seen as a threat to heterogender and heteronormativity.

For being able to trace signs of behavior guided by essentialist and binary conception of gender from the interactional situations that the transsexual interviewees had experienced, this research question guided me from planning the research question on to analyzing and interpreting the research data:

How does the essentialist and binary conception of gender influence interaction:

- internally, in the minds of transsexual people

- externally, in interaction with colleagues?

As a result, after collecting, analyzing and interpreting the interview data I was able to come up with eight themes that all reveal something on the essentialist and binary conception of gender that is present at the workplaces of the interviewees. In the results I first discussed the interviewees' own reflection on their gender, then analyzed the reactions of their colleagues as they were reported by the interviewees and finally pondered the possibility for stepping beyond the binary and essential conception of gender.

Next I will briefly review the main findings of this study. It became very clear that there were difference in the experience within single workplaces as well as between different workplaces. This exemplifies the context and actor bound nature of the researched phenomenon and makes it impossible to draw any universal or general conclusions. Also, it became evident during the research that there are in fact two processes that proceed at their own respective phases. While the physical transition is slow and takes the long, many of the interviewees agreed that it was the social part of the transition that turned out to be the most challenging. This supports the understanding of gender as a social phenomenon that takes place in interaction with other people.

Prior starting the transition process, it was common among the interviewees to experience strong pressure towards being a rather masculine and stereotypical man at work. Motivation towards this sort of a role construction was reported to be coming externally but also internally as precautionary means of not accidentally exposing their true identity at work. There was one type of masculinity that received a lot of pondering from the interviewees. This "äijä" type of masculinity was reported to be backward and tough, homophobic and not socially talented and was in many cases used as a negation with respect to the interviewees' own status in their narratives. This archetype of one type of Finnish masculinity seemed to live strong in the workplaces and be a part of many of the interviewees' experiences.

Contrary to working as a man, the womanhood after the transition was explained to feel very natural and effortless and coming from inside. On the other hand, this sensation of

relief and happiness was not shared by all the colleagues, especially at the early phases of their gender transition as the interviewees changed behavior towards more feminine did not match their still masculine looks. Following the binary and essentialist logic, this was often interpreted as the interviewees being gay men or considered as bizarre in other ways.

Upon starting the transition process, the most common reactions from colleagues felt under different types of silence. Negative and passivizing silence was reported to be coming from male colleagues more often than from female ones. This sort of silence included a sense of lost authority and exclusion from men's social networks. Conversely, it was common for the interviewees to receive welcoming gestures from their female colleagues and they became easily included into the in-group of women.

As it was mentioned already, many of the interviewees received bewildered reactions from colleagues, as the transition process advanced and the interviewees started to appear more gender "normal". It became clear that especially during the time when the interviewees' assumed sex and gender did not necessarily match, explanations and rationalizations were demanded by other employees. In such occasions, it was sometimes enough for the colleagues to learn that the interviewee was in fact transsexual, which provided a possibility to make sense of the otherwise bizarre situations. These findings show how deeply rooted the gender norms are and how implicitly they guide our expectations towards other people.

Finally, I discussed about the possibilities for stepping out of the binary and essential conception of gender via some examples from the informants' stories. It turned out that in several workplaces, for instance, a unisex bathroom was taken as the norm for everyone after the transition process for the interviewee started. In addition to being able to break the bathroom segregation scheme, the possibilities to undo or redo gender were very limited while the interactions generally followed heteronormative patterns.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

Many of the limitations of this study are a logical consequence from the methodological decisions that were made purposefully to best suit the motivations and nature of as well as the resources for this study. Looked at this way, the type of data that the method of semi-structured interview provided cannot be considered as a limitation per se, even though it can only provide a limited account on the interactional situations that were examined in this study.

Had the scope of this study been larger, I would have possibly gained a more well rounded picture of the interactional situations from also interviewing colleagues of the original informants or from observing the interactional situations directly. This method, combined with larger research project would have also made it possible to investigate a specific industry in more detail with compared to this study where people were interviewed across different occupations without being able to delve into each profession more closely. This prospect, on the other hand, would possibly be limited by a relatively small number of transsexual individuals, and observation as a method, then again, would have brought with it new sorts of limitations and most importantly ethical concerns that were already discussed previously in the methodology chapter of this study.

Within the specific execution of this study, there were some things that certainly affected the findings. Most of these limitations have to do with the nature of the research subject as there was only a limited amount of potential informants available that were not easy to find let alone impossible to have a random sample from. The most emblematic feature of this particular study is that the interviewees were solely transwomen. While this perspective enables a deeper investigation into their experiences it lacks a possibility to compare the findings with transmen, who according to prior research have significant differences in their transition experiences (Schilt, 2006; Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Schilt & Connell, 2010).

5.2 Practical Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

It has become clear that in order to improve the situation of trans employees there has to be changes in how we think about gender. There is only so much that can be done on an individual level in single encounters in terms of influencing the values and prejudices of people and in addition to the Non-Discrimination Act proactive and collective forces are needed in implementing the legal changes into practice.

There should indeed be better Human Resource practices in place more broadly that would not only protect the legal rights of the trans employees but also actively promote inclusion and embrace diversity. These conducts should also better provide concrete support in combining going through the demanding gender reassignment process and work, as it would be important not only economically but also socially to have these individuals in the working force throughout their process. It became understood in the interviews that those informants who had the opportunity to have flexible hours or days off during the week were better able to consolidate work and the reassignment process as it, for instance, includes travelling either to Helsinki and Tampere at times. Still, there was need for flexibility in terms of working times and hours as the according to all of the interviewees the process is mentally and physically demanding in addition to it taking place in only two designated cities in Finland.

In spite of an obvious need in the practical level, there is still a lack of academic research on the issues dealing with diversity and transgender members of the workforce. The value bound and taboo status of the subject contributing to the limited amount of research (DeNisi et al., 2014) can also be visible in possibly existing HR practices on inclusion and diversity management that look good on paper or on a multinational's websites but aren't really put into practice like happened to one of the interviewees who was after all pressured to leave her job.

Based on the themes that emerged from this study, it would be useful and interesting to investigate the topic focusing on specific issue or context. Being able to look at, for instance, transwomen loss of status on a deeper level would also contribute to research of women leadership. A case study looking at a specific company with being able to

observe the interactions along with interviewing the colleagues and superiors would reveal us more about the underlying assumptions, thoughts and prejudices that are left on a less deeper level when interviewing only the transitioning individuals. Another interesting viewpoint, that was missing in this study, would be to have the possibility to compare the experiences of transwomen and transmen as those differences mirror the hierarchical gender binary and can contribute to learning about gender equality on a broader level. This would also be true had we the opportunity to study stealth individuals as their insider status in the destination gender would open up new insights on the functioning of our binary gender order. In order to bring in elements of intersectionality, it would be useful to research situations where gender intersects with ethnicity, age, disability and or class (see for instance Crenshaw, 1991; Williams, 1989.)

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