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**Non-Conforming Gender Geographies:**  
**a longitudinal account of gender queerness in**  
**Scotland**

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Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy (PhD)  
School of Geographical and Earth Sciences  
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## Abstract

Transgender and non-binary politics in Scotland have been pushed to the fore of public consciousness through various public interest stories, awareness campaigns and political interventions. Recently, the Scottish Government's public consultation on the Gender Recognition Act (2004) questioned how a 'third gender' might be legally recognised: a move which would fundamentally alter the gender landscape in Scotland and the relationship between gendered citizens and the state. However, gender non-conformity – the myriad of ways in which individuals may deviate from standardised and cisnormative embodiments of male-masculinity and female-femininity – has much deeper roots in Scotland than is commonly thought. Gender transgression and non-conformity have played an important role in challenging hegemonic politics and socio-cultural boundaries across time and space. While the motivations behind gender non-conformity may have changed, it is important to investigate these gender transgressive histories, questioning how they influence gender non-conforming presents and futures.

Through empirically gathering a range of research material, including the testimonies of those who in some way identify as 'gender non-conforming', this thesis threads together a longitudinal account of gender non-conforming geographies in Scotland. Firstly, the thesis looks at the importance of the kilt and the pantomime – each with rich and culturally engrained histories – as vehicles through which to queer gender normativities, both in a historical and a contemporary sense. The thesis then explores how gender identity is articulated, spatialised and politicised within a contemporary Scotland, focusing on the potentials and pitfalls of identity formation within specific political frameworks. Next, the thesis considers how these diversifying gender identities are materially expressed, shedding light on how participants negotiate binary understandings of gender, and how gender expression changes across space from one context/site to another. Finally, this thesis asks how binary gender ontologies are practically and socially challenged, and how these are articulated through various non-conforming world-making geographies. Through these points of inquiry, this thesis begins to conceptually and empirically open up the potential for non-conforming gender geographies, giving insight into how gender is lived across space and place.

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contributions of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature:.....

Printed name: Grant Anderson

# Chapter 1 Introduction

There will be days when I want to do things like paint my nails, wear a dress and go out in the street and feel perfectly fine about it. But there are days when all I can think about is how bad it will be. The way I look affects where I can go because if I get that wrong ... things can get very bad, very quickly. (Elliot)

## 1.1 A shifting gender landscape in Scotland

The gender landscape in Scotland is changing – legally, socially and politically. The Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN) reports that 2017 saw the highest number of referrals to Gender Identity Clinics (GICs), with an increasing number of people being referred to GICs ‘who do not identify as male or female’ (Thomson, Baker and Arnot, 2018: 12)<sup>1</sup>. Those who situate themselves outwith the male/female gender binary find themselves erased from many spheres of public life – unrepresented, lacking legal and legislative support and vulnerable to transphobia and other forms of prejudice (Valentine, 2016). Indeed, according to Stonewall Scotland, 38% of non-binary people in Scotland experienced a hate crime based on their gender identity during 2017 (Bridger, Bachmann and Gooch, 2017: 8). Although this changing landscape has resulted in a growing awareness of transgender identities in Scotland, a binary ontology of gender has remained pervasive, fixing upon a unidirectional gender ‘swap’ (male-to-female (MtF) or female-to-male (FtM)), with medical and psychiatric knowledges being prioritised as a way of understanding and ‘diagnosing’ gender, rather than reflecting any wider socialisation of gendered understandings. This gender swap is characterised not only through Scottish media outlets and ‘human interest stories’, but is also reflected within Scotland’s legal framing of what constitutes as transgender.

Politically, then, the relationship between the state and gender is shifting, calling into question what a recasting of gendered citizenship might change in Scotland. From 9<sup>th</sup> November 2017 until 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018, the Scottish Government launched a public consultation, gathering views on whether and how the Gender Recognition Act (2004)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A full explanation of the Gender Reassignment Protocol in Scotland can be found at [https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2012\\_26.pdf](https://www.sehd.scot.nhs.uk/mels/CEL2012_26.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> At present, the Gender Recognition Act (2004) allows people over the age of 18, who have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria, the legal opportunity to change their legal gender. The Act allows individuals who wish to transition from male to female (or vice versa) to acquire a Gender Recognition Certificate, so that ‘where a full gender recognition certificate is issued to a person, the person’s gender becomes for all purposes the acquired gender (so that, if the acquired gender is the male gender, the person’s sex becomes that of a man and, if it is the female gender, the person’s sex becomes that of a woman), (legislation.gov.uk).

should be amended in Scotland, reframing transgender rights and opening up the possibility of a legally recognised ‘third gender’ option (Scottish Government, 2018a). Gathering 15,500 responses, the resulting Scottish Government consultation report paid notable attention to the potential ways in which non-binary identities may be legally recognised<sup>3</sup>. Crucially, the authors drew on the Yogyakarta Principles<sup>4</sup> of gender identity and sexual orientation to state that ‘Each person’s self-defined ... gender identity is integral to their personality and is one of the most basic aspects of self-determination, dignity and freedom’ (Scottish Government, 2018a: 43). An increased focus on the socialisation, rather than the medicalisation, of transgender and non-binary identities, has also been key to the Equal Recognition Campaign, led by the Equality Network (EN) and The Scottish Trans Alliance (STA), which aims to influence the Government’s approach to the reforming of the Gender Recognition Act (2004). They advocate for a removal of the psychiatric diagnosis requirement from legal gender recognition, for reducing the age at which people can get legal recognition of the gender that they ‘live as’ and to introduce legal recognition for those people who do not identify as men or women (STA, 2018). In spite of The Scottish National Party’s pursuit of socially progressive governance and an emphasis on ‘inclusion’ (SNP, 2016), gender non-conforming individuals still arguably remain unplaceable within deeply engrained, binarised understandings of gender: ontologically precarious and vulnerable to unequal conditions and a lack of legislative support and protection (Johnston, 2017: 9). Despite hegemonic discourse that focuses on distinct interpretations of masculinity and femininity, including on the impact that this has for Scottish cultural traditions, I will note how these political changes affect participants and reiterate how long-established histories of non-conforming gender contribute to contemporary gender politics.

This apparently progressive move towards self-definition and a legal recognition of a non-binary gender has been met with distain within some Scottish media outlets. Transphobic narratives penetrate public discourse as transgender and non-binary lives become ‘debated’, questioning the existence of transgender individuals, focusing on the ‘threat’ that transgender people pose to society, to children, and to women’s lives, through an ‘invasion’ of women’s space (Green, 2018). With regards to self-definition and a perceived threat to children in Scotland, a ‘right to choose’ gender politics has been met with rebuttal: as McGovern (in Drury, 2018) argues, ‘It is deeply worrying that adults are foisting this anxiety

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<sup>3</sup> Full analysis of the public consultation was released in November 2018 (Scottish Government, 2018b).

<sup>4</sup> The Yogyakarta Principles (2006: 4) were designed to inform and influence governments on the human rights of ‘diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.’ ([yogyakartaprinciples.org](http://yogyakartaprinciples.org))

on children – it is a darkly sinister intrusion into childhood and it's cruel.' Even left-leaning outlets such as *The Guardian* (17<sup>th</sup> October 2018) assert that there should be a 'safeguarding' against transgender people in single-gender spaces and that self-declaration must not allow 'violent or controlling male[s] ... a new opportunity to dominate women by changing gender.' While these debates focus mainly on the lives of binary trans<sup>5</sup> people, they inevitably have very grounded effects on the lives of those who do not comply with the gender binary, igniting fierce discussion over transgender and gender non-conforming rights and protections within and beyond Scotland (Figure 1.1). As possibilities open up, allowing gender non-conforming individuals the ontological opportunity to exist, their geographies remain unstable and uncertain as gender non-conformers find themselves in a gendered hinterland, exposed yet erased from many of these trans debates – voiced, yet unheard. How, therefore, at a time when the introduction of a third gender option may become a reality for those positioning themselves outwith the gender binary, might gender geographies in Scotland change and how might this geography be negotiated, lived and embodied across various scales, spaces and places?



**Figure 1.1: Demonstrations in New York against proposed changes to gender recognition, proposed by the Trump administration in October 2018. (BBC News, 2018)**

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<sup>5</sup> Since the emergence of transfeminist scholarship in the 1990s, much contention exists about the practical and conceptual applications of 'trans'. Stryker, Currah and Moore (2008: 12), seek to delineate the connection between 'trans' and 'gender', resisting 'trans' as a gender category which is distinct from 'man' or 'woman'. Rather, they understand it in broader terms, arguing that 'genders [are] potentially porous and permeable spatial territories (arguably numbering more than two), each capable of supporting rich and rapidly proliferating ecologies of embodied difference.' I use it here as a way to decentre the notion of a structured third 'trans' identity, which would inadvertently create a restrictive gender trinary.

## 1.2 Introducing gender non-conforming geographies

A central tenet of this thesis is to investigate what a gender non-conforming geography might look like, building upon the growing breadth of empirically rich geographical inquiry that considers binary transgender geographies. Within queer scholarship, this politics aims to distort essentialisms and categorisations, liberating those who are excluded from hegemony and normativity (Oswin, 2008). Borne out of a 'sexuality and space' research tradition in the way that it conceptually approaches queerness<sup>6</sup> (but not implicitly tackling sexual orientation), this thesis works to develop a geographical imagining beyond the gender binary. I aim to create attention to gender non-conforming geographies that intimately informed by queer scholarship. I use 'queer' to describe the radicality which 'questions normativities and orthodoxies, in part now by rendering categories of sexualities, genders and spaces fluid', including 'the transgressions of dichotomous sexes, genders and sexualities as well as emphasising the artificial boundaries around, and connections between these' (Brown, 2008: 886). Taking inspiration from 'sexuality and space' scholarship and queer theory, the act of queering in this thesis is carried out here both through practice and epistemologically, to enact politically these radical intentions (Halberstam, 2005). Drawing on key works such as that by Browne, Nash and Hines (2010: 573), who move conceptually and empirically 'towards trans geographies', I want to further explore potentials 'beyond trans geographies.' In doing this, I have set myself a series of goals: critically to consider how historical and cultural examples of gender transgression and non-conformity inform Scotland's (non-conforming) gender landscape; to explore how individuals create ontological and epistemological space for a gendered life beyond the binary; to question how the gender binary can be spatially negotiated to avoid the oppressive (micro)aggressions of 'genderism' (Browne, 2004); and to consider how a gender non-conforming and queer collective politics can be adopted by different groups and in different spaces. My shift towards gender non-conforming geographies should not be taken remotely as the suggestion that trans geographies are somehow outdated, redundant or complete. Neither do I want to invalidate the lives and experiences of those trans individuals who wish to 'transition' from one gender/sex pole to another in a way that indeed replicates the gender binary<sup>7</sup>. Rather, I

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<sup>6</sup> I use 'queerness' as somewhat of an umbrella term to describe a set of politics, practices or performances which are 'anti-assimilationist' or a marking of one's self from conventional norms. It is a 'political provocation which seeks to destabilise normalised regimes of power' and looks towards a decentring of identity', replacing this with a 'loosely related hodgepodge of lifestyle choices' (Epstein, 1994: 195).

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, many transgender narratives – academic and non-academic – refer to those who have transitioned across the gender binary: transforming their bodies, medically, behaviourally or

wish to push conceptually at the boundaries of gender queerness in academic geography, expanding and decentring how gender is conceptualised and spatialised, allowing for individuals to explore masculinities and femininities, embodiments and geographies which do not seek to replicate the gender binary.

Throughout this process, it became apparent that ‘non-conformity’ was going to be a central tenet in my thesis: as a queer tool allowing me to reach beyond individualised identity politics; as a way of capturing the intricacies of both gender identity and gender expression and how they complement and/or juxtapose one another; and as a way of (re)reading gender across political, historical and geographical contexts. I used the term ‘gender non-conforming’ as a discursive tool to encompass the plethora of gender identity labels and markers used throughout contemporary gender politics in Scotland. These ‘labels’ are more than just discursive or subjective positions, however, for they are also realities that are constantly explored and embodied, reflecting an internalised sense of gender identity while also acknowledging that one’s gender subjectivity is relational (Butler, 2004). For participants, the search for self is hence an ongoing process reflecting their gender histories and contexts, allowing them on occasion to recognise the spatialities of masculinity and femininity and how these are expressed in different spaces as they position themselves amongst and sometimes against other gendered bodies. Non-conformity can also be addressed beyond these individualised subjectivities, though, since it can also be used to connect the self with the ‘community’, the hegemony or the state, thus looking beyond identity politics to challenge gender-based discrimination, oppression and inequality. Gender non-conformity is considered through a constant and often fraught relationship with spatial and cultural norms, and is exposed by normalised performative representations of gender in specific places. By using ‘gender non-conforming’ as an umbrella term for those identities, presentations and practices placed in contestation with the gender binary, ‘gender non-conforming’ can be used as a device for transcending identity politics to consider queerly non-normative lives and to create what Oswin (2008: 90) calls a ‘non-identitarian queer approach.’

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materially, from male-to-female or female-to-male. However, much sensitivity should be given to personal transgender histories, as individuals may go to lengths to erase their trans identity. This may be done ‘in an effort to avoid violence, or discrimination’ (Beemyn and Rankin, 2011: xii), to avoid discrimination in the workplace or in employment (Bender-Baird, 2011), or simply as a way to ‘feel normal’ (Lyons, 2016). Here, the gender binary is crossed, rather than collapsed or actively inhabited, in a move that effectively reinforces the gender binary (although this may not be done consciously or for political means). There are many ways in which trans-ness can exist and it is important to appreciate those for whom transness might not always be transgressive.



### 1.2.1 Geographical questions for non-conformity

Using ‘gender non-conforming’ indeed poses some inherently spatial questions, yet, as mentioned above, academic geography has to date neglected non-conformity as a way of queerly looking at how gender is distorted to various degrees in different places. Rather, I draw from queer and trans scholars in other disciplines. Davis (2009: 102) uses Butlerian theories to consider how gender non-conformity can be analysed empirically:

According to Butler, the persistence of nonconforming identities exposes the limits and regulatory aims of the “matrix of intelligibility” (Butler, 1990: 17). Fluid, disruptive, transgressive beings are juxtaposed with intelligible, coherent, stable, hegemonic beings. An empirical examination of the ways in which individuals negotiate potentially incoherent identities can expand postmodern insights into the tensions of identification and the regulatory regimes of gender.

Davis mobilises non-conformity as a way of understanding gender that challenges the stability of gendered hegemonies, while also asserting that these identities can be used to expose the regulatory policing of gender norms through recovering how individuals daily negotiate hegemonic gender positions. My thesis will contribute to this framing: firstly, by providing empirically driven accounts of how these negotiations take place in different spaces; and, secondly, through taking seriously the geographies of gender hegemonies and how they are regulated and resisted in different spaces.

It is not my intention to position gender non-conforming as something solid, consistent, coherent, stable and sitting apart from normative expressions of gender. This move could create pseudo-positivist assertions, failing to reflect the relational notion of gendered ontologies. It would risk enforcing stasis and neglect queer fluctuations in how participants embody their gender differently in different spaces. Thinking about Davis’ quote, my thesis aims to interrogate how participants are ‘juxtaposed’, asserting that one does not live in a state of conforming or non-conforming, but that the boundary between these states is fluid, porous and shifting, depending upon spatially contingent interpretations of gender norms and allowances for gender distortion. In questioning what gender non-conforming geographies look like, I hope to avoid the creation of a conforming/non-conforming binary, an ironic new binary indeed, thinking critically about how the extent to which gender hegemonies are non-conformed varies across spatial and temporal contexts.

### 1.2.2 Scottishness as non-conformity

This thesis deploys Scotland as an optic through which to understand how gender non-conformity can be discussed within geographical debates. While I cannot offer a comprehensive analysis of Scottishness as a political or cultural identity, Scotland is used as more than just another geographical space in which gender non-conforming lives are lived, merely a different case study location for the production of supposedly generalisable claims (even if there is an element of such a wish to extrapolate beyond the specificities of the Scottish context). Rather, further analysis of Scottishness as non-conformity and non-conformity as Scottishness is also important for this inquiry. As noted in section 1.2.1, non-conformity is not thought of here as a binary other, or as a static opposition to conformity, but instead this study critically considers the varying extent to which identities, politics, practices and performances are distanced from hegemonies across spatial and temporal contexts. Throughout this thesis, therefore, in many senses I do think about Scottishness as non-conformity in relation to Englishness (or Britishness?). Within recent geographical debate and most potently within the context of Brexit, the relationship between Englishness, Britishness and the decaying memories and nostalgic celebration of ‘empire’ has been discussed widely (e.g. Bachmann and Sidaway, 2016). However, Scottishness, as a cultural and political identity (or cluster of identities) is increasingly set against such Englishness/Britishness: a positionally most vocally expressed by the Scottish National Party (SNP) who have used Scotland’s decision to remain as part of the European Union to demonstrate how Scottishness is posed other to, or as ‘non-conforming to’ Britishness or Englishness (Ashcroft and Bevir, 2016). Through this thesis, this non-conforming sensibility of Scottishness does on occasion overlap/cohere with gender non-conforming sensibilities in the way that it is political deployed, though this is not done neatly as this would risk rendering non-conformity as static, rather than appreciating its multiplicities and instabilities. Beyond looking at gender specifically, thinking of Scottishness as a form of non-conformity operates throughout, demonstrating the intersectional ways in which non-conformities can be understood.

I do not to think of Scottishness as something utterly detached or removed from Englishness, but rather is something shifting, fluid and contextual: sometimes in line with or alongside, while sometimes more distanced. Indeed, MacDonald (2007: 140) notes the complexity of Scottishness and Scottish identity, saying that it is ‘generous and carnivalesque, egalitarian and elitist, radical and conservative.’ The inclusiveness of using such binaries – suggesting that quite different poles or attributes can co-exist, co-mingle – shows the non-conforming ways

in which Scottishness may be constituted across space and time. Through this thesis I hence use Scottishness as a form of non-conformity through which to queer such socio-cultural binaries.

Furthermore, Scottishness as non-conformity can contribute to queer geographical accounts about and from beyond the Anglo-American hegemonies that typically frame queer and feminist geographies (e.g. Chiang and Wong, 2016). While a wealth of queer geographical scholarship has been undertaken in queer metropolises which hold oft-told queer histories, this move does itself risk creating a new kind of hegemony in how queer geographies become understood as the view ‘from everywhere and so nowhere, to be free from interpretation, from being represented, to be fully self-contained or fully formalised’ (Haraway, 1988: 590). In response to this, I have sought to ‘ground’ the accounts of non-conforming lives lived somewhere: to give substance and detail which is rooted in the settings, histories, spaces and places in Scotland, in attempt to replace the view from nowhere/everywhere with a ‘view from somewhere’, thus developing a situated-longitudinal perspective effectively rooted in Scottish ‘soil’ (most explicitly in Chapters 4 and 5 but also through 6 to 8). In doing this, this thesis aims to point to the non-hegemonic ways in which non-conforming knowledge can be produced: sometimes alongside more hegemonic queer geographical discourse, while being more distanced from them at others. In doing so, I wish to also go beyond the Global North/South binary which frames the North as progressive and the global South as left behind or backward in their attitudes towards gender identity and sexual orientation (e.g. Maikay & Stelder, 2015), instead looking for nuance and difference (and non-conformity) between different locations in the Global North.

As discussed throughout my thesis, understandings of gender norms are spatial, constructing local configurations of masculinity and femininity and regulating who is permitted to embody these gendered attributes. If gender norms and gender conformity are spatially contingent, so gender non-conformity must also be geographically placed. A central concern of this thesis, then, is to place Scotland within gender non-conforming discourse, revealing Scotland’s queer geographies that have, thus far, been neglected by ‘sexuality and space’ scholars. In doing this, I open possibilities for exploring queer identities, lives and experiences beyond the queer metropole. While much research has been undertaken within regional cities with a prominent queer history, Scotland has been neglected as a queer hinterland: seen as overly influenced by its largely conservative, Presbyterian pasts and often ‘left behind’, trailing behind the imagining of a more liberal United Kingdom south of the border (Meek, 2015).

In looking beyond the oft-cited queer metropolises of London, Brighton, New York, San Francisco and Seattle, this thesis decentres queer knowledges produced within the field of ‘sexuality and space’ scholarship. Just as gender knowledges have been colonised by imperial powers (see Chapter 4), I use non-conformity as a way to offer alternative geographical sites and the epistemological space to contribute to debates around queer politics. By exploring gender non-conformity in Scotland, I advocate for another strand of post-coloniality: one allowing new geographical accounts to be given, searching for spatialities that decentre queer narratives that seem to hold precedence within queer geographical work. In scaling out further this ambition of decentring queer knowledges, geographically specific knowledges can be interpreted (and experienced) across global contexts. Decentring from Western (perhaps, more specifically, Anglo-American) binary knowledges of gender can offer valuable insight into the various ways whereby gender non-conformity can be reworked and translated across geographical contexts, potentially enriching gender politics in Scotland and beyond.

### **1.2.3 Historicising non-conforming geographies**

A second conceptual move that this thesis makes is to thread together a longitudinal account of gender non-conformity in Scotland. LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) and queer geographies have, to an extent, been guilty of regarding the experiences and geographies of queer individuals as essentially experiences of ‘the recent’ – consulting with lived experiences of what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer in contemporary timeframes, erasing deeper historical and cultural queer histories and geographies that frame and perhaps influence contemporary understandings of gender normalcy and sexual hegemony. Nash (2010: 588) notes the importance of trans histories, iterating the potentials and difficulties presented when trying to write transgender lives into lesbian and gay histories, suggesting that erasures, exclusions and oppressions in lesbian and gay spaces makes it ‘difficult to make visible the historic specificity of trans lives.’ Although these difficulties are undoubted, Longhurst (2005: 388) adds that queer bodies and spaces ‘are always historically *and* spatially located’.

In spite of these attempts to historicise gender queer lives, much of Anglo-American queer scholarship historicises queer lives, politics and practices through a 1960s Stonewallian lens (see Armstrong and Cragg, 2006), only taking such lives as anticipatory or as a trigger of the LGBT civil rights movement in North America (The Leadership Conference, 2009). Much

queer research uses Stonewall<sup>8</sup> as a temporal and ontological platform from which to build contemporary queer geographies. Instead, I want to expose a greater historical depth to gender non-conformity and queer representations and embodiments of gender (and sexuality) in Scotland. I do this to blend historical and cultural depth with contemporary (and shifting) (trans)gender politics in Scotland, in order to create my longitudinal study of gender transgression and gender non-conformity. At this juncture, it is important to note the different ways in which I use 'gender transgression' and 'gender non-conformity'. As I see it, 'transgression' can be used to describe acts which go against law, rule or code of conduct, implying agency over a political mobilisation to challenge hegemony. Meanwhile, I use 'non-conformity' to describe the material, behavioural and social practices not in compliance with hegemonic gendered standards (although these are not wholly separable or distinguishable). It offers a looser description of a state-of-being where prevailing gender norms are destabilised, perhaps without any overt determination to over-turn gender categories. Non-conformity, then, can be deployed to consider queer histories, lineages and genealogies at a variety of temporal scales: threading together deeper socio-cultural and national histories of gender transgression in Scotland; more contemporary local and community histories, politics and geographies; and individualised non-conforming life stories, which are so thoughtfully reflected upon by my participants. While the practices, politics, representations and materialities of these queerings may differ with time and place, the central connective strand between gender transgression and gender non-conformity remains constant: a detachment from the supposedly ever-present constriction of Scottish understandings of the gender binary. While the practices, motivations and politics of challenging the gender binary may also have changed, it is important not to ignore the connections between contemporary gender non-conforming politics and their intricate and engrained pasts when considering queer gender futures.

### 1.3 Thesis aims, intentions and structure

In considering the rapidly shifting landscape of gender politics in Scotland, this thesis works to trace these political, ideological and socio-cultural undulations to create a longitudinal account of gender non-conformity in Scotland<sup>9</sup>. It will reflect upon historical geographies of

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to reject Stonewallian politics or render it irrelevant in Scotland. Rather, I note that 'Stonewallian politics, symbolism and traditions travel, but are often enacted and organised in ways influenced by localised governmental regimes and situated social attitudes' (Anderson, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> The term 'longitudinal' has been deployed within human geography (and beyond), often with respect to quantitative cohort studies that aim to trace and trend changes within a given group of research subjects over a long time period, based on quantitative indicators (e.g. Pearce *et. al.*

gender transgression, threading these materials together with contemporary gender politics, to give insight into the spectrum of ways that the gender binary has been challenged at a variety of scales and across different spaces. Within a historical context, this thesis has taken two symbols of socio-cultural importance in Scotland – the kilt and the pantomime – rereading these iconic features through a queer lens to consider how they might influence and challenge gender normativity and politics in Scotland. With this historical context in place, I then go on to work closely with individuals who consider themselves, to varying degrees, to be gender non-conforming, giving me access to ‘on-the-ground’ knowledges from beyond the gender binary. Both the historical and contemporary elements of this thesis seek to challenge gender orthodoxy, decolonising gender knowledges and creating epistemological space for subjugated gendered knowledges. Adamant not to replicate complex, academicised theorisations of gender, of which queer theory is often guilty (see Watson, 2005), this thesis works to place participants at the centre of knowledge production. The gender non-conforming geographies presented here therefore situate individual experiences at the heart of investigation, reflecting participant experiences, memories, apprehensions, discomforts, hopes and potentials.

Geographically, this thesis contributes, both conceptually and empirically, to the growing breadth of material within the disciplinary orbit of queer geography that, through its engagements with queer theory, seeks further to deconstruct space, place, identity and politics. In her critical paper, Oswin (2008: 89) notes that queer geography should ‘move beyond humanist understandings of essential sexual identities to animate a politics of liberation for those who are presumably excluded from heterosexual hegemony.’ While I am convinced by and supportive of these intentions, this thesis works to expand the remit of queer geographies, which have perhaps overused sexuality as a pointed demarcation of difference (with notable exceptions e.g. Browne, 2004, 2006b; Nash, 2010; Johnston, 2018: all of which will be drawn upon extensively within this thesis). While the primary focus of this thesis is *gender* non-conformity, I do not want to disregard key ‘sexuality and space’ work, using this work instead as a springboard to build a more-than-sexual queer geography which is intersectional and politically motivated in its nature. Looking again at Oswin’s quote, this thesis ‘moves beyond humanist understandings of essential sexual’ *and gender* ‘identities to animate a politics of liberation for those who are presumably excluded from

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2018). Rather, I wish to re-appropriate (or queer) this term to offer a deeper and qualitative social history and geography of gender transgression and gender non-conformity. I do with this to emphasise and expose the deep-rooted, often overlooked relationship between Scotland (as geographical site of investigation), queerness and gender non-conformity.

heterosexual' and *cisgender* 'hegemony.' In explicitly naming gender and cisnormativity as oppressive regimes serving to subjugate those who do not fit within the gender binary, I reflect upon the testimony of my participants to enliven a non-conformity gender politics. With this theoretical framing in mind, I look to create a non-conforming geography of Scotland, focusing on the geographical and social nuances of gender (historically and contemporarily), while also contributing to the very limited field of queer geographical research in Scotland. Thus, the aims of this research are as follows:

- To demonstrate the deep-rooted cultural and social importance of Scotland's non-conforming gender history, and to decolonise hegemonic gender knowledges, allowing geographers to examine the spaces and politics behind Scotland's gender non-conforming pasts;
- To provide a snapshot of the contemporary gender queer landscape in Scotland, questioning how identity can be understood through queer politics, queer contestations and queer assemblages, and asking how these queerings play out across different scales;
- To account for how participants navigate and negotiate the gender binary across different spatial contexts, focusing particularly on the everyday ways in which participants materially explore and express their gender to create more comfortable lives; and
- To consider, in practical and performative terms, how a gender non-conforming politics can be adopted by organisations in Scotland, creating spaces that physically and epistemologically allow for the existence of gendered lives beyond the binary, while also working to reject the cisnormative regulation of gender.

Rather than framing my research around more specific and tightly defined research questions, the above bullet points comprise deliberately open fields of inquiry – intentionally broad to allow for intellectual and conceptual malleability when 'in the field'. Although these broad research aims were set out prior to undertaking fieldwork, I sought to adopt a queer methodology, allowing gender non-conforming participants to lead this research, valuing their experiences, subjectivities and identities, to form the backbone of this research and preventing a 'queering from above' (Haritaworn, 2014: 2). This ethos allowed participants to frame research discussions in ways deemed appropriate and relevant to them, placing them as central in shaping how this thesis constructs gender non-conforming geographies. These research aims, then, shall be approached and interrogated through this thesis as follows.

Following this introduction, **Chapter 2** offers an extensive literature review considering the valuable ways that queer and feminist scholarship has informed, influenced and contributed to this thesis. Firstly, the review discusses the breadth of literature showing how queer geographical works de-essentialise and critique heterosexist and cisnormative framings of gender. Next, I take stock of existing work on transgender or trans geographies, discussing the growing number of empirically-driven studies that look at the lived experiences of transgender people. I then address writings that conceptualise the materiality of gender and gender expression, and how masculinity and femininity are spatially contextualised, challenged and rejected. Thirdly, I explore various literatures from across different academic fields that tackle the importance of activism and the political potential of creating gender non-conforming spaces and queer worlds. I offer reflections upon literature from outwith geography that has begun directly to queer gender non-conformity, assessing how this queering has been conceptually achieved and questioning how academic geography might outwardly look to these literatures for inspiration when spatialising gender non-conforming lives. Finally, I note my own envisaged conceptual academic contributions, detailing how this thesis adds to the growing and diversifying field of queer geography.

**Chapter 3** reflects upon queer methodologies: how they conceptually influence queer research; how they challenge the relationship between the researcher and the participant; and how queer methodologies can be translated into queer methods, to inform how queer research is concretely undertaken when ‘in the field.’ This chapter also gives a detailed explanation of my use of gender non-conformity as a methodological tool and its different implications. I detail the different ways in which non-conformity could be adopted by geographers and how it can enhance queer research. I look at numerous examples of queer research that accounts for the complexities and sensitivities of queer methodologies before giving critical thought to my own positionality, interrogating the relationship between myself and my participants and considering my own gender within a gender non-conforming epistemological space. I position myself as a ‘learning researcher’: not against but *with* my participants. Finally, I assess the methods deployed throughout this thesis, reflecting upon how they can be queered and appropriated, putting queer methodologies into practice.

The first of my empirical chapters, **Chapter 4**, works to reread the kilt as an example of queer materiality, tracing its potential to be read as a queer tool used to challenge political, identitarian and collective orthodoxy. The kilt, often thought of as the pinnacle of Scottish masculinity, offers the opportunity to question its similarity to the skirt by tracking its usage and its gendered history and geography. In this, I also consider how gendered knowledges



travel and have been colonised in Scotland and beyond: only allowing the existence of ‘man’ or ‘woman’ and stigmatising gender non-conformity. Following this, I examine the numerous ways in which the kilt is inextricably linked to queer gender politics by considering its role in the sexualisation of Scottish gender and in disentangling hegemonic binary-gender structures. Finally, I look at how the kilt can be used in cross-dressing practices and in queer (re)readings of what it means to *be* masculine and/or feminine. The kilt, as a man’s-skirt, is used to give context to a non-conforming interpretation of gendered materiality, clothing and behaviour: one in which the male-female binary is not entirely useful or encompassing.

Giving further cultural depth to claims of socially influential non-conforming histories and geographies in Scotland, **Chapter 5** focuses on pantomime as a performance that permits for gender non-conformity and transgression as spectacle. This chapter will take an historical look at the spaces that allowed, and arguably provided for, gender non-conformity. The chapter will focus on the characters of the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame as focal points of gender transgression, providing examples of how Scottish audiences interact(ed) with cross-dressing and gender transgression through these two characters. I will also consider the ways in which gender is read, understood and queered through the idiosyncrasies and socio-cultural geographies of Scottish pantomime.

Traversing temporal and geographical contexts, **Chapter 6** moves on to consult participant testimony, reflecting upon contemporary gender non-conforming geographies in Scotland. I note the flourish of identities that participants perform and live, discussing the possibilities and pitfalls of diversifying gender identities. I outline the spaces, both epistemological and physical, that are created by gender non-conforming people in Scotland when reworking and disidentifying with Scottish gender norms. I will draw attention to the fractured nature of (having to) label gender as a means of gaining political traction and in advocating for political and social legitimacy. Using ‘non-conformity’ as an umbrella term extending beyond the limitations of individualised identity politics, I turn to Spivak’s (1996) ‘strategic essentialism’, advocating for collectivism around a specific political ambition. Moving from notions of individual to collective identity, this chapter considers the current political influences and impacts that non-conforming gender can have at a national and state level.

**Chapter 7** moves from issues of non-conforming gender identity to consider the material ways in which participants express masculinity and femininity, and how this performance is affected by socio-cultural understandings of space. I will concentrate on the material,

behavioural and social dimensions whereby gender expression changes across space as participants attempt to negotiate a privileged binary understanding of gender. I use Browne's (2004) 'genderism' to discuss how gender may be regulated in different spaces, reflecting upon how participants negotiate the imposition of gender normativities. I then consider the importance of 'the closet', developing Brown's (2000) work on the physical and epistemological dimensions of the closet. I begin to imagine what a gender non-conforming closet might look like, thinking critically about how it might be negotiated in gendered terms, contributing to a more-than-sexual reading of the closet. Finally, I reflect upon various 'flash points' that were discussed by participants – spaces where gender is stringently regulated, disallowing the existence of non-conforming identities. Gender segregated spaces have structurally and architecturally bolstered the male-female binary, causing ideological clashes between identity-based and biology-based determinations of gender/sex.

This final empirical chapter reviews the tactics and practices being undertaken by institutions across Scotland to be inclusive of non-conformity and to create queer worlds that politically resist the gender binary. **Chapter 8** hence covers how queer organisations expand the scope of their services to be more inclusive of gender non-conforming individuals, looking critically at how this expansion is done in practical, political and social terms. By taking a closer look at Queer Theory – a monthly queer cabaret event held in Glasgow – I will consider how Glasgow's changing queer urbanisms impact upon the lives of gender non-conforming participants as they seek to develop a collective queer community. While queer spaces have often been read through a sexual lens, this chapter will look specifically at how gender non-conforming lives are affected by shifting queer urbanisms. Finally, I will look at the growing resistance against non-binary gender ontologies, noting how a diluting of gender essentialisms has occasionally been met with an increased regulation over access to spaces, communities and events. I will account for this solidification of the gender binary within certain queer spaces, using participant experiences to discuss what this conflict in ideology means for a changing gender landscape in Scotland.

In concluding this thesis, **Chapter 9** brings together ideas threaded throughout to create a longitudinal study of gender non-conformity in Scotland. It will underscore how the proceeding chapters have combined to create a comprehensive picture of how gender non-conformity is understood in Scotland and how Scotland's unique gendered landscape contributes to both popular and political discussions questioning the stability of the gender binary. I revisit my research aims, considering to what extent they have been met, posing caveats and limitations of this research. At this juncture, I also contemplate the contributions

that this thesis makes: firstly, the disciplinary contributions that gender non-conforming geographies may offer to ‘sexuality and space’ scholarship, queer geographies and feminist literatures; and, secondly, the potential interventions that extend beyond the academy, contributing to the fields of trans politics, policy and practice.

In tackling issues of gender queerness and non-conformity from a geographical standpoint, I begin to think through how issues around gender identity, expression, history, politics and community can be spatialised. The thesis works to make several key contributions to queer geographical scholarship and beyond, ones already signalled in the previous pages, but which I will now bring together in closing my introduction. Firstly, I open up the potentials for a geographical deployment of ‘non-conformity’, thinking about the conceptual, methodological and epistemological potentials for rereading and queering space across a variety of contexts and scales. Secondly, I work to contribute to a more-than-sexual queer geography, shifting the intellectual balance towards discussing gender and how it can be understood intersectionally to place gender non-conforming lives within queer geographical literature. Thirdly, this thesis also begins to take seriously the materiality of gender, and the effect of this materiality in influencing the geographies of participants as they seek to rework, navigate or reject the gender binary. Finally, this thesis aims to contribute to the very narrow field of queer geographical research in Scotland, drawing out geographical accounts from a ‘site’ that has not previously been explored by queer geographical research. Beyond the academy, at a time when dramatic shifts are reworking gender and queer politics in Scotland, this thesis works to tell the stories of gender non-conforming individuals. In not pursuing trends, commonality or conclusions from their testimonies, I present, instead, their individual, ‘on-the-ground’ experiences, memories, feelings and (dis)comforts, piecing together their social geographies. This thesis ultimately offers a queer snapshot of non-conforming lives, their everyday encounters and their mobilisations around issues of gender, as told by the people who live them.

## Chapter 2 Literature review and conceptual developments

### 2.1 Situating gender non-conforming geographies

Within Anglo-American academic geography, critical engagement with non-normative gender and sexuality has branched out in many directions since its emergence in the 1980s (Lauria and Knopp, 1985). This field of inquiry has, in one way or another, concerned itself with the relationship between space and place, sexual desires, gendered realities, identity, representation, power and politics. Critical to these ‘LGBT geographies’ is questioning how space and place (and ‘placelessness’) are produced, understood and negotiated within non-normative gendered and sexual lives (Wright, 2010: 59). While initially concerned with the spatialities of gay men in urban spaces (e.g. Bell, 1991), queer geographies soon began to take on new trajectories to encompass lesbian lives (Maliepaard, 2015), bisexualities (Bell, 1995) and transgender geographies (Browne, Nash and Hines, 2010). These studies worked to reconsider gender and sexuality, but arguably in a manner very different from the earliest work in feminist geographies. In attempting ontologically to create a framework that can interrogate the breadth of gender and sexual experiences, Browne (2006a: 888) calls for radical ‘(re)thinkings, (re)drawings, (re)conceptualisations, (re)mappings [to] (re)make bodies, spaces and geographies’ – a call to queer essentialised categories, experiences and lives.

As my opening paragraph indicates, this thesis cannot be situated within so-called ‘sexuality and space’ studies alone. Feminist geographies have also undergone numerous shifts since critical early work such as *Geography and Gender* (WGSF, 1984) or Rose’s (1993) philosophical engagements with geography, feminism and the questioning of masculinist knowledge production. Feminist geography has taken on a diverse array of commitments: encouraging researchers to be critical of gender-based oppressions and their reproduction within geographical knowledge; to think about sexism and its role within geographical research; committing to understanding knowledges as situated, partial and contextual; and looking to understand the role of gender in the production of space, all with a ‘political commitment to social transformation’ (Pratt, 2009: 246). Despite their different histories, feminist and queer research arguably do ‘share basic political commitments to social justice, equity and the dismantling of power structures producing *injustice* and *inequity*’ (Knopp, 2007: 48). Both feminist and queer research work to break up masculinist and colonial abstract theories that ‘claim to be able to pronounce universal truths and to theorise the

world’ (Radcliffe, 2017: 329). Hence, I do not wish to situate this thesis within a particular sub-discipline, nor search for a boundary between disciplines (or even sub-disciplines), but rather I wish productively to discuss how queer and feminist frameworks intimately inform this thesis as an ongoing dialogue, both relational and political.

This extensive literature review will firstly discuss the breadth of work within sexuality and space studies and the emergence of queer geographies, allowing researchers to deconstruct and redefine ‘man/woman, maleness/femaleness’ (van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005: 10) and to critique the inequalities exacerbated by gender and sexual binaries. I will also frame the growing scope of transgender geographies, affording the prime conceptual foundation on which I build this thesis. I will then consider the performance of identities, paying particular attention to Browne’s (2004) ‘genderism’ as a way of analysing how gender non-conformity and (il)legibility is policed and regulated in different spaces, specifically addressing how this genderism affects the lives of gender non-conforming people. Thinking critically about the materiality of gender and gender expression in different spaces is a central component of this thesis. Thirdly, while queer geography has been relatively slow to respond to what can be seen as the mainstreaming of some gender positions that sit beyond the gender binary, I will give an overview of relevant literatures emerging from other disciplines and show how they engage – conceptually and theoretically – with this diversification of gender. Fourthly, I will explore various literatures that tackle the importance of activism and the political potentials conceived from gender non-conforming spaces. Creating queer worlds – physical, social and epistemological – is a central concern of many queer theorists (e.g. Halberstam, 2005) and this section will discuss the various political and performative possibilities for forging such spaces.

Central to this literature is an ambition to decolonise hegemonic and imperialist forms of knowledge, including that of gender, allowing for gender transgression or non-conformity that offers ‘the shimmering promise of autonomy and the potency of self-creation, but is also threatened ... with the catastrophe of negation’ (McClintock, 1995: 263). This deconstruction of gender knowledges, both individually and collectively, politicises research through unsettling hierarchical and colonial geographical thought. Finally, I will underline how I contribute to existing literatures, seeking to build upon them to give empirical nuance to the geographical realities of individuals who position themselves outside the gender binary in Scotland, adding to contemporary debates – social and political – within queer geography and across the wider human geography discipline.

## 2.2 Geographical engagements with queer theory

Initially, attempts to map the spaces used by gay men and lesbians, as captured in the significant edited collection *Mapping Desire* (Bell and Valentine, 1995a), entrained many key themes emerging within LGBT geographical literature. Concerns with the sexual ‘Other’ – other spaces, places, identities and communities – created a juxtaposition with ‘normative’ uses of space. The ‘spark’ of *Mapping Desire* was reignited by the important text, *Geographies of Sexualities* (Browne, Lim and Brown, 2009), which engaged with these founding texts but also engaged with the act of challenging orthodoxies and the connection between sexualities, space and place. On the construction of queer space, Valentine (1993) notes that, rather than accepting space as being inherently heteronormative, she posits that spaces may be (re)created by the differently gendered and sexual bodies that exist within any given society, time and place:

Space/place are usually understood as heterosexual and meant to be used by two people who are unambiguously sexed (man or woman), exhibit proper gendered behaviours (femininity and masculinity) that are mapped on to that unambiguous physical body and sexual interests that are directed towards the clearly differentiated opposite sex. Those who contravene these norms are detected and repudiated, often with verbal and physical violence ... The sexuality of space tends only to be noticed and named as such when it is not heterosexual/straight. Gay spaces are marked as different and named as ‘gay’, but this is not the case for straight spaces. What this means is that sexualities remake everyday spaces, often as ‘normal’. (Browne and Brown, 2016: 1-2)

Thinking critically about the relationship between gender and sexual norms and space, Browne and Brown argue that gendered *and* sexual practices and expressions define certain core norms within specific spaces. Hence, gender and sexual minorities play a fundamental role in the potential (re)definition of social normalities, creating their own geographies. Space, then, is actively produced and (hetero)sexualised through repetitive instances of ‘norms’ (Binnie, 1997), indeed resulting in a (hetero)sexing of space (Valentine, 1993). In this section I will critically discuss the relationships between gender, sexuality and space, reflecting upon how queer geographical frameworks have informed contemporary research. I will unpick geographical threads that have contributed greatly to this thesis before giving an account of contemporary queer research. Finally, I will assert the need for geography to queer gender (not just sexuality) to create non-conforming gender geographies.

### 2.2.1 Queering LGBT geographies

In his insightful paper, Binnie (1997: 223) writes that geographical research has sought to challenge ‘the marginalisation and exclusion of lesbian, gay and bisexual voices.’ He calls on academic geography to look beyond categorising and heterosexist understandings that erase sexual and gender dissidents who do not fall into any neat categorisation. Instead, he uses ‘camp’<sup>10</sup> ‘productively [to] work to undermine accepted values and truths’ (p. 229), advocating that campness – the performance of male femininity – is a political act worthy of serious discussion. He uses ‘camp’ to call on geographers to look beyond the fixed identities of past sexuality and space studies. Of campness, he states:

The spontaneity and formlessness of camp is less tied to fixed identities and meaning, and as such may be more empowering and easier to identify with for some sexual dissidents, than the institutions of the organised lesbian and gay community with their restrictive terms of membership. (Binnie, 1997: 230)

In making this claim, Binnie calls for a queer epistemology in geographical writing: one that engages with a geographical imagination able to transgress hegemonic epistemes of gender, sexuality and space. These queer knowledges do not seek truth or stability, but instead allow researchers to question the role that spaces, geographies and contexts play in (re)creating queer embodiments and subjectivities (Browne, 2006a: 889). While it is impossible fully to capture what queerness means, Puar (2006: 121-122) describes it as ‘dissenting, resistant and alternative ... it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations.’ One of the key tenets of queerness is its deployment in breaking down and destabilising binaries. While Browne (2006a: 886) notes that queerness is not something that can be easily or fully defined, she articulates that the epistemological process of queering can be a ‘radical requirement to question normativities and orthodoxies, in part now by rendering categories

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<sup>10</sup> Epistemologically, Binnie (1997: 229) uses ‘camp’, and the playful way in which it challenges gender and sexual normalcy, as a way of critiquing geographical truth, stating ‘the notion that there is a single observable truth has, of course, been used to silence and marginalise lesbian and gay lives and experiences.’ Binnie uses the work of Dyer (1993: 146) to note that camp ‘can constantly remind us that what we are seeing is only a view of life ... It stops us thinking that those who create the landscape of culture know more about life than we do ourselves’, thus allowing possibilities for queerness to flourish. Material campness, using clothing as a visual indicator of a specific gender or sexual identity and as a political embodiment of identity, has also been written about by Clarke and Turner (2007). Robinson, Hall and Hockey (2011) write extensively about the subversive nature of ‘campness’ and its uses as a specific performance of gender that spans gender or sexual identity. Male effeminacy has long been associated with homosexuality, but Robinson, Hall and Hockey (2011: 43) also discuss campness in gendered terms, saying that camp male performances are ‘engaged in deliberately and genuine subversive attacks on the norms of hegemonic masculinity.’

of sexualities, genders and spaces as fluid.’

Critical to thinking about gender non-conformity is the epistemological queering of gender beyond the hegemonic man-woman binary. An epistemological move has been made across queer geography to decentre binaries and to create space for potentials beyond dichotomies. These binaries are challenged across a variety of scales to mess up the conventional organisation of space. Using Duggan’s (2002) construct of ‘homonormativity’<sup>11</sup> to tackle the binarism of heteronormative/queer space, Goh (2018) states that exclusions experienced in heteronormative spaces can also be exposed within queer urbanisms, especially along lines of class and racial politics. In further problematising this universal notion of homonormativity, Brown (2009) warns against understanding it as the wholesale compliance with gay cosmopolitanism and commodification, arguing that fluidity can offer space for queers and marginalised ethnic groups and manoeuvrability within neoliberal social and economic regimes. Shulman’s (2013: 28) work *The Gentrification of the Mind* contributes to these debates, articulating that queer urban gentrification ‘replaces mix with homogeneity, it enforces itself through the repression of diverse expression’, quashing public life, controlling queerness and race through uneven policing while rendering other queer bodies as supplementary to capital accumulation and marketing. This gentrification (or genderfication?) of urban space fractures queer communities and disproportionately affects black and Latino gay men and lesbians and transgendered individuals (p.39).

Other binaries have also been deconstructed. In utilising Foucault’s biopolitics, geographers have sought to deconstruct the binary of public/private. When discussing sexual politics, Brown (2009: 23)<sup>12</sup> discusses how private sexual acts and the transmission of venereal disease impact public health policy, influencing the relationship between private sex-lives and the public state: ‘These geographies, while framed at the urban scale, must always be trans-scalar, and must always traverse the public–private divides in appreciating geopolitics, local state power, bodyspace, and of course the politics of life itself.’ These multi-scalar and multi-positional debates deconstruct any binary organisation of space, intimately affecting the relationships that individuals have with the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Duggan (2002) uses ‘homonormativity’ to describe the ideal for gay individuals to resemble heterosexual normativities through the prioritisation of same-sex marriage, the demonisation of promiscuity and the glorification of free-market capitalism, all of which works to narrow freedom, and domesticate (homo)sexual life.

<sup>12</sup> Brown and Knopp (2010) also offer more on biopolitics and the public governing of populations and identity through public health regimes.



By reflecting on the experiences of queer people, the urban-rural binary has also been challenged. This queering has been done by critiquing the metrocentricism of geographical inquiry that often focuses on cities with prominent queer histories (Anderson, 2018) through empirically researching queer experiences in ‘small cities’ (Myrdahl, 2013), or by questioning assumptions made about service provision and queer communities in rural areas (Baker and Beagan, 2016). Importantly, when considering queer geopolitics, Oswin (2008: 787) problematises narratives that frame ‘progressive’, western urban centres in opposition to ‘Other’ places and identities positioned as ‘backwards’.

This thesis will certainly seek to destabilise binaries. Firstly, academic consideration has been given to the relationship between fluid and rigid understandings of identity, particularly in terms of gender and sexualities. Whereas earlier geographical accounts saw sexual identity categories as being the key modes of difference, Khayatt (2002: 495) discusses the benefits of gender and sexual fluidities when discussing what this means for queer identities. She articulates:

My recognition that identity is fluid, that it is not constant or unchanging, allowed me to think of the term as relational. The fluidity of identity allows the terms of mobilisation to change, to develop, to disintegrate without necessarily dissolving the identity.

The relational notion of identity is hence central to this thesis. Considering how gender is created and embodied, and how this process is enacted in relation to other gendered bodies, raises inherently geographical questions about how such a process fluctuates and changes across and in different places. Knopp (2004: 122) notes the benefits of being fluid in response to ‘the stalemate represented by ... contending identitarian political positions’, noting that radical ‘*anti-identitarian* politics of hybridity and fluidity’ can create post-colonial, post-feminist and queer politics.

However, the binary of fluidity-rigidity has itself also been queered. Browne (2006a: 888) notes that ‘queer’ should not become a ‘simplistically appropriated identity category’, mimicking the fixity of identity categories such as ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ or ‘bisexual’. However, Oswin (2008: 92) believes that Browne does not go far enough in critically engaging with the apparent fluidity of ‘queer’:

So, while I agree with Browne that queer and LGBT are not synonymous, I question the analytical usefulness of defining queer as fluid and beyond

normativity. Such a move does not reconfigure the mapping of resistant/oppressive onto homosexuals/ heterosexuals.

Oswin argues that, in rendering identity as fluid, research potentially fails to consider the very real material inequalities felt by individuals who do not conform to normativity. Rather, these individuals do not exist ‘beyond normativity’, but are profoundly affected by it – by gender and sexual norms and oppressions. Moreover, Nestle, Howell and Wilchins (2002: 29) acknowledge that some feminist theorists question the radicality of fluidity and gender queerness, articulating that ‘transsexuals, butch/femmes and drag queens’ are actually ‘gender-conforming because they partake in binary stereotypes.’ Davis (2009: 102) also demonstrates that even those who identify with fluidity exist within normative social regimes, which can then curtail the possibilities for self-representation. She cites Butler (2004) in rejecting the idea that gender fluidity should be based on some utopian notion of ‘radical free agency’. Rather, fluidity is perhaps better used as a theoretical and philosophical tool to question categorisation, rather than reflecting individuals’ grounded experiences of gender<sup>13</sup>, with Davis (2009: 103) adding that, ‘no matter how fluidly gender is conceptualised, it is always juxtaposed against, intelligible, coherent, stable, hegemonic beings.’ Queering the fluid-rigid distinction, Nash and Gorman-Murray (2017)<sup>14</sup> use the work of Saldanha (2006: 18) to consider identity in terms of momentary viscosity, meaning that moments of fixity can still emerge from moments of flux:

Local and temporal thickening of interacting bodies ... collectively become sticky, capable of capturing more bodies like them ... under certain circumstances, the collective dissolves, the constituent bodies flowing freely again.

Where these moments of viscosity occur reflects the social, material and bodily geographies that are ‘formulated through place’ (Nash and Gorman-Murray, 2017: 7). Not only does this claim demonstrate how identity can be experienced along a fluid-rigid continuum, but Saldanha also discusses how this theory can be used to understand queer subjectivities as

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<sup>13</sup> However, it should be noted that five of my participants did think of their identity, in some way, as being fluid, questioning whether a wholesale rejection of ‘fluidity’ is also a viable conceptual move.

<sup>14</sup> Rather than considering sexual identity as something either fixed or fluid, Nash and Gorman-Murray (2017: 1524) put forward a case for conceptualising identity through assemblage thinking. They say that it requires ‘a recognition of the intersections of the social and the material, more-than-human or non-human presences or actants in the constitution of meaningful geographies.’ Assemblage thinking is used here as a way to conceptualise bodies, subjects, affects and moments of indeterminacy and temporality, allowing researchers to think critically about the queer subject and differences between different identities and their geographies. In my thesis, I do speak about ‘assemblages’, but acknowledge that I have not pursued the complex debates circling around ‘assemblage theory’ (but see Anderson and McFarlane, 2011).

both relational and collective.

Within feminist geographical research, work has questioned the ontological and epistemological conceptualisations of space and place so as to explore the differences between men and women (McDowell, 1983; 1999). Browne, Nash and Hines (2010: 573) assert that this latter distinction should itself be queered within gender geographies, suggesting that the dominant framings of man/woman, male/female and masculine/feminine genders are ripe for critique:

Such omissions mean that assumptions predicated on a straightforward gender mapping onto biological sex organs and gender roles and relations grounded in male/female and man/woman separations, are often uncritically reproduced. (Browne, Nash and Hines 2010: 573)

While critical work has been undertaken to disrupt the correlations between both men and an essentialist notion of masculinity (Jackson, 1993; Hopkins and Noble, 2009) and women and an equivalent notion of femininity (Laurie *et. al.* 1999; Browne, 2004; Nash and Bain, 2007), little has yet been done to consider subjectivities that exist beyond and between the gender positions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. Even within the growing field of transgender geographies, much of the research reflects the experiences of binary trans individuals. This thesis will problematise this dichotomy, then, explicitly creating ontological space for gender subjectivities that disassociate from normative genders and thereby seeks to b(l)end, distort and/or reject the explicitness of man/woman and masculinity/femininity in fostering what I will characterise as a queer gender non-conforming geography.

### **2.2.2 Transgender geographies**

A growing body of work exploring transgender geographies provides a useful platform on which to contemplate gender non-conforming gender geographies. In academic geography, early work carried out by Lewis and Pile (1996: 36) challenged the binarisation of masculinity and femininity through the transgressive nature of carnival and the transgressive body of the ‘transvestite’, but this work arguably needs more conceptual framing. Queer and feminist theory has created space for critical engagement with the experiences, embodiments, politics and geographies of transgender individuals. Doan (2007: 58) states that this move to research transgender lives is vital as it permits ‘transgender individuals greater freedom to express the range of their gender identity positions.’ However, gender theorists (e.g. Butler, 1990) have come under increasing criticism from within academic geography as complex theories identifying trans people as the archetypical queer trope –

deconstructing hegemonic notions of gender and sexuality – ‘fail to address the lived realities of transfolk’ (Nash, 2011: 197). Instead, a flourish of empirically-rich studies has sought to engage with trans subjectivities, practices and politics that ‘far exceed the narrow focus on either same sex desire or gender inversion’ (Oswin, 2008: 583). These empirical studies are diverse and increasingly numerous. Just as space is actively produced and heterosexualised through repetitive instances of ‘norms’ until re-marked through the repetition of gay acts, activism and politics (Binnie, 1997), space can be actively produced as (cis)gendered through the repetitive performances of masculinity and femininity and their mapping onto apparently unambiguous male and female bodies respectively. Those who disrupt these masculinist<sup>15</sup> correlations are exposed; rendered unreadable, illegible and unrecognisable (Nash, 2011).

The consequences of this illegibility can be experienced across many spaces, scales and temporalities. Namaste (1996) discusses instances of transphobic violence and ‘genderbashing<sup>16</sup>’, while Doan (2010) reflects on how instances of hate speech, insults and violence impose hetero-patriarchal regulation upon the bodies of trans people and their access to public space, reflecting a default cisgender politics which dominates the production of urban space. In what has been termed ‘the bathroom problem’ by Browne (2004), geographers (e.g. Bender-Baird, 2016) have considered bathroom spaces as rigidly gendered, with Cavanagh (2018: 183) identifying how bathroom usage is ‘architecturally, bodily or affectively’ about the reproduction of normative gender binaries that ‘mirror contemporary anxieties about gender [and] sexual difference.’ Trans experiences of prison environments (Rosenberg and Oswin, 2015), the family home (Schroeder, 2015), nightclubs (Misgav and Johnston, 2015), activist spaces (Doan, 2017) and in work and community spaces (Hines, 2010) have also contributed to a rich body of work disclosing the experience of transgender individuals.

Even so, little of this research addresses the experiences of those individuals who do not identify as binary trans<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, Oswin (2008) encourages geographers to address gender

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<sup>15</sup> Doan (2007: 58) understands these correlations as masculinist, since ‘male power ... thrives on the separation and segregation of the sexes and thereby would provide transgendered individuals greater freedom to express the range of their gender identity positions.’

<sup>16</sup> Namaste (1996) uses ‘genderbashing’, rather than ‘gaybashing’ or ‘queerbashing’, explicitly to name the violence perpetrated against individuals because of how their gender is read, rather than their sexuality.

<sup>17</sup> I use the term ‘binary trans’ as a bracket term for those individuals who may have a transgender history, but identify in a way that indicates a move from one gender pole to another (from man to woman, or vice versa) rather than identifying within some kind of gender middle ground.

knowledges created by queer subjectivities that go beyond the gender binary. She criticises research that upholds cisgender privilege and which, in doing so, effectively assumes that trans (and, as I shall discuss, gender non-conforming) individuals desire to uphold or replicate the gender binary. In queering 'transgender' and thinking about its meaning beyond an identity category, Oswin (2006) encourages us to envisage queerness in a manner that goes beyond normative or (Western) mainstream discourse. In her exciting book *Transforming Gender, Sex and Place*, Johnston (2018: 2) discusses 'gender variant geographies', when discussing the life-worlds of those who face gender identity discrimination (including feminine men and masculine women). She discusses at length, the spatialities of gender variant identities, seeking to decentre geographical knowledges away from cisgender modes of understanding threading this through New Zealand's rich gender diverse Maori culture and building upon contemporary social and political debates on gender diversity. She states that:

Gender variant geographies are filtered through people's embodied feelings of belonging and alienation. Claiming and making inclusive gender variant places, is an ongoing and transformative project and one which continues to revolve around, resist and live in-between and beyond binary gender. (Johnston, 2018: 163)

I wish to deploy similar articulations when thinking about developing gender non-conforming geographies, specifically through adding a post-colonial dimension to Scottish gender hegemonies. Using the work of Bacchetta (2002), Oswin (2006) writes that queerness should be understood though 'thickly historicized, contextualized, rescaled transversality' (Bacchetta, 2002: 953) where we pay 'energetic attention to the modes in which scale, scapes, scapeflows, and hot sites of power are produced by and embedded in shifting relations of power (of colonialism, postcolonialisms, gender, sexuality, race, class, religion, etc.)' (p.970). Understanding that there are innumerable ways to understand gender subjectivities and, in so doing, to queer the hegemonic gender binary, discloses possibilities for a more diffuse geographical consideration through gender non-conforming geographies: ones that do not focus solely on the (mis)production of gender norms, but that can be understood as a more localised 'product of historical and cultural contingency which cannot be mapped, defined or easily known' (Oswin, 2006: 785).

## 2.3 (Non-conforming) gender and material (im)possibilities in Scotland and beyond

Gender non-conformity is highly contextual – embodied, read and regulated against/by normalised performances of gender that are geographically contingent and historically contextualised. Empirically, then, gender non-conformity is considered through a constant and often fraught relationship with spatial socio-cultural norms and is reflected by normalised performative representations of gender in specific places. Just as hegemonic gender norms are produced across different scales and spaces, the regulation of these performances of gender are also inherently geographical. When discussing the relativity of gender, Thein and Del Castro (2012: 1148) argue that ‘this relational stance emphasizes the mobile co-constituencies of spaces, subjectivities, and socio-spatial processes of power and inequality as embodied processes through which genders take place.’ They understand that gender is ‘materially and discursively co-constituted [to] shape, intervene, affirm and challenge presumptive categories’ (ibid.). When discussing the spatiality of hegemonic masculinity, Hopkins and Noble (2009) suggest that it is essential to interrogate hegemonic gender performances and the ways that they are lived and challenged in everyday and local circumstances. The importance of localised knowledges and situated understandings of gender prompts me to address how non-conformity may be embodied and experienced in Scotland, positioning my thesis geographically<sup>18</sup>. I will discuss how gender expression has been contemplated in geographic research, before considering how Browne’s (2004) ‘genderism’ is used to conceptualise the regulation of gender expression and the policing of bodies which are illegible or ‘out-of-place geographically. Finally, I will discuss the importance of materiality in gender discourse, questioning how masculinity and femininity are embodied.

### 2.3.1. Situating Scotland in gendered debates

As I have argued, gendered hegemonies are both geographically and historically contextual. Exploring gender and sexual histories in Scotland can give context to contemporary discourse, and, while the practices, motivations and politics behind challenging the gender binary may have changed over time, it is important not to ignore the connections between

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<sup>18</sup> While I have pointed out that localised histories/ontologies and geographies play an important role in the way that gender is understood (historically and coterporally) in Scotland, I also do not wish to homogenise these gendered knowledges. Hanawa (1994 in Oswin, 2006: 785) says that ‘it is neither possible nor desirable to insist upon pure local episteme’, and instead research should consider situated ‘circuits of knowledge’.

contemporary gender non-conforming politics and their intricate and engrained pasts when considering queer gender futures.

Masculinity and femininity in Scotland have been researched by academics and popular writers, with McArthur and Long's (1957) novel *No Mean City* describing at length experiences of working-class masculinity and gang violence in Glasgow. Working-class Scottish masculinity has also been discussed academically by Johnston and McIvor (2004: 135), who argue that 'working in such tough and hazardous occupations as coal mining, the iron and steel works and shipbuilding, nurtured and reinforced masculine identities, especially that of the Glaswegian 'hard man.' Whether it be socio-economic circumstance, gender-based inequality or environmental conditioning, Peake and Trotz (1999: 127) suggest that 'masculinities and femininities are not given but are historically produced via struggle and consent.' These historicised constructions of masculinity and femininity are framed by 'constitutive relationships between class, gender, sexuality, race and place' (Berg and Longhurst: 2003, 356). Socialisation into a locally hegemonic form of masculinity is achieved through the repeating of gender norms, rendering those who do not comply as weak, feminine and 'other', resulting in a 'failure' of gender (Halberstam, 1998). In Scotland, work has considered masculinity, femininity and health (Hunt, Hannah and West, 2004), masculinity and age (Emslie, Hunt and O'Brien, 2004) and masculinity and race (Hopkins, 2009). Perhaps predictably, much of this research privileges men's masculinity (and to a lesser extent women's femininity), perpetuating the idea that failing masculinist standards equates to a 'crisis of masculinity' or a form of feminisation because, ontologically, they are the only two possibilities of gender performance. Refreshingly, Hopkins (2009: 300) notes that discussing shifting masculinities as a 'crisis' is problematic:

Any criticism, weakness or failure directed at men does not necessarily result in crisis, there are many ways of being a man, and masculinities are multiple, complex and fluid. Furthermore, the crisis of masculinity discourse can also be used as an anti-feminist tool to further marginalise women and women's interests.

This multidimensional, pluralistic understanding of what constitutes as masculinity or femininity has been valuable in attempting to understand gendered subjectivities and realities. Similarly, in research carried out in Scotland, Bondi (1998) sought to dismantle gender dichotomies, working to destabilise the binaries of public/private and city/suburb to challenge stereotypical interpretations of masculinity and femininity and their spatialities. Nonetheless, limited work has been done to queer this gender dichotomy, meaning that

cissexist understandings of gender are still prevalent within geographic research undertaken in Scotland.

Problematising this cissexist narrative can be advanced through rereading sexual histories in Scotland. Cross-dressing, transvestism and gender transgression were historically and culturally synonymous with homosexuality, male prostitution and effeminacy (Meek, 2015). Cross-dressing subcultures came into fruition in Edinburgh and Glasgow in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, threatening Puritan values in Scotland and castigating not only homosexual men, but also anyone who took part in gender transgressive practices. Meek (2015: 188) goes on to make the interesting point that, following the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967, those who engaged in gender transgressive practices in Scotland were further berated, this time by gay men, as the image of the ‘respectable homosexual’ encouraged individuals not to take part in gender transgressive practices:

The respectable homosexual was expected to engage in discreet, private sexual relations and would not challenge accepted norms relating to social acceptability. The homosexual who conducted his sexual life in public, or who embodied the evils of gender transgression, was excluded from a new narrative of homosexual respectability. (Meek, 2015: 188)

This disassembling of gender and sexual orientation stigmatised individuals who expressed and embodied their gender in unconventional ways, suggesting that any expression of gender transgression or non-conformity should be kept out of public view and public consciousness. Reconstructing these gender transgressive histories – and the regulatory reactions – can give meaningful and contextual backing to contemporary research that has been undertaken to explore the experiences of those who do not adhere to the gender binary in Scotland. Considering the contemporary experiences of non-binary people in the UK<sup>19</sup>, *Scottish Trans Alliance* has released numerous reports to ‘investigate the specific needs and views’ of non-binary people (Valentine, 2016: 6). These reports investigate health and social service usage, employment and views about legal recognition (ibid.) and using GICs (Valentine, 2017). While research conducted by *Scottish Trans Alliance* has been useful in providing a basic knowledge of the experiences of Scotland’s non-binary people, little qualitative academic research has been conducted in Scotland to reflect further upon these relatively unknown life-worlds. With work on Scottish gender hegemonies providing much insight into how gender is experienced in Scotland, even emphasising the geographical element of how

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<sup>19</sup> While *Scottish Trans Alliance* research notes experiences of non-binary people across the UK, the report does acknowledge that, because they are a Scottish group with well-established networks in Scotland, Scottish non-binary people are over-represented in their sample.



gender is understood, it is also essential to draw attention to geographical understandings of how these gender norms are regulated and policed.

### 2.3.2 'Genderism' and regulating illegible gender expression

Browne's (2004) concept of 'genderism' is utilised throughout this thesis. I have attempted to deploy it conceptually and practically, as a body of social ideas and practices imposed upon gender non-conforming citizens illustrative of how gender expression is policed and regulated in different spaces. As non-normative bodies openly contest, de-dichotomise and destabilise hegemonic understandings of masculinity and femininity, 'genderism' is here used to describe the reactive regulation of such (im)proper ways to *be* gendered:

Genderism is used here to articulate the often unnamed instances of discrimination based on the discontinuities between sex/gender with which an individual identifies, and how others, in a variety of spaces, read their sex/gender. (Browne, 2004: 332)

Even though Browne's research focuses on 'women who do not 'fit' within boundaries of feminine norms' (Browne, 2006b: 124), genderism can also be used more widely to account for the many ways in which the gender non-conforming body may be spatially (mis)understood, transcending identity or gender categories. This move requires ontological understanding of the space between 'man' and 'woman' so as to make unobtainable gendered realities possible. While Butler's (1990) performativity<sup>20</sup> notion has been critiqued by geographers (e.g. Brown, 2000; Nash, 2011) because it frustratingly overlooks experiences of groundedness and context, as already mentioned, Browne (2006b: 126) argues that performative geographies can be generative if they 'recognise the fluidity of place and space [in] contesting the binary separations of man/woman, recognising not only the contextual contingency of sights/sites of bodies but also their continual (re)formations.'

How gender is controlled and policed is spatially and socially dictated. Browne (2004) notes that gender ambiguous or mismatched bodies – where gender is either unreadable at a glance or it 'fails' to meet normative expectations of masculinity or femininity – are particularly at risk in places where space is segregated into men's and women's spaces. Returning to

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<sup>20</sup> Butler (1990: 191) defines performativity as: 'repetition as at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and as the mundane ritualised form of their legitimisation. The effect of gender is produced through the stylisation of the body, and hence must be understood as the mundane ways in which bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.'

references already scattered throughout my literature to this point, studies have considered gender policing in single-sex spaces such as toilets (Bender-Baird, 2016), changing rooms (Colls, 2004), health services (Grossman and D'augelli, 2006) and gyms (Hargie, Mitchell and Somerville, 2017). Policing can involve violent assault or 'genderbashing' (Namaste, 1996), vocal intimidation and invalidation (Doan, 2010) or various microaggressions that perpetuate oppressive discourses through 'everyday insults, indignities [and] unintended and unconscious demeaning messages toward nondominant groups' (Smith, Shin and Officer, 2012). Simplistically, this gives power to the 'observer' of another's gender, rather than to the 'observed', eroding the latter's agency over gender. Some of Browne's (2006b: 136) participants are keen to note that they are not passive victims of these power relations, though, and remark on how, through acts of gender disorder, they use their bodies (particularly their breasts) to prove their womanhood: they '(re)make themselves women.' In rethinking how gender expression is (mis)read in different spaces and about how gender non-conforming identifying participants express their gender in a fashion that decentres the gender binary, I want to deploy genderism further, to explore how it is experienced by gender ambiguous bodies and gender non-conforming individuals.

### **2.3.3 The materiality of gender**

Genderism is also pertinent to debates raised in this thesis because it allows for a deep inquiry into the materiality of gender and gender expression. The manner in which someone 'looks' gendered, for instance, can make them more or less likely to be affected by genderism. In discussing the body as the site of gender deployment, Browne (2006b) shows how the sight of bodies can be read and interpreted. Wright (2010: 62) argues that, as queer geographers seek to 'engage with concrete social relations and practices[,] ... their insights are materialistic, spatialised and affective.' In capturing this point, Browne's discussion of the material illegibility of gender ambiguous bodies is key:

She [a research participant] interestingly moves between the body and fashion styles illustrating that the stylisation of bodies is a nexus of build, hair, dress that are read within and through particular sexed discourses. Attempting to fit within feminine dress conventions would not halt this woman's problematic experiences of being mistaken for a man (genderism) because her body would 'betray' her, and she would look like 'a man in drag'. Instead, the dichotomies of male/man and female/woman, which make her, often simultaneously, illegible (in her embodiment) and unintelligible (in the readings of others), are not based solely on individual performances. Rather this dichotomy is constituted within the 'chronotopic tripartite dynamism - of the social, of the body and of the self' (Wilton 2000: 251). Thus, the 'self-as-gendered is not purely socially produced, but a product of the meniscus between the body and

the social' (Wilton 2000: 249). Placing explanations for genderist policing processes upon the site of individual bodies does not recognize the constitutive betweenness that incorporates bodily sites, as well as sightings, in the formation of sexed corporealities. (Browne, 2006b: 130)

This quote captures many of the intricacies, and indeed failures, of attempts to map binary genders onto bodies that do not meet expected performances of masculinity or femininity. Firstly, imagining the affective nature of clothing, hair and build within gender non-conforming discourse is important. While some geographical research into the production of clothing, commodity chains and business networks has been undertaken (e.g. Hassler, 2003), little has been done to explore how the socio-materiality of clothing can be used to manipulate interpretations of gender. I deliberately use the word 'manipulate' here to emphasise that materials should not be understood as something that necessarily 'outs' individuals or 'gives them away'. It is important to recognise the agency that individuals possess, at least partially, to influence how they are read through their material choices. When carrying out research with black lesbian communities in New York, Moore (2006: 123) considers the interrelationship between bodies, materiality and place:

Physical representations of gender, indicated by clothing, hair, physical stance, the presence or absence of make-up and various other symbols, are extremely important markers of identification. People's style of clothing lets others in the community know right away how they choose to represent their gender as well as the type of physical representation they are attracted to.

Questioning how clothes are read through a gendered lens and empirically accounting for how individuals use clothes as part of their gender construction, promises an interesting strand of queer inquiry. Additionally, in reading the gendered self as an assemblage – constructed of materials, behaviours and the physical body – we can begin to grapple with a multi-dimensional understanding of how gendered bodies are embodied and read. The 'social relations through which disciplinary and material power are deployed and which exist in a particular dynamic relation to bodies and their (often eroticized) behaviours' (Wilton, 2000: 239) are pivotal to understanding how genderism is experienced in different places. Limited by binary gender ontologies and socialised stereotypes of what constitutes masculinity and femininity (and who has the 'right' to embody these stereotypes), those who are unreadable at a moment's glance are deemed 'strange' and are thereby susceptible to genderisms.

Gendered materialities have been interrogated by other writers when discussing queer identity, practices, politics and representations. Hines (2010: 609) ascertains that queer

geographers must go further to ‘develop material and corporal analysis of gender and sexuality’, addressing how these states are societally understood, while dialectically remaining ‘attentive to discursive formations.’ Ahmed (2006: 551) offers this kind of analysis through advocating for a ‘queer phenomenology’ that emphasises the importance of lived experience, valuing what cannot be seen but going beyond what is made ordinary by perception. The intimate co-constitution of bodies and objects is central to how gender is understood. Distorting these objects/materials, with their own gendered histories and genealogies, can create a queer (re)reading of the relationship between body and objects that makes new gendered ‘futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost or even becoming queer’ (p.554). When reflecting upon participant experiences of selectively wearing certain clothes in specific places in an attempt to avoid gender-based harassment, Johnston and Longhurst (2016: 46) articulate that the body is ‘both written and writes: that is, bodies are more than just texts written upon representational fields; instead, flesh is articulated by language. Cultural contexts do not simply surround sexed and gendered bodies, but also come to inhabit them.’ Rather than simply seeing the material and the body as something solely physical, the readings of these materials are contextual, spatial and experiential. From the position of the researcher<sup>21</sup>, Bain and Nash (2006: 102) discuss their anxieties of ‘blending in’ with their participants when undertaking research in a queer bathhouse. Their introspective paper discusses their own anxieties about ‘blending in’, stating their unease with undressing in the bathhouse when carrying out research. They claim that in not undressing, their clothing set them apart in the queer bathhouse, and that the clothes ‘gave us confidence and perhaps contributed to our sense of ease’ (ibid.).

However, it is not simply queer bodies that have been interrogated from a material stand point. Queer symbolism such as rainbow flags, pink triangles and gender-neutral toilet signs have been explored by geographers in discussing notions of belonging in processes of community-building (e.g. Gorman-Murray and Waitt, 2009; Bain, Payne and Isen, 2015). Knopp (2004: 124), meanwhile, uses actor-network theory (ANT) and non-representational theory to explore ‘“non-human forces’ and their affect and agency over our experiences as humans’. ANT allows research to interrogate materials, such as clothes, to understand queer and gendered ontologies, taking seriously the material, discursive, individual, collective, active and passive’ (p.126) importance of materials. Using the example of ‘coming out’ – ‘a highly contingent and contextualized process involving all manner of human and non-human

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<sup>21</sup> Through using a feminist methodology, Bain and Nash (2006) position themselves as an integral part of the fieldwork process, discussing how they position themselves (ontologically and materially) within research space. This is something that I discuss more in Chapter 3.

forces' (p. 25) – Knopp argues that materiality, distributed around all manner of other non-human actors, has the power to shape queer life-worlds, negotiations and decision-makings.

## 2.4 Gender from beyond the binary: a focus on diversifying gender

Limited geographical work has been undertaken to explore gender identities that exist beyond the gender binary, with the majority of research, until recently, replicating the long history of the discipline chiefly engaging the geographies of those who sit comfortably within the gender binary. A desire to deconstruct the hegemonic trinarities of male-man-masculinity and woman-female-femininity has now heralded an important queer juncture in geographical research, with calls very recently arising for research to look beyond common narratives to consider the diversity of conceptualisations, embodiments, identities and geographical contexts in which trans lives are lived (Brown, Nash and Hines, 2010). Beyond academic geography, meanwhile, a breadth of work reflects upon how gender has been transgressed, entailing academic inquiry into transgender studies at the nexus between queer theory, feminist study and the history of sexuality (Stryker and Whittle, 2006).

Work that has been critical to this thesis and already introduced in section 2.2.2, such as that undertaken by Browne (2004, 2006b) and Nash and Bain (2007), discusses the lives of gender-variant people who do not adhere to standardised embodiments of masculinity and femininity (some identify as transgender whereas others do not), critically engaging with the implications of performing unreadable or distorted configurations of gender<sup>22</sup>. In terms of queer geographical research, these pieces are important as they puncture the boundary between transgender-cisgender, analysing the spatial implications of gender expression and non-conformity more generally. However, I now wish to consider research that recognises the growing need for beyond-the-binary knowledges in researching gender geographies with their own radical, deconstructive politics and have a stake in imagining various gender queer futures. Other disciplines (including sociology, history and cultural studies) have perhaps been quicker to take up the challenge of carrying out research with gender non-conforming individuals, particularly those who identify as non-binary or gender queer. I then consider

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<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, much of the geographical research that discusses illegible embodiments of gender reflects upon (assumed) female masculinity (e.g. Browne, 2004). Little research has been undertaken to reflect upon the geographies of (assumed) male femininity. Bell *et. al.*'s (1994: 31) early paper discusses the gender expression, performativity and constructiveness of identities which sit at the intersection of sex, gender, identity and space, such as 'lipstick lesbians' and the 'gay skinhead'.

how these other conceptualised notions of gender non-conformity can be grounded in the likes of my own research, reflecting upon the experiences of gender non-conformers and their relationship to the state.

### 2.4.1 Situating non-conforming gender identities

The interplay between identity and expression can create numerous avenues for geographical inquiry as individuals negotiate gender epistemologically, maybe attempting to situate themselves outwith the gender binary, and spatially, as they negotiate gender performance, disclosure or concealment within different contexts. Gender identity is central to gender non-conforming lives, and how gender is traversed is inherently geographical:

Even in environments where a multiplicity of gender identities exists, gender is not unbound ... While multiple gender options exist, and individuals move in and out of these categories ... gender identities continue to be structured such that movements across these categories both within and across contexts is regulated ... The traversing and inhabiting of multiple gender categories remain context and purpose specific. Thus, in contrast to perceptions that gender diversity and movement across boundaries of identity are a result of freedom from bounded gender rules and classifications, fluidity is not simply outside but (like coherence and stability) is constituted in and across sociopolitical cultures. (Davis, 2009: 100-101)

By considering gender identity in geographical terms, work on trans geographies can learn from the likes of Davis to focus on more than expression, giving voice to the potentials of gender non-conforming politics and how this politics can be understood through gendered spaces, languages and ontologies. Further to this, identity, language and semiotic agency have also been discussed by Corwin (2017). In considering how genderqueer individuals both challenge *and* maintain the gender binary in their everyday interactions, Corwin considers how identity can be developed through the environment and the semiotic signs within it ‘to interactively construct non-binary genders’ (p.255). This thesis will indeed consider how non-conforming gender identities come to be understood as a personal *and* relational project of self-finding.

The importance of language for gender non-conforming identities has also been discussed within international contexts. Academic and non-academic research investigates hidden gender histories within Western Europe (for example, Norton (2009) discusses ‘Mollies’ as figures of male femininity and their link to homosexuality in Georgian England), but has also recognised non-Western gender-variant identities. In discussing identities such as Hijra in India and Pakistan or Kathoey in Thailand, Vincent and Manzano (2017, 23) state that

‘the binarised nature of language when discussing gender in English makes it difficult to do justice to non-Western social systems, which have culturally embedded articulations of gender beyond the binary.’ Tafoya (2003: 402) also talks widely about sexual behaviour, boundaries, bodies and the gender identity construction of Two-Spirited people in the Pacific Northwest: ‘even the discrete categories that exist for social science research will not always make conceptual sense to Native people, who may have a far more sophisticated taxonomy addressing spirituality and function, rather than appearance.’ Non-Western queer identities can play an important role in decolonising gender politics. Central to this decolonising project is the aim to release individuals from the dichotomised distinctions of gender. Lugones (2010: 743) discusses the imposition of gender knowledges through colonisation:

Beginning with the colonisation of the Americas and the Caribbean, a hierarchical, dichotomous distinction between human and non-human was imposed on the colonized in the service of Western man. It was accompanied by other dichotomous hierarchical distinctions, among them that between men and women. This distinction became a mark of the human and a mark of civilization. Only the civilized are men or women. Indigenous peoples of the Americas and enslaved Africans were classified as not human in species—as animals, uncontrollably sexual and wild.

The dichotomising of gender knowledges – a practice of humanising and civilising – worked to subjugate and oppress those who did not embody the Western-centric ideals of/distinctions between man and woman. This thesis works to decolonise these knowledges through enacting a critique of colonial and heterosexist gender oppression. Through this, I understand hegemonic binary knowledges of gender to be a function of a colonial knowledge-system which must be decolonised in order to create the possibility for genders which do not comply with the gender binary. Morgensen (2011) notes that queer Two-spirited activism challenges colonialist practices and politics through centring Native epistemologies and critiquing heteropatriarchy, indicating that activism and theory works to re-shape colonial geographic thought and practice. By considering queer identity and its connectivity to geographical contexts, gender non-conforming geographies can investigate the place (or placelessness) of the plethora of identities that exist beyond the gender binary.

#### **2.4.2. Non-binary and genderqueer experiences: health, education and service usage**

Non-binary and genderqueer identities have recently been approached across disciplines, as notions of inclusion become increasingly important throughout academic, policy and social research. As some service-providers adapt to be more inclusive of genders sitting beyond

the gender binary, research has reflected upon the experiences of those using these services, and how non-binary gender identities navigate services that are often institutionally and organisationally binarised around the standard gender polarity. Pervasive information gathering practices that over-rely on a binarised system of identity (Figure 2.1) are instrumental in erasing intersex people, agender and non-gendered people, non-binary and genderqueer people, as well as people with culturally specific genders, such as two-spirited, aboriginal or indigenous folks (Ansara, 2015).

The screenshot shows the 'About you' step of a registration process. At the top, there are four tabs: 'About you' (active), 'Your address', 'Confirm your details', and 'Additional information'. Below the tabs, the form is titled 'Step 1 - About you'. A note states 'All of these fields are required'. The form contains the following fields:

- Title \***: A dropdown menu with '--- Select ---'.
- First Name \***: A text input field with placeholder 'Your first name'.
- Surname \***: A text input field with placeholder 'Your surname'.
- Gender \***: A dropdown menu with '--- Select ---' and a list of options: 'Male' and 'Female'.
- Email Address \***: A text input field with placeholder 'Your email address'.
- Confirm Email Address \***: A text input field with placeholder 'Confirm your email address'.
- Create your username \***: A section with instructions: 'Choose a unique username for your account. Make it something memorable, or simply use your email address.' It includes a checkbox 'Use my email address as my username' and a text input field with placeholder 'Your username'.

At the bottom right, there is a 'Next step »' button.

**Figure 2.1: (Bi)Gender options for registering with mygov.scot which registers access to public services in Scotland. (www.mygov.scot)**

This ‘bigenderism’ – the view that ‘accepts the rules of gender and does not permit or allow for variations, exceptions and/or deviations from the norm’ (Gilbert, 2009: 95) – works as a biopolitical and bureaucratic device through which ‘governments, schools, hospitals, the professions, the arts, and virtually all social institutions classify and categorise those who avail themselves of or come into contact with their services of necessities’ (ibid.). Hunt (2018: 33) notes the importance of ‘fleshing out’ or giving body to these erasures, however, arguing that ‘this erasure itself is a determinant of health, shaping the ability to be seen, heard, and accounted for in all aspects of the lives of ... people who fall outside the gender binary’, as they exist beyond the scope of everyday life. She advocates that a re-ontologising of services must replace the Western-centric categorisation largely perpetuated by service



providers. By taking seriously two-spirit and trans knowledges, she continues, services would be better prepared to deal with gender-based violence, and social inequalities so as to create healthy, self-determining individuals and communities.

Much has been written, both academically and non-academically, about gender non-conforming individuals' experiences of health services, gender identity clinics (GIC) and sexual health clinics (see Valentine, 2017). Gender non-conforming individuals face a variety of institutional and financial barriers when attempting to access health care (Puckett *et. al.* 2018), which may result in their seeking out alternative ways to accessing hormones or surgery (Metastasia *et. al.* 2018). While I am wary of equating living a gender non-conforming life with any necessity or presumed desire for medical intervention, research within transgender studies has been instrumental in challenging both medical assumptions routinely made about gender non-conforming people and the barriers that they face when attempting to negotiate medical facilities and gender dysphoria. Taylor *et. al.* (2018: 2) state that, unlike binary trans experiences, non-binary experiences of gender may be 'more dynamic and less linear [in] nature ... For these individuals, transition may represent an open-ended process or project, rather than a shift from one clearly defined gendered position to another.' The non-linear and perhaps non-settled nature of gender non-conforming identity construction means that the individuals concerned are often in contestation with clinical (both medical and psychiatric) procedures developed on a binary model of gender. Further, Thorne (2017: 1) invites researchers to queer how gender is conceived in medical studies, launching a challenge to 'recognise the docility with which we have uncritically accepted and even embraced the binary assumption', so as to recognise the 'immeasurable harms that must now be redressed.'

In Richards, Bouman and Barker's (2017) important book *Genderqueer and Non-Binary Genders*, they collate a volume that reflects upon gender non-conforming experiences of activism, the law, psychiatry and various medical procedures and hormonal interventions, to name but a few. In this volume, particular attention might be paid to Iantaffi's (2017: 287) reflections on future directions for gender non-conforming research, its potentials, and the various routes that it could take in meandering through the thick ontological and embodied entanglements of gender:

In the area of identity labels and politics, one of the potential future directions on non-binary gender identities seems to trouble the liberal – and somewhat self-congratulatory – Anglo acceptance of trans bodies by inviting us to truly dismantle cisgenderism; to question the assumed essentialism of masculinity

and femininity as natural polarities; to consider our complex, intersectional bodies and lived experiences; and to engage with a different framework of genders altogether.

This quote provides broad scope for various ways in which geographical research could be emboldened to embrace genders that are, in some way, non-conforming. Gender non-conforming geographies evokes a series of questions spanning spaces and scales: how can gender be understood and spatialised through an individual search for self? How can space be produced to destabilise dominant understandings of gender? How do individuals affect and how are they affected by national politics and how does the state interact with (non-conforming) gendered individuals? What might gender-critical queer futures look like and how can embodied experiences of gender challenge gender inequalities and oppressions? A decolonisation of identities and knowledges is needed, meaning that research must ‘believe in the possibility that some people have the capacity to simply tell us who they are’ (Iantaffi, 2017: 288).

## **2.5 (Gender)Queer collectives and queer activisms**

Experiences of gender and sexuality have been critically addressed by geographers through empirically-rich and diverse study. These studies have been instrumental in understanding the relationships between minoritarian identity positions and how individuals interact with, move through and negotiate heteronormative and cisnormative spaces. However, some researchers consider this approach to queer research to be self-limiting, and ‘firmly grounded in the categories used to classify a population’ rather than looking to alliance building or world-making practices (Gimenez, 2006: 426). In this section, I will discuss the importance of queer collectivity for gender non-conforming geographies and how it may contribute to queer collective practices. Finally, I will consider the various ways in which researchers have understood performance as a way of understanding the pro-activity of non-normative genders and sexualities.

### **2.5.1 Creating collective queer politics through the individual**

Challenges to identity politics and its association with assimilationism have been central to queer theory since the 2000s. Duggan’s (2002) oft-cited work on homonormativity<sup>23</sup> has

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<sup>23</sup> However, Brown (2009) encourages geographers not to think of homonormativity in universal terms, encouraging researchers to look beyond its assimilationist ambitions to appreciate alternative queer economies and practices.

been key within geographical arguments. It considers the recurring exclusions that result from the assimilation or normalisation of certain embodiments of gay or lesbian life and considers how this assimilation is perpetuated through its alignment with neoliberal and inclusive political agendas. Duggan (2002: 177) states that neoliberal notions of inclusion are responsible for the ‘repeated assimilationist tirades against more flamboyant in-your-face activists.’ A politics based on the normalisation of specific formations and performances of bodies and individuals ‘contest[s] and displace[s] the expansively democratic vision represented by progressive activists ... replacing it with a model of a narrowly constrained public life cordoned off from the “private” control and vast inequalities of economic life’ (p.177). The fragmentation and normalisation of certain acceptable forms of ‘gayness’ – including the likes of same-sex marriage and monogamy (Wilkinson, 2013) – rejects gender non-conformity, both in terms of gender identity (eliminating the existence of genders beyond binary categorisation) and expression (limiting performances of masculinity or femininity that do not correspond to ‘man’ and ‘woman’ respectively). Noting this conflict, Halberstam (2005: 19) suggests that the emergence of individual ‘uniqueness as radical style in hip queer urban settings must be [critically] considered alongside the transmutations of capitalism and late postmodernity.’ Using the work of Duggan (2002), Halberstam (2005: 19) notes that this ‘is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilised gay constituency and privatised, depoliticised gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.’<sup>24</sup> Halberstam goes on to suggest that academics researching or even adopting this individualised notion of identity may risk creating narrow scholarship, reductive and stifling of more expansive and sophisticated projects. Brown (2001 in Sothorn, 2006) is also critical of a research agenda that over-emphasises the individualisation of identity in research:

Identitarian political projects are very real effects of late modern modalities of power, but as effects, they do not fully express its character and so do not adequately articulate its condition; they are symptoms of a certain fragmentation of suffering, and as suffering lived as identity rather than as generic injustice or domination – but suffering cannot be resolved at the identitarian level. (Brown, 2001: 39 in Sothorn, 2006: 158-159)

Queer politics that extends beyond the individual critically considers how gender non-

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<sup>24</sup> In terms of gender, this homonormalisation of gay communities can also uphold dominant cisnormative gender discourses within gay spaces. The denouncing of femininity (Tabberer, 2017) and the proliferation of sexist and misogynistic discourse (Johnson and Samdahl, 2005) have arguably resulted in non-conforming genders being erased within many LGBT communities.

conformers, along with other queer identities, attempt – in a more structural register – to challenge inequalities, deconstruct hegemonies and hierarchies so as to question the regimes restricting non-normative gender lives.

When researching ballroom counterculture in Detroit and looking beyond the individualised embodiment of gender transgressive bodies, Bailey (2014: 490) states that ‘black LGBT people’s relationship to urban space, public and private, is one of contestation, violence and exclusion on the one hand and resistance, negotiation and revision on the other.’ Here, Bailey concentrates on the collective plight of queer people of colour in urban space and their experiences of exclusion, but he also notes the deconstructive and constructive ways in which people resist and negotiate majoritarian uses of public space. Stryker (2008: 149) notes that queer (namely trans) collectives can be ‘oppositional, sometimes aligned, sometimes fighting rearguard actions for inclusion, sometimes branching out in entirely different and unrelated directions’, all leading to alliances that extend beyond the individual and beyond one axis of identity. Some researchers look beyond individuality to focus on the counter-publics and counter-cultures that create collectives. Warner (2002) thinks of counter-publics as places where marginalised groups are able to engage politically with the hegemonies of a dominant public. When thinking of queer counter publics, he says:

Counter publics are “counter” to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger-sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger-circulation in a way that is not just strategic, but also constitutive of membership and its affects. As it happens, an understanding of queerness has been developing in recent decades that is suited to just this necessity; a culture is developing in which intimate relations and the sexual body can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers. (Warner, 2002: 87-88)

Warner’s notes on the ‘strategic’ assembling of individuals assist thinking about how counter-public groups create projects serving to stem individuality, evoking a queer politics that goes beyond the singular queer body. While Warner does not mention the possibility of gender queerness, certain comparisons can be drawn. Relations between queer gendered bodies can also be understood as experiments in fashioning queer counter-publics – sharing experiences and knowledges of sitting outside the gender binary and reflecting on how gender can be reworked within these counter publics.

To challenge structural oppressions experienced by minoritarian genders and sexualities, and in order to (re)read spatial resistances to these oppressions, Oswin (2008: 90) argues for a ‘non-identitarian queer approach’ to research: one that considers ‘processes of identity

formation by considering queer subjects as simultaneously raced, classed and gendered bodies' (p.91). Sothorn (2006: 158) suggests that researchers should 'move beyond the identitarian commitments that help to (re)produce ... injustices', in order to explore a queer politics that spans individuality and collectivity. It is interesting to note that Sothorn proposes moving 'beyond' identity politics, rather than replacing or abandoning it, while Clifford (2000: 105) suggests that dismissing identity politics would be a mistake within queer research. He insists that ignoring the individuality of identity risks ambivalence towards how individuals position themselves within/against dominant social regimes, and instead he calls for a 'comparative understanding of the politics of identity' alert to how various communities and individuals make sense of themselves. Placing research within a middle ground that takes seriously the capacity of the individual to understand and position themselves within wider economic and social contexts can allow scholars to research how individuals interact with state institutions, both individually and when embarking on queer world-making projects.

### 2.5.2 Queer world-making

Central to much discussion surrounding collective queerness is the practice of queer world-making and community creation – thinking through critical alliances that can challenge normative uses of space. Queer communities and the spaces in which they operate have been written about extensively within geography, spanning from engaging with the 'gaybourhood' (Knopp, 1998) to examining the activism of older gay men in community space (Misgav, 2016). In this section, however, I want to think critically about the politicisation of these queer worlds and how this process is conceived as deconstructing norms while also constructing alternative world-views. Muñoz (1999: 195-196) talks extensively about the act of queer world-making:

The concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances – both theatrical and everyday rituals – have the ability to establish alternate views of the world. These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspectives; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people ... Such performances *transport* the performer *and* the spectator to a vantage point where transformation and politics are imaginable.

The politicisation of queer worlds means that queer collectives are instrumental in the active re-rendering of spaces in ways that challenge and critique orthodoxies such as the gender binary. Secondly, Muñoz notes the affective importance of these spaces, claiming that it is not only those who are *doing* the theatrical or everyday performing who are affected but also

‘the spectators’, showing that these worlds are not exclusive or self-limiting but span beyond the individuals involved in building these queer worlds. Perhaps one of the potentials of queer world-making is to enliven an alternative queer imagination. Halberstam (2005: 2) discusses the potential for queer futures that are imaginable, saying that queer worlds and the queer subcultures which exist within them ‘produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience.’ This (re)imagining affects participants’ understandings of their selves, their life-courses and existences, giving a queer rendering of space and time.

Queer world-making is more nuanced and dialectical than carving our queer community space: it is one based on deconstruction and construction. Using his theories on disidentification, Muñoz (1999: 195) states that queer worlds do not simply ‘tear down majoritarian public space’, but rather they work with that majoritarian culture as a raw material to make a new world and to ‘build an alternative reality.’ Thus, creating gender non-conforming geographies cannot be established by erasing majoritarian gendered worlds, but rather through actively reworking, revaluing and redressing<sup>25</sup> gender structures. Additionally, McGlotten (2014: 472) warns that the process of ‘worlding’ should not be seen as something with a static end-point, arguing that worlds are developed through ‘a struggle to cultivate an understanding in motion, rather than a cultural freeze-frame.’ They are ‘unfinished worlds’ in which ‘life seems at once suspended, still and resonant with unfolding change’ (Stewart, 2007 in McGlotten, 2014: 473). The deconstructive-yet-constructive, still-yet-changing nature of queer worlds shows their terrain to be unpredictable, reflecting the dynamism of lives and the alter-knowledges that circulate between them. Bailey (2014: 503) adopts the work of Lefebvre (1991) to note that the production of queer worlds is ‘deeply rooted in a dialectic between space and transformative practices of social subjects’ (p. 502). These socio-spatial practices ‘represent the possibilities of queer social transformations in spatial terms’, potentially allowing individuals to act collectively to create ‘continuity, new identities, and new strategies for adaptation and survival.’ Halberstam (2005: 21) says that queer worlding includes ‘a dialogue about the meaning of gender variance in queer communities that moves beyond claims of either uniqueness or unilateral oppression.’ The unpredictable performances of gender in queer worlds creates collective resistance to norms

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<sup>25</sup> Throughout this thesis, I repeatedly use ‘redressing’. This is a purposeful move, firstly as a way of questioning or critiquing gender normativities, but secondly, to nod to the importance of materiality and clothing to gender non-conforming lives. This ‘re-dressing’ is a conceptual move to take seriously how material accoutrements are used through personal and political motivations.

through various embodiments, practices and politics that can be quotidian or theatrical, mundane or spectacular, in nature.

### 2.5.3 Performing gender and building activist assemblages

Queer performance has been approached academically from a range of angles, both in terms of the everyday performance of gender or sexual identities and through the critical analysis of theatrical performance, to shed light on the multifarious ways in which performance can create radical politics. Concerning the latter, the politicisation of performance has been embraced by geographical research as ‘geographers creatively re-engage with the practices and politics of making artworks ... [to] expand our horizons of what constitutes knowledge by directly utilizing, and drawing inspiration from, theatre, dance and performance art’ (Rogers, 2018: 550). Even so, it is worth noting the tensions that arise in researching assemblage activism. The Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010: 264) warn academics to be aware of imposing research agendas upon activist groups, reaching for research objectives rather than reflecting upon the experiences of those taking part. They note that ‘we [researchers] need to reflect upon the ways in which we seek to derive academic ... value from the life experiences of others, questioning what co-produced activist knowledges actually mean in practice.’ Ong (2013: 22) also reviews how performance activists can become incidentally entangled in the naturalised raced, gendered and classed hierarchies they set out queer, and also about how, instead, building ‘solidarities across differences’ that work to re-imagine new categories and political possibilities would be more productive. Scholars should hence be critical of the spatialities, politics and practices of performance activism in order to queer research.

Specifically, the collaborative nature of ‘cabaret’ as an assemblage<sup>26</sup> of short performances, means that it is deliberately provocative and is able to cultivate the work and politics of those who remain peripheral because of their gender, sexuality, class or ethnicity<sup>27</sup>. Cabaret

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<sup>26</sup> Anderson and McFarlane (2011: 124) discuss the numerous ways in which assemblage thinking has proliferated through human geography. They articulate that ‘deploying the term assemblage enables us to remain deliberately open as to the form of the unity, its durability, the types of relations and the human and non-human elements involved.’ In this thesis, I use the term ‘assemblage’ to describe spatially and temporally unfixed conglomerations: comings together of heterogeneous individuals, organisations, networks or groupings to emphasise an inter-related set of processes, practices and politics.

<sup>27</sup> While this chapter focuses on the cabaret as a place of queer place-making, it is worth drawing parallels between the cabaret and the pantomime (Chapter 5) as places which challenge orthodoxy and create temporary and spatially determined worlds which work to invert and decentre notions of gender and sexuality. Again, in Chapter 8, I use the example of Queer Theory, a queer cabaret

performer and performance theorist TL Cowan (2012, n.p), articulates why cabaret is so beneficial to queer world-making:

It allowed the various performances and performers ... to be engaged together ... in a time and space, in a conversation that took the form of what we might call *proliferating dialectic*. In general, by staging a range of performance forms, contents, tones and styles, the cabaret produces multiple relationalities.

Whatever you call it, the cabaret is an embodied, relational, dialectical form. Cabaret places dissimilar or loosely connected performances side by side, or on top of each other ... and these performances move together and against each other throughout an evening, producing an experience of knowing and being that necessarily differs from the solo shows that make up the rest of the series.

The usefulness of the cabaret as a function of creating queer worlds is borne from its breadth and range, and from the diverse ways in which queer ontologies can be conceived, negotiated and performed. The individual performances themselves may seek to include a wide range of voices, experiences and identities, but through cabaret these individual voices are assembled together to create new experiences of 'knowing and being' that build alliances and co-create a politics critical of norms and hierarchies. Queer cabaret within queer activist spaces has also been central to building political alliances beyond gender or sexual identity categories and practices, thereby crystallising 'queer gatherings or queer convergences' (Brown, 2007: 2693). In searching for a queer space that looks beyond 'single-issue activism', Bilić and Dioli (2016: 105) use cabaret as a way of politicising queer spaces. Jet Moon, a performer and founder of the Queer Beograd Collective festival, says:

Cabaret has always been a careful knitting together of personal anecdote with its political context. Collaborating with artists and activists to produce scripts, we created shows which ranged across the topics ... To show the interconnections between personal stories and a broader politics, and to go beyond the idea of any 'single issue'. There are never enough stories of how we are different, our commonalities, how we came to be where we are, what we think, feel and experience. (Jet Moon, 2014 in Bilić and Dioli, 2016: 114)

Jet Moon explicitly discusses the interconnectivity between individual subjectivities and the wider political contexts in which they exist. Accounting for a breadth of subject positions and experiences, a queer politics that challenges 'sexism, fascism ... domestic violence, capitalism, homophobia and transphobia' (ibid.) is assembled and (re)enacted within queer spaces. By looking for connection, rather than the difference between performers and

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night in Glasgow, to give an empirically grounded example of how cabaret might be used to create queer worlds.



audience members, cabaret becomes a queer time and space enabling queer counter-publics to step across individual and political lines of division. This coming together of bodies and politics creates what Cowan (2012) calls a ‘cabaret consciousness’ that ontologically and epistemologically privileges queerness and questions dominant regimes of understanding.

The performances of the cabaret and the bodies that take part in them are often the site where routine re-enactments of gender are disturbed. The mundane ways in which gender is reproduced are often exposed, challenged and satirised, as a springboard to producing new modes of being gendered. This challenge to conformity shows how cabaret performers are able to recognise their minoritarian positions within dominant ideologies, before using them to disidentify with oppressive and normalising discourses (Muñoz, 1997). Within queer worlds, the affective nature of these individualised attempts to disrupt performative gender norms creates possibilities for destabilising majoritarian performances of gender, resisting the erasure of minoritarian groups through ‘the radical aesthetic and political praxis of cabaret’ (McLean, 2017: 39). Cowan (2012) states that the positioning of cabaret as a way of building queer worlds means that performers and audiences become involved in a ‘social commentary, a community-building, sustaining and transformative site of political activism and aesthetic innovation.’ Cabaret ties up the theoretical threads that flow through this thesis, including the ways in which gender non-conforming politics can be understood through the individual and as a provocation for collective world making, while also taking seriously the aesthetic and material importance of gender and gender non-conformity over space and time.

## **2.6 Thesis contributions and potentials for gender non-conforming geographies**

This literature review has covered much of the research, carried out within geography and beyond, that has informed my research directions. Through reviewing academic geography’s engagement with queer theory, I have mapped out the various directions whereby queerness has been spatialised by and disseminated through geographical knowledges. The growth of queer geography has been a dialogical process between and across various fields of study to produce an amorphous approach to identity, bodies, politics and representations that now should prompt geographers to rethink the intimate interactions between sexuality, gender and space.

The way that gender identities are performed through various material means is central to much of my research. I have drawn attention to the importance of materiality and

representation, and how this pairing affects gendered bodies and gendered lives. Briefly discussing Ahmed's (2009) work on phenomenology has allowed me to note the importance of materials (clothing, jewellery) as well as behaviours, and how they can all contribute to and have real impact upon the lived experience of those who do not conform to gender norms. In addition, an in-depth reading of Browne's (2004) 'genderism' has allowed me to account for the ways in which queer geography has grappled with the implications of gendered materialities, behaviours and aesthetics within regulatory structures that uphold normalised performances of masculinity and femininity, rejecting and dismissing those who do not comply or who 'fail' to meet gendered standards.

I have addressed literature from outwith academic geography that has become increasingly engaged with gender non-conforming identities, both in the sense of identity development and conceptualisation and through the various ways in which gender non-conformity interacts with state processes and institutions. I have considered recent texts that reflect the growing attention being paid to 'non-binary' and 'genderqueer' identities, as they become increasingly mainstreamed both in academic and non-academic conversations. I have assessed the potential benefits that these texts may hold for queer geography, thinking critically about the spatial implications of this mainstreaming, and conceptually considering what they might mean for future geographical research.

Finally, I have thought about the individuality of gender experiences has been important in creating a rich landscape of empirical research giving voice to queer individuals who have long been excluded from conversations around gender, sexuality and space. In thinking beyond the individual, however, I have used the work of Oswin (2006; 2008; 2015) and others to discuss how the personal and the collective influence one another and how this conjunction opens potentials for deconstructive queer politics. This work contributes to geographical debates seeking to go beyond gender identity, striving to consider the implications and impacts that queer communities, collectives, subcultures can have on and for queer urbanisms and politics. In this respect, I have used the work of Halberstam (2005) to think about how an alternative politics can be instrumental in creating queer worlds, reflecting on how gender non-conformity can be deployed to create queer worlds and also on how gender transgression has already been used for political and activist ends.

This thesis aims to offer various contributions to the fields of queer geography and gender geographies. Firstly, I wish to open up the geographical potentials for 'non-conformity' and how it can be utilised. By adopting non-conformity as a conceptual, methodological and

epistemological tool, I will contribute to the ways in which queer geographical research is undertaken, making space for those who sit beyond various social binaries in a manner that includes and appreciates context, scale, individuality and collectivity. I will deploy gender non-conformity along numerous avenues: as a queer tool allowing me to reach beyond individualised identity politics; as a way of capturing the intricacies of both gender identity and gender expression and how they complement and/or juxtapose one another; and as a way of (re)reading gender across political, historical and geographical contexts. Acknowledging the lack of geographical knowledge from beyond the gender binary provokes numerous questions: To what extent does the lack of research in this area signal the lack of resources, confidence or access to institutions for gender non-conforming individuals? How does this marginalisation along class, gender, racial and sexual axes materialise because of this under-theorisation? How does exclusion spark solidarities? Through tackling some of these issues, this work will shed light on how gender non-conformity is embodied in different places and how this process complements or conflicts with what is considered ‘conformity’ in different socio-spatial contexts. The interconnective relationships between gendered knowledges and how they can be transgressed contributes to contemporary geopolitics, and more specifically to tracing gender non-conformity’s rich history in Scotland and beyond.

Secondly, I will contribute to what I wish to term a more-than-sexual queer geography that develops groundwork set out by Browne (2004; 2006b) and Nash and Bain (2007), critically considering how gender expression and identity are queered within different spaces. While many important contributions have already been made within queer geography that primarily discuss sexuality as the main axis of difference, I will shift the intellectual balance to consider how gender, and how it interacts with other social markers, is read, performed and queered within difference spaces. While gender and sexuality cannot and should not be disconnected, I will add to a narrow band of literature that considers gender queerness in spaces *not* normally considered as sexual spaces (indeed, some of which might even be considered ‘unsexy spaces’ and are hence, ignored by sexuality and space studies as they seem sexless: Hubbard, 2012: 28). Through this focus, I will also call for a loosening of hegemonic and binarised epistemes of gender within academic geography, proposing that geography take seriously the innumerable configurations and, of course, scramblings of masculinity and femininity and how these are embodied, regulated and understood across a variety of socio-cultural contexts.

Thirdly, this thesis will develop inquiry to explore the interconnectivity between materials, behaviours, histories and contexts that are intimately gendered and geographical. How

certain materials are used, rejected, read and understood across different spaces and places reveals how gender non-conforming ontologies are explicitly geographical. Thinking critically about these materialities challenges the stability of gendered hegemonies, while also asserting that they can be used to expose the regulatory policing of gender norms through the ways in which individuals negotiate hegemonic gender positions. My thesis will contribute to these theories: firstly, by providing empirically driven accounts of these negotiations in different spaces; and secondly, through taking seriously the geographies of gender hegemonies and how they are regulated and resisted in different times and spaces. Thus, I seek to provide a longitudinal Scottish account of how the gendered landscape has changed over time, capturing a geographical and historical account of how gender can be non-conforming in different places.

Finally, in providing a longitudinal account of gender non-conformity in Scotland, I will contribute to the very narrow field of queer geographical research in Scotland. Much queer geographical writing reflects the experiences of queer individuals and communities in cities boasting more prominent, archetypically Anglo-American queer urban histories such as New York (Andersson *et. al.* 2011), London (Gandy, 2012), Seattle (Brown and Knopp, 2010, 2014, 2016) or Brighton (Browne and Lim, 2010) with its title of ‘gay capital of the UK’. While a smaller body of work focuses on the experiences of those in ‘small cities’ (Myrdahl, 2013) and rural places (Binnie and Valentine, 1995)<sup>28</sup>, by positioning Scotland as a research site, I can introduce several useful interventions: I will account for experiences across different environments, reflecting upon what it means to be gender non-conforming in different urban or rural environments and moving beyond the metro-centricism of queer urban research; I will account for Scotland’s unique gendered history through rereading the kilt and the pantomime and how these distinctive Scottish cultural forms have and can be used as vehicles for distorting masculinity and femininity; I will consider how non-conforming gender is being understood, embodied and even popularised in a context that does not straightforwardly replicate the American-centric narratives of gender identity and expression (although the latter do of course travel to Scotland, reflecting a global interconnectivity of gender non-conforming politics, but they are still always reshaped, remade and re-understood in context-specific ways); and, by looking at Scotland on a national level, touching upon the particular political circumstances *here* through which

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<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, Little (2002: 666) considers the performance of masculinity and femininity in rural places, in an attempt to distort the dichotomous understanding that rural masculinity depends on the physicality of masculinity and the ‘control of nature’ and rural femininities are based on ‘nurturing and helping roles in traditional agrarian ideology’ (p. 667).

gender non-conforming people interact and are (de)legitimised by the Scottish state. These geographical interventions will be threaded throughout this thesis to provide insight into how gender non-conformity has been, and is being, understood, creating a perspective that has, until now, been under-represented within geographical research.

## **Chapter 3 Non-conforming methodologies: queering gender and queering methods**

### **3.1 Introducing queer methodologies**

Embracing a queer methodology presents researchers with a purposefully incomplete way of researching social worlds. Critical in its nature, but also permissive of fluidity, malleability and unknowability, queer methodologies have been discussed widely amongst geographers who seek to collect ‘data’ using methods inquiring into the life stories, subjectivities, identities, spatialities and experiences of queers (Browne and Nash, 2010). Within academic geography, queer methodologies follow multiple threads: to research the relationship between space, gender and sexuality; to queer the relationship between researcher and researched; to question how knowledge and power impact and are impacted by queer identities; and to create a research framework that holds anti-normativity and anti-essentialism at its core. Binnie (1997) acknowledges that early LGBT geographies challenged the heterosexism present across geographical thought by using a queer methodology to question how methodologies were complicit in replicating heterosexual normativities. This intervention was crucial in placing the lives of sexual others within the fold of alternative geographical knowledge-making. However, I wish to push this move further, to challenge cisgenderism – the assumed normalcy and privileging of the gender binary – within geographical research and to provide room for gender queerness, non-conformity and gender disruption. I believe that, through using a queer methodology, geography should consider those bodies who move between and do not seek to replicate the male or female binary gender positions. When considering gender, queer methodologies should search for ‘the potentialities and subversions that lie behind gender ambiguity and indeterminacy’ in order to challenge and problematise hegemonic expressions of identity and the associated categories of woman/female, man/male (Hammers and Brown, 2004: 95).

In this chapter, I will discuss how a queer methodology may be deployed when researching non-conforming gender, thinking about how gender could be (re)imagined and queered within geographical research. Firstly, using the breadth of research already undertaken in queer geography, I focus on work carried out by other researchers who have considered the sensitivities of queer methodologies and how they can be used to the benefit of both the researcher and the researched. Secondly, I will give a critical account of my own positionality within this research. Critical analysis of positionality has been crucial in queer research as a way to interrogate the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

I pay attention to my own positionality, since doing so allows me to reflect upon my own positioning within a gender non-conforming<sup>29</sup> epistemological space. Haritaworn (2014: 2) argues that such a move allows queer researchers to ‘define our speaking positions and how they relate to others, especially those whom we claim to speak for,’ avoiding colonising and appropriating knowledges and ‘queering from above.’ Queer geographers (e.g. di Falicianantonio and Gadelha, 2016) use ‘queer methodologies’ rather than referring to a singular ‘queer methodology’ in order to emphasise the plurality of ways that a queering of methodology can be undertaken, rather than solidifying or prioritising a singular ‘correct’ way of carrying out queer research. I go on to consider the different ways in which queer methodologies encourage researchers to reassess hegemonic understandings of power within research, noting how this move has informed my own research practice. Finally, I will assess the methods deployed throughout this thesis, discussing 27 semi-structured interviews and other ‘data gathering’ techniques which were undertaken, reflecting on their effectiveness and considering how methods may be queered and appropriated, putting queer methodologies into practice through decolonising knowledges and gender ontologies.

### **3.2 Framing gender non-conformity through queer methodologies**

Considering gender non-conformity through a methodological lens became an important aspect of this research: as a queer tool allowing me to reach beyond individualised identity politics; as a way of capturing the spatial intricacies of both gender identity and gender expression, and how they complement and/or juxtapose one another; and as a way of (re)reading gender across political, historical and geographical contexts. During the recruitment process, I used the term ‘gender non-conforming’ as a linguistic tool to encompass the plethora of gender identity labels and markers used within contemporary gender politics in Scotland. Yet, these ‘labels’ are more than linguistic positions: they are realities that are explored and embodied by the people concerned, reflecting an internalised sense of gender identity, while also acknowledging that one’s gender subjectivity is relational (Butler, 2004). While attempts to capture the myriad of ways in which gender can be challenged or queered will inevitably remain inconclusive or incomplete, it seems instinctive to use queer methodologies as a means to reflect the fluid and ever shifting nature of gender expression and gender identity. Rather than seeking to develop any notion of gender non-conforming ‘truth’ and in a move to reject any claim of/to ‘authentic’ gender

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<sup>29</sup> Within geographical scholarship, Johnston (2018), in her opening pages does discuss gender non-conforming identities but it is not used as an epistemological tool.

non-conforming experience (see Hines, 2006), by using queer methodologies I hope to create space within geographical knowledge for these marginalised voices and to expand queer and trans geographies beyond binary modes of existence. In this section, I want to consider what a non-conforming methodology might look like, reflecting upon how queer methodologies might approach issues of gender identity and expression.

### 3.2.1 Queer gender knowledges within geographical research

Queering gender identity and gender expression is a key concern threading through this research, and I wish to develop queer methodologies that critically engage with the complex web of non-conforming ontologies which inform, influence and affect subject positions. Drawing upon the work of queer theorists such as Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1990), queer methodologies should, according to Manning (2009), be responsible for creating new queer ontologies, democratising knowledges and challenging the silence conventionally enforced by dichotomisation and categorisation. This deconstruction of power, taken-for-granted assumptions and categorisation is central to much of the literature, but this deconstructing of knowledges should not seek to simply rearrange and reconstruct a new form of 'truth', purporting to account for the diversity of *all* gendered experiences:

Firmly convinced that 'queering' methodologies and methods is not an ontological position pre-assumed when conducting research with queer-identified subjects, we play with the tensions between queer as an adjective aimed at fixing and defining and as a verb signalling a continuous politics of becoming. Although in line with the 'anti-normative' character of queer theory that 'seeks to subvert, challenge and critique a host of taken for granted 'stabilities' in our social lives' (Browne and Nash 2010, p. 7), these tensions reveal the contradictory position of our writing effort: we are aware of the impossibility to fully account and represent emotional, affective and embodied personal trajectories, but we are still producing a form of knowledge (an academic paper) aimed at representing and somehow fixing those forms of experience. (di Felicianantonio and Gadelha, 2016: 276)

While queer research may seek to destabilise the rigidity of categories and identities (Oswin, 2008) in order to create an epistemological<sup>30</sup> space in geographical knowledge that passes

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<sup>30</sup> Throughout this methodology, I shall reflect upon the importance of queer ontology and epistemology. Through considering feminist philosophical threads, this work can be used to imagine what queer ontologies and epistemologies might look like. Stanley and Wise (1993: 120-121) describe ontology as a 'way of going about making sense of the world.' A queer ontology 'makes available previously untapped store of knowledges' about what it is like to be queer and constructs the social world from the perspective of queer position. Central to the queering of such ontologies is a rejection of authentic experience, instead understanding that 'intersubjectivity does characterise everyday interaction (p.120). Watney (1994: 16) considers a queer epistemology as 'the theory of knowledge which informs the classificatory system which defines and regulates



beyond essentialising categories, it is important that the constitutive parts of this deconstruction are not simply reassembled in a different formation, but di Felicianantonio and Gadelha also note how the production of academic material unavoidably if problematically represents a solidifying of a particular form of knowledge.

At a meta-level, it should be acknowledged that any act of naming risks a form of stabilising and boundary-making, limiting what is considered 'inside' and 'outside'<sup>31</sup>. Cloke *et. al.* (2004: 257) note that the naming and allocating of geographical knowledge is 'really quite problematic and rooted in a host of questionable assumptions. To be sure, these activities and assumptions are deeply entrenched in the conventions of Western thought and action, and as such they are mostly taken for granted and rarely exposed for critical attention', but, work within queer geographies should work to always question these universalising knowledges, categories and binaries. Queer methodologies depend largely upon the total rejection of a loosely positivist research approach across many fields of social science and even cultural studies research, rejecting the commonalities often assumed to exist between identity categories (Warner, 2004). In attempting to capture or represent a form of knowledge, queer research should also be aware of the incompletenesses, inaccuracies and imperfections associated with the process of doing queer research, but this incompleteness should not be rendered as necessarily negative. Halberstam (2011: 88) remarks that this 'failure can exploit the unpredictability of ideology and its indeterminate qualities.' Using the work of Gramsci (2000), Halberstam notes that a failure to create static knowledge allows queerness to produce a 'radical political response', one able to 'deploy an improvisational mode to keep pace with the constantly shifting relations between dominant and subordinate within the chaotic flow of political life' (p.89). The ever-fluid, ever-questioning nature of queer methodologies presents researchers with an infinite number of opportunities for

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modern sexual identities.' While explicitly discussing sexual identities, Watney goes on to note that 'the question of gender (or genders) one is sexually attracted by becomes the ground for fundamental power relations of privilege and underprivilege', meaning that a binary gender epistemology is central to the regulation of societal and cultural modes of both gender and sexual others. Within academic geography, much of the generative groundwork, imagining queer epistemologies, has been undertaken by Binnie (1997, 2011) who states that queer epistemologies should work to 'better challenge the conventional (positivist) methodologies by attacking [their] exclusive focus on an (impossible) objectivity ... challenging 'the notion that 'real' or 'reliable' knowledge is unaffected by social-cultural context' (Binnie, 1997: 227).

<sup>31</sup> The relationship between 'the inside' and 'the outside' holds particular relevance for non-conforming geographies. Work within academic geography (e.g. Dixon and Jones, 2005: 243) has used Derrida's (1988) constitutive outsider 'to offer an epistemological critique of geography's theoretical framings.' Richter (2006) notes that radical outsider identity construction works to define the insider's identity. Thus, as non-conforming identity formation is based upon what one is *not*, rather than what one *is*, the radical 'non-conforming' outsider works to formulate, and is dependent upon, the 'conforming' insider in order to exist: hence, the non-binary outsider works to formulate, and is dependent upon, the binary insider in order to exist.

rethinking in-between gender epistemologies in an attempt to bring to light those bodies, experiences and practices which have been neglected by geography's largely dichotomous and categorising traditions.

The relinquishing of categorisation is central to accounting for the breadth of experiences explored through queer methodologies. Past feminist and sexuality and space research has been overly hasty to draw dissimilarity based on specific identity markers, focusing on the 'other' through a proscribed and assumed notion of difference. Yet, ascribing a marker of difference inevitably results in the erasure of those non-conformers who do not fit into such categories: those queer individuals who become rejected by the constant (re)structuring of gender and sexual knowledges bolstered by categorisation. McDonald (2013) consults the work of Butler (2004) to think about the gender-queer individual. Butler encourages queer scholars to (re)think the gendered body in ways that subvert dominant discourses, emphasising how the body may not fit into fixed categories such as 'man' and 'woman'. When an individual falls outside the confines of such categories, they are determined as unintelligible. Their bodies are labelled as 'out of bounds', erasing the queer from view and solidifying the common discourse of the 'proper' way to *be* male or female. Within research, it is crucial that intricate subjectivities are not reduced to such labels and such value-laden binary modes of identifying<sup>32</sup>.

Queer methodologies seek to mess with such categorisations to consider gender realities and lives through a kaleidoscopic lens alert to biological sex, gender identity, masculinity, femininity, sexual fantasies and political and cultural affiliations (Detamore, 2010: 172-173). Detamore also echoes issues that arise from such assumptions when identifying as 'straight'<sup>33</sup>. An assumption of structure, continuity and stability outweighs and erases any possibility for emotional, geographical, affectual and emotional nuance, while also positioning 'straight' as a convenient counterpoint to the othering of homosexuality. However, these dualistic and overly-simplistic assumptions do not account for the everyday queer practices played out in day to day lives. Jackman (2010) also warns scholars against

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<sup>32</sup> This regulation by categorisation has very concrete geographical implications though various 'genderisms' (Browne, 2004) and the policing and regulation of how one expresses their gender. This regulates how gender is embodied across different spaces and influences how participants negotiate the gender binary – ontologically and spatially.

<sup>33</sup> While Oswin (2008) is wary of constructing identitarian politics predicated on homogenising attempts to universalise the experience of one category or social label, hooks (1989: 15) notes the importance of language in queer struggle. She articulates that 'it shapes and determines our response to existing cultural practices and our capacity to envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts. It informs the way we speak about these issues and the language we choose. Language is also a place of struggle.'

depending upon social labelling as this can lead to miscommunication between researcher and participant. This matter hence presented me with some serious practical and methodological issues. How is it possible to decide who to research when the labels typically used do not give constants? This, rather than being seen as an issue for researchers, is arguably instead an opportunity for queer methodologies to decentre knowledges around what it means to *be* a certain gender or sexual orientation. By using queer methodologies, scholars are encouraged to acknowledge identity categories as regulatory units of power, while critiquing their stability and exposing the intricacies that exist within such categories. Through this research, I will assess how gender non-conformity – as an open conceptual space, rather than a narrow category – can be used to account for the multifarious gender experiences sitting uneasily within binary categorisation. Thus, gender non-conformity does not exist as an entity in and of itself, but rather should be used as a loose, encapsulating notion to embrace those who do not position themselves neatly within the gender binary.

### **3.2.2 The relational geographies of gender non-conformity**

Rather than merely considering how identity is conceptualised by the individual research subject and then filtered by the researcher, queer methodologies seek to problematise this process by considering the affective and relational nature of identity in research. This point is highlighted by Gorman-Murray *et al.* (2010) when carrying out research in New Zealand. They articulate that queer researchers must be aware of the distinctly un-queer implications of assuming categories and labelling, and thereby support the idea that identities are held in isolation from one another and from local contexts:

For the queer scholars it becomes a case of remaining alert to how subjectivities are an outcome of a relational process and how a queer methodology must facilitate narratives that do not inadvertently impose meanings rather than seeking to rework and create new meanings. The spatially-situated interactions of research help to constitute not only the context of subjectivities of the researcher and participants, but also *how* narratives are told. (Gorman-Murray *et al.* 2010: 101)

A queer methodology frames how different identities and narratives are read and provides innumerable ways in which disclosed individual identities are able to question pre-established gender and sexuality binaries. Relational identity formations and knowledges of the self may be influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Rose, 1997), or the relationship between participants, for example through a group interview or focus group setting (Belzile and Öberg, 2012). These fluid and contextual understandings of identity bring to light some inherently geographical questions: How does

place influence how identity is understood and explained through the research process? How do individuals understand their gender identity in relation to the researcher and other participants? I use gender non-conformity as a way to consider the constant and often fraught relationship between queers and spatial and cultural norms, alert to how these relationships are reflected by normalised performative representations of gender in specific places. By using ‘gender non-conforming’ as an umbrella term for those identities, presentations and practices composed in contestation with the standard gender binary, ‘gender non-conforming’ can be deployed to transcend identity politics so as queerly to consider non-normative lives. Gender non-conformity allows researchers to consider the intricacies of gender normativities, spatialities and cultural contexts, thus constructing a more empirical appreciation of what it means to live a life beyond the gender binary. It is also able to avoid the risk of imposing boundaries or borders on who has the ‘right’ to claim specific gender labels, alleviating concerns over how identity can become policed, even in queer spaces (Formby, 2017). ‘Gender non-conforming’ can also spark a queer move to refuse the idea of ‘authentic experience’, looking instead to the socialised and spatialised relationship that participants (do not) have with ‘conformity’, norms and hegemonies.

Strikingly geographical concerns emerge when considering identity beyond the individual, and when researchers are encouraged to question hegemonic, Western-centric gender ontologies while carrying out geographical research. Gopinath (2005) draws attention to the very geographical issues of labelling. While carrying out research on sexualities in South East Asia, he became aware of the challenge of developing a common representation of South Asian sexual identities while depending on Western labels. Understanding gender non-conformity as something spatially contextual, which can be deployed and translated across different places and scales, is a key benefit. I am attracted to the term ‘gender non-conforming’ as a methodological tool as it allows researchers to consider critically how gender can be queerly challenged in a manner that is not regionally limited and does not risk what might be called ‘methodological nationalism’ (Wimmer and Schiller, 2002). While my thesis considers Scotland as its field of inquiry, it is important not to forget that non-conformity is something experienced and embodied far beyond national boundaries, and also to reject the notion of any nationally homogeneous gender non-binary experience. While there may be idiosyncratic ways in which gender is constituted in Scotland, to focus on them as comprising a ‘true’ way of being non-conforming would risk de-queering non-conforming geographies. Instead, deploying non-conformity as a queer tool can allow scholars to (re)read gender across historical and geographical contexts.

### 3.2.3 Intersectionality within queer research

Queer and feminist scholars have paid sustained attention to the importance of intersectionality within research methodologies. Intersectionality, and the geographical questions that it raises, seeks to theorise ‘the complex relationships between and within different social categories (such as gender, race, class and sexuality)’ (Dias and Blecha, 2007: 6). Parker (2016: 1341) keenly notes the politically grounded importance of intersectionality and its roots within critical race activism. She writes of intersectionality: ‘with caution and perspective, it attends to material inequalities and structures like patriarchy, racism, heterosexism and capitalism and the ropes that they weave together and unravel’ in order to create ‘partial approaches to knowledge production in place [while] critiquing the “Godtricks” and associated epistemic violences, seriously paying attention to power in the research process and engag[ing] with voices of those often marginalized.’ Within trans geographies, the intersection between gender and sexuality is perhaps the most common articulation to be recognised (e.g. Browne and Lim, 2010; Doan, 2007), but my research does not focus on particular articulations of gender identity or expression and their inter-relationship with (only) sexuality. Rather, I have also considered other intersections, such as educational attainment and age, so as not to focus on the intersection of just two social markers, but instead to create a broader picture of how these intersections affect the non-conforming gender geographies of my participants. Brown (2012: 545) acknowledges that intersectionality has been ‘relentlessly criticised for its lack of methodological direction, which leads to the possibility that there may be theoretical justification for choices, but here too, anxieties emerge.’ Though carefully articulating the linguistic, methodological, conceptual and political anxieties created through using intersectionality within geography, he argues that it is not the purpose of deploying intersectionality in queer research to create new, deceptively solid, new modes of understanding, but rather to embark on a course of creatively exploring geographies of identity as a model for researching ‘intersectional gaps and omissions’ (ibid.).

The importance of identity categories in intersectionality means that its relationship with some strands of queer research, often hostile, as mentioned, to identitarian categorisations, can be contentious. Fotopoulou (2012) notes that, while feminist methodologies should take seriously these various interrelated social categories and how they are experienced across various spatial contexts, queer methodologies seek to destabilise the very foundations of

these categories, searching instead for the in-between<sup>34</sup> spaces and identities. As previously mentioned, challenging notions of categorisation may be done in nuanced ways in research, but, rather than solely attempting to erase categorisation (in this case, erase the gender binary), Baldo (2008 in Fotopoulou, 2012) suggests that intersectionality should destabilise categories while questioning what might constitute as queering across geographical contexts. Queer approaches to intersectionality should not attempt to create new fixed knowledges or attempt to ground the lives of queers, of course, since to do this would undermine the intention to deconstruct master narratives and challenge normativities. In discussing McCall's (2005) understanding of intersectionality, Fotopoulou (2012: 22) discusses 'intra-categorical complexity':

In McCall's typology, 'intra-categorical complexity' focuses on transgressive social groups crossing the boundaries of existing categories and is the one I find most productive ... [An] Intra-categorical approach to research reflects the idea that in order to understand the lived experiences of subordinate groups, we have to look at the social settings where oppression intersects. As an approach it may be the most fruitful and political ... because single-axis analysis failed to account for the multiplicity of subordinate positions.

I believe that this intra-categorical approach may hold several similarities with my own research. Thinking about how gender categories can be transgressed – crossing boundaries, destabilising hegemonic narratives and inhabiting a position of non-conformity – my research aims to show how individuals disidentify with gender normativities. Through using non-conformity as a bracket in which some participants identify themselves, this move also allows them the opportunity to discuss their gendered lives beyond categorising, not focusing on experiences of, for example, being non-binary, but instead, allowing them to consider ways in which they are more broadly positioned within a gender system of knowledge and how their other social markers (e.g. age, educational attainment, sexual orientation etc.) complicate their understanding of gender and social location. This appreciation of intra-categorical intersectionality is therefore interwoven through my methodology, and as neatly as possible threaded throughout the research process and the methods used.

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<sup>34</sup> Even using 'in-between' as a way to describe identities which are positioned away from mainstream categories suggests a solidifying and categorisation. A common critique of theorists who deploy such 'in-between' notions is that this indeed, also contains the possibility of movement and nuance. In various ways, this thesis constantly battles with this conundrum, continually specifying categories which are used by participants, only to question how they can be dealt with in fluid and unsettled ways.

### **3.3 Moments of reflection: researching gender, positionality and affective knowledges**

Throughout feminist and queer geographical research, attention has been lent to the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Sullivan, 2003) and to the importance of critical reflexive engagement with positionality (McDonald, 2013). Feminist scholars such as Haraway (1988) recognise that knowledge should always be understood as ‘situated’, always produced within certain contexts and disclosed through the self-acknowledged epistemological gaze of the researcher. Early positionality work in academic geography (e.g. Jackson, 1993) showed the importance of place in positional understanding and its importance within feminist geographical research. This provocation has encouraged feminist and queer researchers to take seriously the significance of positionality, identity and reflexivity, to reflect upon how these elements are an intrinsic part of knowledge building. In this section, I discuss the intertwined relationship between the researcher and the researched, queering this binary and asking how queer methodologies encourage researchers to (re)think this relationship as a process always fluid and in flux. I then reflect upon my own shifting positionality during the research process, how this was affected by my research participants and how anxieties, questions and productive discomforts were provoked through undertaking this research.

#### **3.3.1 Queering the researcher-researched relationship**

As previously mentioned, feminist methodologies encourage researchers to consider intersectionality as a way of exposing the power relations and social contexts existing in the research procedure (McCall, 2005), but queer methodologies encourage researchers to think further about this relationship as more of a fluid, flux of power, rather than as a uni-directional and top-down flow. Jackman (2010) says that it is important to blur the boundaries that render the researcher as removed from the participant, for such boundaries uphold and reinforce a politics of categorisation, contributing to unequal power relations and social standing. Instead, a more nuanced relationship must be allowed to germinate in an attempt to co-produce knowledge. Sullivan (2003: 41) also states that the elevating of the researcher’s ‘expert’ knowledge is problematic and that objectivism<sup>35</sup> should be critiqued, whereas researchers should realise that they ‘embody the discourses that exist in our culture,

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<sup>35</sup> Objectivism, as ‘epistemologies that consider knowledge to be a more or less authentic reflection of the object under investigation’ (Proctor, 1998: 242), has long been critiqued within feminist and queer geographical research in order to decolonise knowledges and to provide scope for more subjective understandings of the social world.

our very being is constituted by them, they are part of us, and we cannot simply throw them off.’ Gorman-Murray *et. al.* (2010) also write that, by questioning their own positionality as the academic ‘expert’, they are able to consider their participants’ subjectivities in a queerer way, while also thinking about their own power and subjectivities as more nebulaic and unstable, especially when researching those of a different social grouping<sup>36</sup>. Binnie (1997) argues that, in doing this, researchers are able to overcome problems of objectivism in research. Part of this queering process removes the binary of researcher and researched to prevent political and ideological stifling and to create epistemic space for gender queerness.

Detamore (2010) discusses how a politics of intimacy might be used as a means for queering the researcher-researched binary and to engage with participants in a manner that challenges liberal notions of consent (Butz, 2008). This shift recasts the presupposition that (only) participants may be ‘harmed’ by the research process, assuming that the researcher is fully in control in being able to manipulate the research encounter. Arguing that institutional and bureaucratic ethics practices act to sanitise and limit social science research, Detamore (2010: 170) posits that a politics of intimacy can reimagine the relationships within research and ‘open up new ways of producing knowledge and creating political and kindred alliances for social and environmental justice.’ He adds:

Intimacy is risk, and if the argument for an entangled, co-production of knowledge can be valued as a legitimate means to understand the multiple and nuanced circumstances that constitute human socialisation and experience, then the relationships that are established between researcher and the researched are inherently intimate. (Detamore, 2010: 171)

This striving for a co-production of knowledge cannot be undertaken without a considerate and reflexive rebalancing of the relationship between the researcher and the participant. A politics of intimacy played a pertinent role in this research because of the highly personal, often private information disclosed during my ‘field’ inquiries. This call makes it necessary for the researcher to place themselves deeply within the research, understanding the research encounter as dialectical – a to-and-fro in searching for commonality and difference, experiencing moments of knowing and un-knowing, and a constant motion of talking, listening, engaging, responding and reacting. The impact of the research process on the

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<sup>36</sup> Rose’s (1993) critical work, *Feminism and Geography: the limits of geographical knowledge*, was key in critiquing masculinist constructions of knowledge that were implicitly concerned with the ‘disembodied, unsituated masculine subject as well as its masculinised, detached form of theorising’ (Nelson, 1999: 334). Rose’s work was instrumental in challenging geographers to focus on epistemology, the politics of knowledge production, identity and subjectivity.



researcher is also discussed by Dickson-Swift *et. al.* (2007) when considering researcher anxieties surrounding researcher-participant rapport, reciprocity, feeling privileged and feelings of vulnerability. By drawing attention to the reciprocal process of research, queer methodologies can situate the researcher *with* the researched,<sup>37</sup> to realise that ‘we’ are affected by the research and the participant is affected by ‘us’ (Bondi, 2005). From this stance, I seek to reflect upon my own experiences of carrying out fieldwork, thinking critically about how the research affected me as a researcher.

### 3.3.2 An ethics of vulnerability

While carrying out fieldwork I attempted to remain critically reflexive about both my positionality, and my role as a researcher, constantly examining how these properties of ‘me’ might influence the research process. Rooke (2009) adopts an ethic of vulnerability when attempting to queer the field. She quotes Butler (2003: 31) who says ‘Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something.’ This process of being undone allows queer research to be undermined, not in a way that necessarily challenges the ‘results’ of the research, but in a way that contributes to the richness of queer research and the queer empirical work which it creates. Rooke (2009: 151), when discussing queer ethnography, discusses how a queer methodology during field work contributes to this ethic of vulnerability:

[This] points toward an ethic and ontology of vulnerability, of how our sense of self is made through the inevitability of less, and the ways in which we are connected and indebted to each other. When researching the social world qualitatively, these connections also exist within our research encounters. Gathering ethnographic “data” depends on haptic human connection, closeness, understanding and personal engagement ... This ethic of connection is often at odds with the kind of distanced, rational and reasoned theoretical texts ethnographers produce in a discipline that prioritises distance, reflection and abstraction.

For Rooke, vulnerability – an ethic of not-knowing and constant questioning – is central to queering the relationship between the researcher and participants. The interchanging of knowledges, experiences and understandings means that discussions can take seriously, the

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<sup>37</sup> While there may be commonalities between the researcher and the participant, Binnie (1997: 232) adds to this point, warning against assuming that commonality exists between queer people. Rasmussen (2006: 47) warns that ‘sexual and gender identity are only one factor in mediating relationships between researchers and participants,’ and therefore a more critical and expansive approach to commonality is necessary.

social positions of both parties, building that awareness into research frameworks. Many feminist scholars have advocated the benefits of discussing participant subjectivities, rather than focusing on fixed identity markers (e.g. Lather, 1991), but Hammers and Brown (2004) discuss how researcher subjectivity and experiences play an important part in how research is created, placing the researcher alongside the participant as co-producers of knowledge. Hammers and Brown (p. 90) say that, while theory and research inform the production of knowledge, the experiences of the researcher should be inextricably interwoven into the research. This creates a new relationship of ‘theory-research-experience’ that appreciates the ‘conflation and integration of all three aspects so that dis-order and non-linearity are part and parcel of the research paradigm’ (ibid.). This recasts researcher objectivity or any notion of expertise, while also appreciating the ways in which researcher positionality informs and shapes research.

Throughout this methodology, I have used the term ‘process’ to describe how research is carried out, but this term should not be equated with a unidirectional journey to a pre-established end point, nor to a linear process comprised of clearly distinguishable inputs and outputs. Rather, it should reflect the manner in which research can be ongoing, meandering and co-created, encouraging the researcher to consider how power is distributed and deployed through space, and recognising that what is produced cannot but run squarely through both participant *and* researcher subjectivities (Misgav 2016). This ‘process’, learning as a researcher, should be an ongoing undertaking that is liable to react, alter, change and adapt to the shifting subjectivities of the researcher and the participant. In response to this realisation, I positioned myself as a learning researcher: not against but with my participants, allowing myself also to become vulnerable. As many of my participants saw their gender non-conformity as something to be explored and experimented with, I began to think about the research process in a similar way – an opportunity to explore and test new ways of conducting research interviews, demanding that I was constantly thinking about how I positioned myself with my participants, but also allowing myself to go astray and to go off course (albeit always ensuring that such waverings could not impact negatively on my participants).

While decentring the researcher from a position of authority or expertise, Misgav (2016: 728) does go on to acknowledge the importance of being informed and prepared to discuss potentially misrepresented, misunderstood or fraught subject matter when undertaking qualitative queer research:

In order to build trust, good communication skills are required. It is essential to understand the nuances of language and the complexity of discourse – to be familiar with the spaces and scales of activity taking place in it, and to use our common ground to get closer.

Honing my capacity for communicating complex and highly personal thoughts on gender became an important skill when carrying out fieldwork. Despite lacking the first-hand experience of being read as gender non-conforming, I had to be able to discuss these ideas in a way that was meaningful to participants. While I was cautious not to assume commonality based on shared identities, I shared experiences, empathy and political similarity within the ‘space’ to create a productive research space, while also making the participant feel at ease, reducing the feeling of formality often associated with interviews. One of my first interviews was with Kay, whom I had met through common friends prior to my fieldwork. In my fieldnotes I discussed my anxieties about starting out research with Kay:

We spoke about the fact that I am read as a cisgender man and about what this might mean for my research. Kay reiterated that gender expression doesn’t necessarily line-up with gender identity and that should not be presumed by others. They went on to tell me that they thought the most important thing about starting interviews was making sure that participants knew what I was talking about by being intelligent to the complexities and nuances of gender and by using words and phrases that my participants use and understand. (Field diary, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2016)

While this may be read as a form of posturing, through engaging with a gender non-conforming lexicon, I attempted to let my participants know that I was able to communicate ideas around gender non-conformity with them clearly and relatively knowledgably, reflecting upon their and my own experiences and upon conceptualisations of gender that are non-binary in nature. In my field diary (28<sup>th</sup> October 2016), I noted my feeling of having to ‘somehow impress my participants so as not to feel like I am wasting their time.’ These anxieties made me reflect upon my own research practice and upon how I interacted with my participants in order to discuss highly personal gender feelings.

### **3.3.3 Research positionality**

Destabilising gender and sexual norms is reliant upon the researcher’s understanding of their own positionality and on a critical reflexivity that begins to unpick social, political and cultural relations of authority within the research process. Dowling (2005: 25) contends that this understanding means that ‘critical reflexivity is the most appropriate way for dealing

with subjectivity', adding that it is important for researchers to be aware of their own social position, the positionality of their participants (and how these interact), so as to expose 'networks of social power' (Gorman-Murray *et. al.* 2010: 99). It is not enough simply to state researcher positionality at the outset and then fail to reflect upon this subsequently, and rather, positionality should be accounted for and critically negotiated throughout the research process. I would add that, in using queer methodologies, it is important not to assume that these positions are stationary, but are in fact always themselves in flux, affected by the researcher, the participant and on the social positionings held by each of these actors. Researchers must be aware that gender and sexual subjectivities are practised, enacted and *lived in-situ* and that the fluidity of these subjectivities is played out in very place-specific, relational ways. Blackwood (1995: 55) goes on to state that 'we [researchers] occupy multiple positions and identities that transform over time, forcing us constantly to reconstruct who we are in relation to the people we research.' To assume that either the researcher's or the participant's gender position will remain the same throughout the research process sits uncomfortably with any attempt at queering. McDonald (2013: 129) supposes that positionality is a fluid 'social location' needing to be understood as a set of 'complex interactions between our gender, race/ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality and socio-economic class' (Scott-Dixon, 2004: 32). This intersectionality of course needs to be considered and reflected upon when designing research questions and how they can be effectively framed and interrogated. Further to this, and crucial for geographers, is to understand how the space in which the 'fieldwork' takes place should also be understood – also in flux and open to contestation and conceptual questioning.

While it may be the researcher who organises and steers the fieldwork, I have tried to adopt an ethics of honesty, openness and vulnerability. I hoped that through discussion about my own positionality and, in particular, my gender self-conceptualisation with participants, we would be able productively to address how gender affects the fieldwork, while also being able to reflect upon the very process of such discussion within the research space. Vincent (2017: 4) frames this kind of move as 'transparency', commenting on how it can affect fieldwork:

Researchers should consider carefully how much of their own stories they are comfortable sharing, whether that involves outing oneself as a marginalised gender or sexuality, or sharing a narrative related to having a trans family member, partner or friends.

In ensuring that I was transparent with my participants, and in sharing my own stories and experiences of being a queer person, I was able to open up to my participants (ensuring my own ongoing reflexivity), while also offering elements of my own story back: co-creating research material through discussion, rather than through more conventional interview structures. It is through this conversational approach to ‘interviews’ that I hoped to search for commonality with participants. Through the sharing of gendered memories, stories, experiences and discomforts, I sought to build an ethic of caring for the participants as they shared their own highly personal emotions and insights into their gendered realities. This created a fieldwork assemblage constructed of my own positionality, that of the participant and of how we both understood the space in which the fieldwork was taking place (Figure 3.1). Figure 3.1 shows that positionality, the way that it is understood by the self, and the way that positionality is ‘read<sup>38</sup>’ by the other, is a dialectical and bi-directional process of sharing, challenging assumptions and allowing one’s own position to be challenged. Smith (1972) notes that stating one’s own position is not enough within qualitative research, and that investigating the social world by starting from one’s own direct experience allows researchers to acknowledge their own epistemological standing and begin to think about the relationship with the participant as equitable and respectful.

Ahmed (2014) warns that the academic researcher must be aware of their position, being conscious of generating new queer knowledges through research but also ensuring not to neglect the impact on the body:

When I use the concept of “sweaty concepts” I am also trying to say we can generate new understandings by describing the difficulty of inhabiting a body that is not at home in a world. Sweat is bodily; we might sweat more during more strenuous activity. A “sweaty concept” might be one that comes out of a bodily experience that is difficult, one that is “trying,” and where the aim is to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty, which means also aiming not to eliminate the effort or labour from the writing (I suspect not eliminating the effort or labour becomes an academic aim because we have been taught to tidy our texts, not to reveal the struggle we have in getting somewhere) (Ahmed, 2014 n.p).

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<sup>38</sup> Even going through my fieldwork, I found it difficult to stop making assumptions about my participants and ‘reading’ them through a binary lens – making assumptions about their gender based upon their gender expression and upon hegemonic understandings of masculinity or femininity. When discussing this issue with Kay, they believed that it is ‘impossible to leave that binary gender world behind. We’re all brought up and conditioned within that world and we can’t escape it. What is more important is that we are able to question those assumptions that are made at a moment’s glance and not treat people in a particular way because of that.’

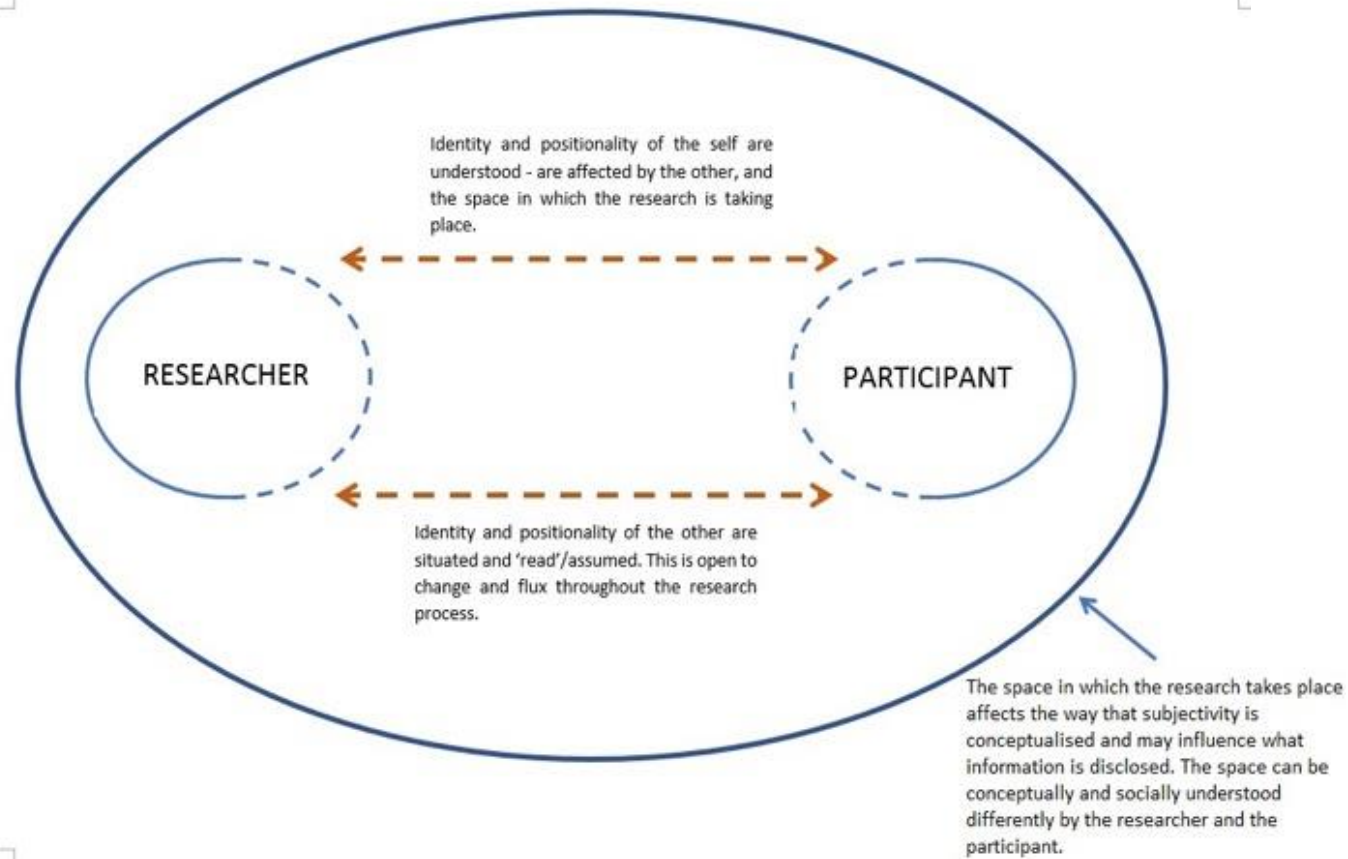


Figure 3.1: Research-participant positionality assemblage. (Author's own model)

For gender non-conforming bodies that may not feel ‘at home in a world’, it is important to realise that discussing these potentially stressful experiences in a research context may be viewed as an exploitative use of knowledge gathering. This also throws into light my own positionality further, not just as someone who is read as ‘male’ by others, but also my academic position, encouraging me to ask uncomfortable questions about the extracting of peoples’ experiences which are lived as very real struggles while questioning how this ‘data’ is used or published for my own benefit. Through this light-shining, I have been encouraged to face the myriad of ways in which this research may be fraught, but also the potentials for it to forge solidarities through developing and contributing to a gender non-conforming geography in an appropriate and ethical way. A critical and queer approach to positionality allows assumptions about social positions to be addressed and questioned, allowing the researcher to place themselves with the participant so as also to question their own positions and privileges.

Sharing my own gendered experiences with participants was also useful in critically analysing my own positionality. Being part of the research inevitably meant that my understanding of (my own) gender was challenged as I found myself placed within and/or being restricted by socialised norms and ontologies, and as I learned from my participants’ testimonies. Queer researchers have provided honest and thoughtful discussion of how interacting with participants affects self-conceptualisation of their own gender and sexual orientations (e.g. Rooke, 2009). McDonald (2013: 127), who discusses ‘coming out in the field’, provides a very honest account of how encounters with his participants inflected his understanding of his sexual orientation, adding that ‘people’s identifications with particular categories of identity can change, and the meaning of these categories are contextually dependent on the personal trajectory of every person who comes to identify with a given category’ (p.140). Hence, in discussing gender dysphorias and discomforts with participants, I began to question my own position within a gendered system as I became increasingly immersed in the research process and increasingly affected by the accounts of my participants.

In April 2017, I decided to acknowledge these gendered anxieties by recording the way that I was feeling as a type of autoethnography, allowing me to offer a reflexive account of my own positionality. Primarily, though, I did this as a release – as a way of physically getting these thoughts, anxieties and confusions down on paper, rather than continuing to worry about them abstractly. Prior to fieldwork, much of my queer self-reflection had focused on

the positioning of my sexual orientation, rather than on my gender<sup>39</sup>, but, through speaking to participants, I admitted that I must be open to questioning the stability of my own gender, something that should not be forced or resisted. Many of the discomforts that I had/have with my own gender echoed the experiences of participants. I began to question how others read my gender and how my male-orientated embodiment of gender may influence how others understand me. I discussed at length that I do not ‘feel a particularly strong connection to typical understandings of masculinity,’ although I was not sure to what extent this was a ‘symptom’ of my queer sexual orientation. Discussing my discomfort when faced with ‘typically masculine behaviour and interests,’ I noted my ‘frustration at the confines of being a man’ and a disdain for how patriarchal masculinity impacts the self negatively (through contributing to high levels of young male suicide and poor mental health, as noted in popular discourse: Perry, 2016) ‘and the way that it impacts other people through sexism, homophobia and transphobia. The idea that something which is seen as so socially elevated, yet potentially detrimental is paradoxical.’ However, I also noted my concern at claiming alternative genders, discussing frustrations at how I do not have (if at all I need) ‘the correct language or label to explain how I feel about my own gender.’

I considered my gender expression and how other people shape the ways in which I express my gender differently in different places. I questioned how my gender has been read by my participants and how they have affected the manner in which I have expressed my gender within interviews<sup>40</sup>:

How do I ensure that I am not going to be threatened by those who seek to regulate gender expression, masculinity and femininity and how does this change depending on where I am or who I am with? It is difficult to balance these up – what can one ‘get away with’ without causing offence or discomfort to others and, hence, to myself. It is important not to underestimate the affect

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<sup>39</sup> This also gave me the opportunity to reflect upon how sexual orientation is inescapably gendered. In my reflections, I discuss ‘buying women’s clothes and wearing them amongst friends, which encouraged me to think about how people perceive my gender and sexuality. I began to wonder in what ways people thought my feminising was just part of ‘being gay’ and whether I may have in some ways taken advantage of that in the past; it is now something with which I am not entirely comfortable as it conflates femininity with homosexuality: a patriarchal attitude which I now realise has been perpetuated as a form of oppression against gay men and women.

<sup>40</sup> Rooke (2009: 155) offers a reflective account of how she ‘performed’ her lesbian identity within research encounters, questioning what affect this had on her participants. The way that I expressed my gender – through behaviours, clothing and mannerisms – was something which I gave considerable thought to during research. Just as my participants gave open accounts of their own gender, to a degree, I felt as though my gender was also ‘on show’ and was being read by participants. In some interviews, I challenged myself to wear more feminine clothing, perhaps as a signal to my participants that I was willing to challenge masculinity within public space and to provide a sense of subtle solidarity with participants as my own gender presentation was something which participants often wanted to discuss.



that my gender expression has on others. I suppose that there are also several other things that influence the way that I present my gender to someone and no one of these things can necessarily be taken in isolation. Things such as the company that I keep, flirting, whether or not I feel confident in certain places, the image of myself that I want to show to people, relationships and comfortability with other people, my perceived interpretation of the openness that someone might have to questioning normalised notions of gender, sexual orientation and queerness, the place that these social interactions take place and the impact that these social interactions might have on future interactions. These things not only change depending on the people that I am interacting with but also depending on where I am and the threats that I perceive to be present if I am read as being gay or effeminate (seeing as most people do not take time to differentiate between these two things necessarily).

However, if this is an issue for me, as someone who is quite confidently read as male, I lack the experience to empathise fully with my participants, whose bodies and gender expression may be more unreadable or problematic. I suppose thinking about this in similar ways to my participants, I have to balance (perceived) risks of threat while also attempting to achieve a gratifying sense-of-self when externally portraying our gender identity. (Field diary, 7<sup>th</sup> April 2017)

Hearing my own gender anxieties being vocalised by my participants was both liberating and confusing. Having conversations about my own gender and how my understanding and embodiment of gender changed depending on geographical contexts was in some ways very cathartic, partially removing me from a position of power or expertise within interviews. These discussions were thrown into relief when Aeryn asked me, ‘Tell me about your gender?’, after which we talked at length about my own conceptualisation of my gender. Leo was also open to talking about my gender anxieties, saying ‘I don’t think anyone who confidently identifies as cisgender sits around thinking, ‘what is my gender?’’ Being honest with my participants about my own gender anxieties incidentally forced me to think about and deconstruct my own gender. While this intense self-reflection and questioning provided few (if any) answers, I have found it to be both enlightening and challenging.

### **3.4 Queering methods**

Throughout this methodology chapter, I have frequently noted what it might mean to construct queer methodologies – ones concerned with subjectivity, challenging hegemonic power and deconstructing essentialisms. How, though, can this overall queer methodological orientation be translated into the detail of queer methods, and how can queer methodologies be put into the grain of practice when carrying out qualitative research? Dilley (1999: 462) states that queer theory ‘creates new, or altered, methods of investigation and analysis,’ producing methods reflective of different subject positions, while also being flexible and

malleable in how they are executed. In this section, I will discuss the ways in which I executed such research techniques, allowing epistemological space for queerness to be formulated throughout the research and analysis process.

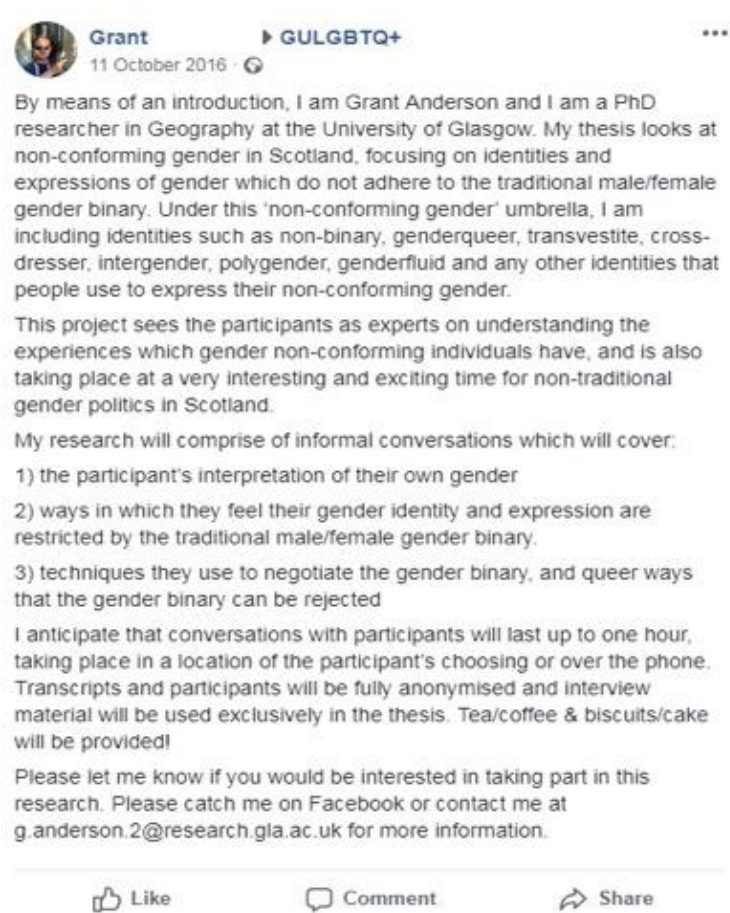
### 3.4.1 Recruitment

Firstly, recruiting participants was a central concern. Having lived in Glasgow for a number of years and having taken part in voluntary work with LGBT groups in the city<sup>41</sup>, I initially depended upon a network of individuals and institutions built up over a number of years. Having formally been part of The University of Glasgow's LGBT student organisation (GULGBTQ+), I first contacted a friend who was still part of the group and who identifies as non-binary. They acted as a gatekeeper to the group, granting me permission to post on the group's Facebook page (Figure 3.2) and Twitter account, raising awareness of my research with the hope of generating interest in my research. Also, at this stage 'snowballing' became an increasingly important part of my research as non-binary and gender non-conforming participants began to introduce me to others who might be interested in taking part. I used a snowball recruitment strategy as a way of widening participation, using the unique position of one participant to gain access to others. Noy (2008: 330) proposes that snowball sampling can be particularly useful when 'trying to obtain information on and access to hidden populations.' Despite concerns about research fatigue arising in trans communities (Glick *et. al.* 2018) and the assumption that trans individuals are used as an academicised queer trope for deconstructing gender and sex (Hird, 2000), non-binary trans and gender non-conforming voices remain relatively unexplored and hidden from popular narratives. These hidden perspectives meant that gaining access through snowballing was essential in contacting participants.

This method alone, however, raised a number of concerns about to whom I was able to gain access. Taylor (2010: 71) notes that the recruitment process is critical when thinking about queer research methodologies, since it influences 'who gets to speak', what stories are told and who has the opportunity to contribute (and who may be inadvertently excluded). Following Davidson's (2007) observations that genderqueerness remains predominantly a

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<sup>41</sup> Since 2010, I have been a research volunteer with LGBT Youth Scotland, a charitable organisation that works with LGBT young people in Scotland. My experience of researching with the charity provided me the opportunity to discuss my research with third sector policy researchers and gave me increasing awareness about how political discussion around trans and non-binary rights was being played out at a national level.



**Figure 3.2: Facebook post used during the recruitment of participants. (Author's material)**

white, middle-class university graduate's gender ontological move<sup>42</sup>, I recognised that my research needed to reach participants outwith university spheres, to which end I developed a research poster to publish on social media and that could be printed out and given to LGBT and trans groups across Scotland<sup>43</sup>. This poster allowed me to contact participants who were not part of university organisations and thereby to capture a greater breadth of experiences.

The wording used on the recruitment poster (and in social media posts) led to much thought and methodological questioning from the outset with respect to my fieldwork process. What

<sup>42</sup> Although I would argue that there has been a mainstreaming and a popularisation of non-binary knowledges since Davidson's (2007) paper was published.

<sup>43</sup> During the recruitment process, I contacted a number of national LGBT organisations, including the Scottish Trans Alliance ([www.scottishtrans.org](http://www.scottishtrans.org)), Equality Network ([www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)), LGBT Health and Wellbeing ([www.lgbthealth.org.uk](http://www.lgbthealth.org.uk)) and Stonewall Scotland ([www.stonewallscotland.org.uk](http://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk)). Using a list compiled by the Equality Network ([www.equality-network.org](http://www.equality-network.org)), I also contacted regional LGBT trans organisations in an attempt to contact those who live outwith the urban centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh, where the majority of LGBT organisations are centred. Of these, the Scottish Trans Alliance (STA) proved to be particularly helpful because of their willingness to promote my research material and also because of the popularity and connectedness of the group. STA, in 2016, widened its remit to support and include non-binary and genderqueer individuals, which indeed made it an effective way of contacting my intended research population.

language/wording should I use to ensure that the material was inclusive – capturing a breadth of experiences – but would also be personal enough to be meaningful to individuals, encouraging them to reply to my request? I had to design content with which potential participants would identify. It was my aim to create a catch-all bracket that I believe was both inclusive of specific gender identity markers but also still left open to interpretation, speaking to gendered notions of ‘just being different’, as described in numerous reflections from gender non-conforming and trans individuals (e.g. Bornstein and Bergman, 2010). I considered using ‘gender non-conforming,’ although, while ‘gender non-conforming’ has increasingly become part of the lexicon of gender non-binary narratives, at the time of initial writing it remained peripheral across academic and non-academic discourse.

Amid concerns that ‘gender non-conforming’ would not resonate with those affected by the everyday implications of sitting in contestation with hegemonic and bi-modal gender ontologies, and concerns that the term was ‘too academic’, I began to consider other gendered terms arising in more popular discourse. I noted that stories of ‘non-binary’ and ‘genderqueer’ lives had started to appear on social media and through ‘human interest’ stories in popular news outlets (BBC News, 2018). I spoke to a non-binary friend about this matter, wanting to work with them and to hear their thoughts on how best to contact potential participants. After reflecting upon their uniquely placed experiences and knowledges, I decided that, from a recruitment perspective, it would be worthwhile to embrace how gender diverse identities were being understood through popular discourse, rather than attempting to understand them purely through academic conceptualisation. Thus, *both* ‘gender non-conforming’ *and* a list of identities were used on the poster. After many alterations, a finalised version of the recruitment poster was created (Appendix 1).

These methods of recruitment still had some shortcomings. Firstly, Vidal-Oritz (2018) encourages researchers to address intersectionality when recruiting trans and non-binary populations. While not all of my participants were Scottish, and many did offer a variety of insights and comparisons from other countries in Europe, all of my participants were white. This fact, inevitably, limits the contribution that this thesis can have in discussing the lives of gender non-conforming people of colour. Because of the highly personalised material being discussed during fieldwork and because I did not feel it ethically appropriate to target individuals and, in the process, assume their gender identity, I did not feel comfortable searching out non-conforming people of colour, also fearing that to do this would appear tokenistic. Instead, recruitment was done on a voluntary, opt-in basis. Furthermore, De Vries (2012) raises concerns that transgender research tends to focus on middle-classness. While

class was not directly discussed during the research process, most of my participants do have high levels of education,<sup>44</sup> with 22 out of 27 participants having university education. In spite of these shortcomings, Hines (2010) cautions against a reductionist ‘tick-box’ approach to intersectionality in trans research, meaning an approach that does not do the necessary analytical labour meaningfully to analyse how particular intersections affect gender experiences. In spite of these potential biases, I believe that I was able – in an ethically responsible fashion – to recruit a breadth of experiences and thereby to discuss gender non-conformity and how it is experienced by different ages, in different places and across multiple identities.

### 3.4.2 Queering the interview: queer conversations

Interviews have a lengthy history of being used as a primary method of empirical ‘data’ gathering across social sciences and across gender geographies (McDowell, 1992). The bulk of my research was carried out using in-depth, semi-structured interviews that tackled how the gender binary is negotiated within different spaces and considered how gender non-conforming geographies are being developed ‘on the ground’. Having secured ethical clearance from the University’s College of Science and Engineering, I was able to move forward with the research design. I created a project information sheet, to make potential participants aware of what taking part in the research process would involve (Appendix 2). This would ensure transparency throughout and allow the participant to ask any questions that they may have prior to taking part. I also created a consent form, which I asked every participant to sign before taking part in any of my research (Appendix 3). As my intended participants were not designated as a ‘vulnerable group’ by either the University of Glasgow or the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2010), participants were able to consent for themselves<sup>45</sup>. At this stage, the importance of anonymity was discussed with participants. Given the highly personal information being shared, I invited my participants to decide upon a pseudonym that they would like me to use, ensuring that no anonymity was breached. Detamore (2010) expresses concern that these processes of formalisation can stifle

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<sup>44</sup> Although it may not be fully correlated to any kind of classed-based identity because university education is publicly funded in Scotland.

<sup>45</sup> While transgender and gender non-conforming individuals are not included in the list of ‘potentially vulnerable groups’, it is worth noting the disproportionately high levels of poor mental health represented within LGBT communities. *The Scottish LGBT Equality Report* (Equality Network, 2015) notes the extent to which poor mental health impacts LGBT people. In preparing myself to talk about mental health more openly with participants, I took part in the National Health Service mental health first aid training course to make myself more aware of mental health issues which could be discussed during interviews.

queer research and resemble the signing of a binding contract, with Massey (1994) adding that the bureaucratic process of having to apply for ethical approval can be to the detriment of research. While carrying out interviews, it was important, at least partially, to look for ways to relinquish this formalisation and to reframe the interview as something both personal and reflective. By using semi-structured interviews to open up conversations about gender and gender non-conformity, I sought to reverse some of the structuring often imposed upon interviews through consent forms and information sheets.

Finally, I designed a personal information sheet that I asked participants to complete and which was discussed during the interview (Appendix 4). This did not demand any response from participants, and I asked interviewees to leave answers blank if they did not think it appropriate or applicable to them. Following the research procedures of Browne, Munt and Yip (2010) in their book, *Queer Spiritual Spaces: sexuality and sacred spaces*, these information sheets did not use tick boxes or specific labels. Instead, participants were able to choose how to name or describe their own identities by filling in a blank field. This approach ensured an ethic of self-determination and gave agency to the participant to define themselves as they desired throughout the research process. Interviewing within queer geography seeks to ‘bring to the surface social worlds only dimly articulated hitherto’, and in doing so, to shine light upon the hugely diverse, hybridised and newly imagined subjectivities that simplistic categorisation would otherwise ‘collapse into homogenised subjective meaninglessness’ (Kong, Mahoney and Plummer, 2003: 100).

Before carrying out the interviews, I also created a list of topics to steer – however loosely – the conversation, although these topics could be changed to reflect the individual participant while allowing myself a more conversational and *ad-hoc* approach to the interview (Appendix 5). At this stage, I also gave participants the opportunity to ask any questions and asked whether or not they would consent to being recorded using a dictaphone. While the limitations of interviews have been discussed across the social science (e.g. King and Horrocks, 2010), I still regard them as a viable device for putting queer theory into practice, allowing queer subjects the ‘space’ to discuss their experiences and tell their own stories openly. While Nash (2010) agrees that interviews are a valid method of carrying out qualitative social science research, she still encourages queer geographers to re-examine such methods:

What queer methodological approaches press us to do is to re-examine those methods and their deployment within the wider historical and political context

of research on sexual minorities and the more intimate and constraining spaces of interaction in the field. (Nash, 2010: 141-142)

It was hence necessary to reframe how interviews could be deployed and developed as a queer technique. Through her ethnographic work, Rooke (2009: 152) reflects upon the role of the interviewing researcher and how they can adopt an ethic of ‘listening that combines emotions and intellect [through] an ability to convey genuine interest, express care and respond appropriately with the desired outcome of establishing feelings of trust.’ Perhaps this claim strikes at my own discomfort about using ‘interviews’ as a way of describing how I carried out research. Given their connotations to questions and answers and the formalisation of responses, I sought to move away from ‘interviews’ towards queer conversations as a method. In practice, such a move has indeed allowed more honest discussion with my participants, permitting me to reflect upon their responses, react to their replies (both in terms of what is said but also through reading body language) and also offer my own personal experiences of being a queer person, in attempting to conjure a dialectical environment of sharing, honesty and empathy. While the majority of organisations that have adopted gender non-conformity into their policies and practices are based in Edinburgh and Glasgow, I thought it important – as already noted – also to contact groups in other parts of Scotland to avoid giving a disproportionately metrocentric account of gender non-conforming geographies. This was done through social media, using Facebook and Twitter in particular, to contact organisations such as Shetland LGBT (Facebook) and Dumfries and Galloway LGBT Plus ([www.lgbtplus.org.uk](http://www.lgbtplus.org.uk)). In this way, 61 organisations across Scotland were contacted. Following this initial recruitment drive, 27 interviewees were secured. Table 3.1 was created, noting the details of the participant and the interview as a way of logging interview details. Many of the participants were from the Central Belt of Scotland, but interviews were also carried out in Aberdeen, Stirling and Dundee, giving a breadth of urban experiences from across Scotland. Beyond Scotland’s urban centres, participants were also from Dumfries and Galloway, The Shetland Islands and Falkirk.

When reflecting upon how interviews can be queered, it is important to question how they can be used in a fashion more appropriate for conversations surrounding gender and sexuality. Given that many participants see their understanding of gender as something relational, unfixed and ongoing, interviews should not be taken as a definitive account of an individual’s identity, but recognised as merely offering a queer snapshot of how their gender was understood at that time and within the space that the interview took place. As geographers, it is important to note how the temporalities and spatialities of the interview do

give a specific context to the responses given. In reframing interviews as queer conversations, I build upon the wide span of feminist geographical writing that considers how interviews can be used in a highly reflexive and situated way to critically understand both the relationship between researcher and participant and the importance of positionality (e.g. Rose, 1997; Bondi et. al. 2002). However, in thinking about ‘queer conversations’, I wish to augment decades of feminist approaches towards fieldwork in two ways. Firstly, I thought about these research encounters as conversations rather than interviews as they become more about sharing stories and experiences of gender, particularly when discussing discomforts with masculinity and femininity. While McDowell (1992) notes that ‘we must recognise and take account of our own position, as well as that of our research participants and write this into our research practice’, positionality in these queer conversations did more than merely ‘recognise’ our positions because my own gender was also discussed openly throughout this process. Looking for moments of commonality and sharing stories and feelings thereby became an important step in queering the relationship between myself and my participants, making this process more dialectical. Secondly, gender queerness became an integral part of these conversations as I began to understand my own gender as something shifting, fluid and relational through these interview experiences. While one might expect the research experience to become easier as one builds experience, this was not the case during my fieldwork. The more conversations that I conducted, the more I began to think of my own gender as I distanced myself more from (certain versions of) masculinity. The affect that the conversations had meant that I began to queer(y) my own gender. This unsettling of my own gender was created through the research encounter, resulting in my own shifting positionality as knowledges were shared between myself and my participants.

The geographies of the interview itself should be taken seriously, and interviews took place in a location chosen by the participant in an attempt to make them feel comfortable to speak openly.<sup>46</sup> Elwood and Martin (2000: 649) have written extensively about placing interviews, encouraging geographers to undertake careful ‘observation and analysis of the people, activities, and interactions that constitute these spaces, of the choices that different participants make about interview sites and of participants’ varying positions, roles, and identities in different sites can illustrate the social geographies of a place.’ When initially

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<sup>46</sup> Longhurst (2016) encourages researchers to consider the importance of ensuring that researchers themselves feel comfortable throughout the research process. While much has been written about protecting the participant from ‘harm’ during the research process, Longhurst notes that the emotions and potential anxieties of the researcher must also be taken seriously to ensure self-care and to remove the masculinist assumption that researchers are objective and emotionally distanced from the research.



contacting interviewees, I encouraged them to think about a space where they would be able to speak as openly as possible, giving power to the participant to organise the interview, at least partially, on their terms, and empowering them in their interaction with me as the researcher. Most participants chose local coffee shops or cafés, but some opted for more private space, such as offices.

As already mentioned, I aimed to give participants as much freedom as possible, allowing them to identify using words and descriptors that they felt best represented their own conceptualisation of gender (Table 3.1). The growing lexicon of gender non-conforming language meant that ten identity markers were used, with a variety of other words and expressions also deployed to describe gender expression. These self-definitions have been used and reflected upon throughout this thesis, indicating the varied ways, and to different degrees, whereby gender non-conformity can be understood and lived. Interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 1 hour 25 minutes, depending on how well I felt that our queer conversations flowed, being aware that I did not want to keep pushing participants to answer questions or to make them feel uncomfortable. I felt that the majority of interviews went well, with a number of participants telling me afterwards that they had enjoyed the experience. While there were some moments of fieldwork awkwardness (see Bille and Steinfeldt, 2013), as is often the case in feminist and queer qualitative research, as the interview fieldwork progressed I became more confident in carrying out interviews – conversations were getting longer, I felt more engaged with the material and also felt that I was able to offer more empathy as I gained more experience and had more exposure to gender non-conforming knowledges. I noted in my field diary (12<sup>th</sup> October 2016), when carrying out my first interview with Elliott, ‘when listening back to the recording, there are things I wish I had asked and things that I should have been more subtle about. Hopefully these early interviewing experiences will contribute to later interviews that I do.’ Perhaps the most rewarding of these instances was being thanked by participants for undertaking work with people ‘like them’, and for how – in asking about ‘the everyday’ experiences of being gender non-conforming, rather than attempting to translate lived experience into academic concepts or theories – I had allowed them to feel ‘empowered to talk about [their] everyday lives’ (Jio).

Once interviews had been transcribed, I then used Nvivo software<sup>47</sup> to code the interview material (Appendix 6). Meticulously going through all interview transcripts, I created 67 codes and sub-codes that were then put into a matrix showing the number of times that codes coincided. I used this matrix to formulate a structure that I used during the writing up process, looking for which codes overlapped and how they could be arranged in a way that seemed cohesive and appropriate. During this process, it is important to note the unavoidable centrality of myself, as the researcher, in deciding what to include and exclude, how to structure the written thesis and how I then represent the narratives of my participants through this structure. Despite taking steps to keep the research process equitable and transparent, geographers such as Baxter and Eyles (1997: 505) note that the ‘significance of authorship and the characteristics of the researcher in shaping the interpretation of findings have become increasingly influential as writing social and cultural geography seeks to re-present the subjects of inquiry.’ Therefore, it is important to realise that my own agendas, interpretations, interests and objectives are inevitably instrumental in shaping this research.

### **3.4.3 (Auto)ethnographical field diary**

Supplementing my interview material, I also kept a field diary throughout my fieldwork process. Before starting my fieldwork, I was not clear about what I would record in this diary. Rather, I decided to use it on an *ad hoc* basis, which I found surprisingly useful in consolidating my thoughts, reflecting upon what could not be recorded using a dictaphone, and for noting down further questions or points of inquiry when I was ‘in the field.’ Firstly, I used the field diary as a way of recording what happened in each of the interviews. The intention here was to find a means of recording the complexities of interviewing interactions that could not be detected through recording or transcription, as a reminder of what happened, to prevent it becoming forgotten or lost over time (Punch, 2012). I noted pauses and silences, awkwardnesses and how I had read participants’ body languages throughout interviews:

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<sup>47</sup> Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis software package. I used Nvivo to store and organise my transcriptions on a single platform and to categorise, analyse and code interview transcripts.

**Table 3.1: Table of participants**

Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identity	Gender Expression	Sexual Orientation	Preferred Pronouns	Highest level of study
Elliott	22	non-binary		bisexual	they/them	undergraduate
Cal	19	non-binary		?	them/they	undergraduate
Kay	19	non-binary	non-binary	gay	they/them	Undergraduate
Rory	22	non-binary		Pansexual	they/them	HNC
Willow	25	non-binary	non-binary	pansexual 'if I must put a word to it'	she/they	Masters
Sharon	22	agender		asexual	they/them	undergraduate
Alex	33	multi-indentification	feminine	i see it as a process of becoming	any	Masters
Sam	32	androgynous	androgynous	gay	she/he	PhD
Aly	24	non-binary/ genderqueer		Queer (bi/pan)	they/them	MSc
Ace	23	non-binary/gender fluid	masc-leaning androgynous	pansexual	they/them	HNC
Sloane	27	non-binary	masculine	gay	they/them	BA Hons
Jio	21	non-binary/ agender		?	they/them	Undergraduate
Maud	23	genderqueer	fluid	bisexual	she/her or they/them	Postgraduate
Aeryn	29	non-binary woman	soft butch	lesbian/ queer	she/they	Undergraduate
Joey	22	agender-fluid	leaning towards gender neutral	pansexual/panromantic	they/them	undergraduate
Seumas	24	?	wizard	asexual spectrum	they/he	HND
Terry	22	non-binary	genderqueer	bisexual	he/she	Undergraduate
Chris	57	non-binary	masculine + femme aspects	heterosexual	they/them	MA
Sidomie	25	agender	femme	asexual/queer	she of they	Mlit
Sophie Gnosis	29	genderqueer	?	bi/queer	they/them	PhD
Charly	21	genderqueer	masculine	pansexual	they/them	MA
Linda	57	genderqueer/genderfluid	fluid	bisexual	she/they	Masters
Jess	50	non-binary	non-binary	bi		PhD
Ivor	27	non-binary	vaguely tomboy/ dapper femme	queer	they/them	MA
Pops	37	Male/ gender subversive		straight	he or she (en femme)	BA Hons
Ste	36	male	effeminate - masculine	gay	he/him	diploma
Sparrowhawk	28	Genderqueer/fluid	neutral	bi	she/xe	BA Hons

This has been the first interview where I have been very aware of the silence. Seumas shuffled in his chair. I punctuated the silence by asking if he wanted to talk about anything else on the information sheet but still more silence. He thought some more. I became aware of how loud Starbucks [the location of the interview] was. It was like he was worried he was going to say something wrong. When he did speak, I felt like I should make sure I should provide validation for his response (Field diary, 10<sup>th</sup> November 2016)

I thought that Sophie would be very confident in talking about their own gender. They seemed confident. But when we started, they apologised, saying that they found it easier to speak when they weren't making eye contact with someone and that I wasn't to take it personally. They were very fidgety in going through things – shuffling in their seat, playing with the ring on their finger. I found this distracting but didn't want to make them feel awkward so didn't push too hard on forcing the conversation in a particular direction in those moments. (Field diary, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016)

While these diary entries gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the impacts of silence and body language during an interview, it is also instructive to note what was included and what was omitted from diary entries. When reflecting upon the diary as research material in geographical research, Meth (2003: 197) notes that 'decision[s] about authorship and the very process of selecting what is to be shared and what is to be omitted in a research project are political in themselves.' Though using the diary to be more reflective of and on the research, it is ultimately myself, as the researcher, who constructs the narrative of the interview and, as such, what is included is unavoidably dependent on my own perceptions, rather than those of my participants. These diary extracts were typed up and loosely coded by hand, allowing me to add to my own notes, going back to entries after time to rethink how I felt during the interview, allowing me, once again, to reflect upon the fieldwork process going forward.

Secondly, I used the field diary as a tool to note my own feelings, emotions and thoughts throughout the research. This allowed me to reflect upon things that I thought were going well during fieldwork and things that I thought could be improved. As previously mentioned, the affective nature of my fieldwork meant that, at times, I found being intensely introspective about my own subjectivity, identity and positionality to be mentally tiring. Reflecting upon the emotional impacts of research has been discussed across feminist geography (e.g. Bondi, 2005), while Punch (2012: 88) discusses how field diaries can be used as a tool for managing the emotional labour of fieldwork:

Whilst it is not helpful to overindulge in self-pity in the field as the fieldwork will not get done, better awareness of the range of potential pitfalls could enable researchers to confront and accept their weaknesses. Anticipating a

range of emotions and not ignoring how doing the fieldwork feels are effective means of developing both resilience and coping strategies in the field.

Following Punch, I used my field diary to capture the ‘unexpected and unanticipated, the difficult and awkward, the messy and complex’ (p.90): in short, to represent the chaos that I often felt during fieldwork, using it as a way of mapping out my own path through the messy social worlds in which I was immersing myself. While it was never my intention to use extracts from the field diary within this thesis and for it to remain as a personal account, it was invaluable in allowing me to discuss how I felt, and in practice it has proved useful to include a small number of diary entries in the final written chapters. Reflecting upon these emotions also allowed me to think about coping strategies that I felt would improve the quality of my research.

Finally, I found it valuable to use the diary to make observations when attending events mentioned by participants. Geographers such as Drummer *et. al.* (2008) have reflected upon the importance of reflective field diaries in geographical research, with McGuinness and Simm (2005) noting that, rather than simply recording facts, reflective field diaries are a means of ensuring critical reflection on field experience. As I accumulated increasing amounts of interview material, I began to note events repeatedly being mentioned by participants. These events, and the spaces in which they take place, form an important element of non-conforming geographies in Scotland, allowing for community building and the creation of safe space. I began to attend some of these events – drag performances, queer cabaret events – making observations and taking notes that would provide valuable insight into the various ways in which gender and sexual queerness play out in community groups. These events were public in nature, were widely advertised and no expectation of privacy was expected. In order to remain ethically diligent during this process, I did not seek to influence the event at any time, nor did I engage in interviews with the performers or audience members attending the events. As those who were taking part were not seen to be ‘vulnerable’ by University of Glasgow protocol, I was not required to seek further ethical approval in order to observe them.

#### **3.4.4 Searching for research material online**

Throughout the research process, but particularly when considering gender non-conformity

and transgression within a historical, Scottish context, using ‘online’ material<sup>48</sup> formed an important empirical method of ‘data’ collection. This was done principally throughout Chapters 4 and 5 where I found that using websites, blogs, news articles and thought pieces that were not peer-reviewed allowed me to reframe what academic content might look like, broadening the scope of material used as part of my research process. These materials – the ways that they are used and the ways in which geographers can contribute to them – is key to dismantling the dualisms of academic/non-academic and researcher/researched and has been a key aspect of geographer’s engagements with shared knowledges (Pain, 2004). Drawing on these numerous sources allowed me to flatten knowledges, queering the archive and intertwining knowledges produced from research beyond the academy with more academicised theories arising in the academy. Halberstam (2011: 15) may have referred to this method of ‘data collection’ as the creation of ‘low theory’:

Here we can think about low theory as a mode of accessibility, but we might also think about it as a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the high in high theory.

This democratisation of knowledge – drawing on sources not produced through academicised systems of knowledge production – ‘detached itself from prescriptive methods, fixed logics and epistemes, and it orients us toward problem-solving knowledge or social visions of radical justice’ (p.15-16). However, this flattening of knowledge and seeing all sources as being equally valid does have implications as the material drawn upon here was obviously not passed through a rigorous academic peer-reviewing system in order, allegedly, to maintain high quality research output. While this method of ‘data collection’ may perhaps be critiqued as an attempt to undermine high-quality standards that should be present throughout academic work, I have undertaken this method as a way to challenge hegemonic and traditional forms of knowledge production. I have sought to contradict and illuminate forms of scholarly governance that permeate throughout academic knowledges, instead placing the everyday interests, stories, observations and thoughts of individuals with/alongside/in conflict with academic sources in order to create non-conforming

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<sup>48</sup> While I located much of the material referenced in this section online, it is important to note that it may not all have been ‘online material’. For example, many of the newspaper articles, pamphlets, policy documents and government reports that I have used throughout this thesis may have taken a non-electronic form. In these cases, their online-ness was not an integral part of the composition and finding them online was only one way that this material could be accessed. However, materials sourced on social media (namely Facebook and Twitter) and some online-only articles from social and cultural commentators should be explicitly framed as online material because they are only available in electronic form.

knowledges that challenge how gender is conventionally understood (inside and outside of the academy).

I made use of materials available online for two reasons. Firstly, I found there to be a lack of published academic and historical material that considers the social and cultural specificities of gender transgression and gender non-conformity in Scotland<sup>49</sup>. This technique was particularly useful when searching out material pertaining to Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, for which I became increasingly dependent upon more ‘informal’ historical records found through conducting Google searches. This inquiry produced a variety of material, including non-academic research undertaken by social and cultural commentators, newspaper articles reflecting on historical examples of gender transgression in Scotland and historical interest pieces, seeking to unearth hidden histories of how gender has been understood and lived in Scotland. Rather than simply creating a literature review of academic material when researching gender transgression, therefore, I wanted to carry out an empirical trawling of such material and to use it to create an historical account using a broad span of potential sources, approaching something of a historian’s archival craft, rather than this work being just simple online searches. The open access of these websites means that materials used as part of this research were democratised, allowing me to attribute value to non-academic materials and to appreciate their importance (both to myself and potentially to gender non-conforming individuals) in constructing non-conforming gendered histories.

Secondly, I found using these materials a valuable method of collecting ‘informal’ records of experiences, acknowledging marginalised knowledges that had nonetheless been recorded online (Dadas, 2016), giving me insight into the geographies of gender non-conformity and how these realities have been lived in Scotland. While I have not used personal blogs as evidence in this thesis, many participants noted the importance of using Tumblr ([www.tumblr.com](http://www.tumblr.com)) or Reddit ([www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com)) in reading about other gender non-conforming experiences and in ‘learning about gender’ (Sidonie). I have, however, used social media as data throughout this thesis, as I believed that these online pages had value in showing how gender non-conforming communities can be created and organised virtually, with personal reflections and thoughts being shared between individuals, creating spaces of knowledge sharing not limited by basic worldly geography (Chenail, 2011). The ethical

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<sup>49</sup> Although there was a lack of published academic material which considers the history of gender non-conformity in Scotland, I did use academic ‘secondary’ historical and sociological texts in Chapters 4 and 5. I relied on such sources for knowledge of relevant and ordered materials, as I acknowledge that my thesis is not a work of sustained archival investigation, but rather, works to trawl various unorganised sources which were publicly available.

dilemmas faced by social researchers when using social media as a source have been thoroughly discussed by Henderson, Johnson and Auld (2013: 547):

Most prominent is the issue of whether we should treat the online texts ... as data from a human subject with corresponding ethical concerns of consent and privacy, or should we treat the texts as open for public consumption. This concern is intimately connected to the well-established and broader ethical debates around private versus public realms, consent, and rights to privacy.

In attempting to negotiate some of these public-private, textual-human contentions, I have been careful to ensure that those who post on social media platforms remain anonymous. While I have taken quotes from Facebook and Twitter pages, these have been publicly available, requiring no 'membership' to a page in order for them to be accessed. Furthermore, where I have quoted from group Facebook and Twitter pages, particularly referring to the 'bio' section giving information on the purpose of the groups, I have not drawn on posts from individuals themselves in this thesis. This decision was taken to protect the anonymity of individual posters and because, while I wanted to assess the purpose and ambitions of these online groups, I did not feel that a discussion of the individual posts themselves was necessary or ethical.

While, in this section, I have attempted to set out and demonstrate methods I used throughout this research, in reality a much more *ad-hoc*, reactive approach to research was taken. This was done, not necessarily because of a lack of direction or preparedness on my part, but because it allowed me to adapt my research methods to particular scenarios, contexts and re-routings – some of which were unpredictable as I set out 'into the field.' Dahl (2010: 150) contends that using a mixture of different methods allows for a 'queerer' representation of participants and how they negotiate social worlds. Rather than using methods to generate facts or creating truths, using a mixed methods approach, and allowing for queerness within my methods, draws attention to the uncertainties and situated knowledges that are constantly created, negotiated and experienced in queer life-worlds (King and Cronin, 2010).

### **3.5 Investigating gender non-conformity through queer methodologies**

Throughout this chapter, I have critically discussed how queer methodologies can be used as a flexible, open and changeable framework when researching non-conforming gender geographies. As queer methodologies aim critically to deconstruct the essentialisms of gender, sexuality and space (Binnie, 1997), they have been key in creating ontological and



epistemological space for those gender non-conforming and transgressive individuals who cannot be positioned within a binary gender model. Queer methodologies have been used to agitate categorisation when considering gay and lesbian lives and spaces across a rich breadth of empirical inquiry (Filiault and Drummond, 2009; Talburt and Rasmussen, 2010). This thesis seeks to push queer methodologies further, however, so as to discuss the ways in which not only the categories of 'man' and 'woman' can be deconstructed, but also how categories such as 'non-binary' can be researched in a fashion that does not assume homogeneity through categorisation or universalised representation.

Firstly, I considered the ways in which non-conformity could be framed through a queer methodological lens. This process involves decolonising knowledges and avoiding the repetition of bi-gender modes of research that have taken prominence, even within feminist geographical thought. Instead, queer methodologies should appreciate that 'subjects and subjectivities are fluid, unstable and perpetually becoming,' although this appreciation does lead to questions about how we can gather 'data' from those tenuous and fleeting moments of research encounter (Browne and Nash, 2010: 1). The benefits of using queer methodologies are two-fold. Firstly, queer methodologies, rather than looking directly or mono-thematically at identity, are able to account for the shifting subjectivities of non-conforming individuals. As participants discuss their non-conforming gender as a process of self-searching and a process of 'becoming' (Sophie), queer methodologies can be used to recognise the ongoing, shifting and unstable realities of gender conceptualisation. Secondly, a focus on fluidity and shifting subjectivities allows researchers to capture moments of relationality, reflecting on how non-conforming gender geographies can be created beyond the individual. In considering gender categories as a form of regulation that participants must negotiate in order to live gender non-conforming lives, queer methodologies seek to undermine this power and how it can be reproduced through geographical research, thus challenging cisnormativities in geographical knowledge. Critically analysing the geographical dimension of gender regulation and the ways that it is navigated by participants is a key point of investigation for this thesis.

In this methodological review, I have also given an in-depth, reflexive account of my own positionality. Queer researchers (e.g. Diamond, 2006) have lent much thought to the various ways in which the research-participant relationship can be queered to ensure that research remains equitable, transparent and dialectical in nature. I have embraced an ethic of transparency in order to create a research environment that positions myself as a learning researcher, allowing my participants, in a sense, to teach me about their experiences as I use

their situated gender ontologies as a way of learning about anti-normative gendered knowledges. I have provided a detailed reading of my own positionality and how this has been affected by my participants. Just as Rooke (2009) and McDonald (2013) discuss how their sexual identities were affected by their research, I have also found my own gender to be called into question as I continued to reflect upon participant testimony. This self-questioning has become critical to how I understood my fieldwork and to the way in which I have positioned myself in relation to my participants.

Finally, I reflected upon how a queer methodology could be developed in practical terms, through adopting research methods that could be queered to reflect the shifting and relational subjectivities of participants. I have discussed how my methods were appropriated and altered in order to capture the complexities of gender non-conforming lives. While being aware that some shortcomings inevitably remain, I used these research techniques as a way of capturing queer snapshots of gender non-conforming lives, and in the process, I hope to have outlined all of the basic details about the conduct of my research ‘in the field’ and elsewhere necessary for readers to make sense of the empirically-facing chapters that follow. This methodology has created a framework through which gender non-conforming lives can be investigated both in a historical and a contemporary sense, in order to thread together a longitudinal study of the multifarious ways in which gender non-conformity has been, and is being, embodied, experienced and negotiated in Scotland.

## Chapter 4 Queering the kilt: kilting the queer

### 4.1 Kilted geographies

In order to consider the specific geographies and contexts of contemporary gender non-conforming politics in Scotland, it is important to (re)consider Scotland's gender transgressive histories: how was gender transgressed? How did gender transgressive counter-cultures create a politics of anti-normativity and resistance? While scholars have discussed gendered representations of Scottish identity – usually ones that privilege masculinity while marginalising feminine histories (Breitenbach and Abrams, 2006) – little work has been done to unearth gender transgressive histories and the role that they play in Scottish identity formation. In this chapter, I wish to reread the cultural importance of the kilt as a material way through which gender transgression and ambiguity were/are embodied, writing gender non-conforming lives into geographical accounts of the way that gender is understood in Scotland. This key conceptual move aims to queer gendered histories and geographies, in order to write queerness into Scottish histories and cultures. Stryker (2004: 214) articulates that, as gendered culture is created through 'putting together bodies, subjectivities, social roles, and kinship structures – that vast apparatus for producing intelligible personhood that we call gender,' it is easy to reproduce such gender narratives, advancing dominant constructions of gender and sexuality through a colonisation of knowledge. Instead, this chapter will begin to decolonise dominant gender regimes in Scotland, calling instead for the creation of gender non-conforming geographies.

Using a conglomeration of materials, from online thought pieces through to more conventional academic material, this chapter aims to give a historical and contemporary account of how gender can be (re)understood through the kilt. Following a brief introduction of the history of tartan and the kilt, I will explore the intricate relationship between the kilt and the ways it can be used to reread gender, developing an alternative narrative through discussing its similarity to a skirt and exploring the history of the relationship between gender ambiguity and the kilt. In doing this, I will deconstruct hegemonic gender ontologies that remain prevalent in Scotland. In particular, this conceptual move will critique hegemonic formations of masculinity in Scotland, challenging the images of 'rugged, primal, Highland masculinity' (Abrams, 2010: 634) or 'hard man' working class imagery perpetuated through 'reductionist conceptualisations of masculinities' (Haywood and Mac an Ghail, 1996) and popular culture (see Catherine, 2000). I consider the kilt as a political tool, assessing how it has been used to resist and transgress political and gendered

hegemonies. By considering the kilt's material-cum-cultural importance, I note how this item of national significance has been used politically, viewing it as a way of reading the gendered body as political. I also investigate the relationship between the kilt and gender, and the ways in which it can be used to open up epistemological space allowing for identities and bodies to exist between the di-poles of 'man' and 'woman.' Finally, and critical to addressing how gender transgressive histories influence gender non-conforming presents, I make conceptual moves to queer the kilt, looking at its use as a tool to disassemble the gender binary, providing an alternative reading of the kilt as a gender-ambiguous skirt. Portraying this gender-ambiguity through clothing is central in the production of gender non-conforming lives as participants work to express gender non-conforming identities in a fashion that distorts both masculinity and femininity and the ways in which these identities are mapped onto gendered bodies (see Chapters 7 and 8).

## 4.2 Rereading queer gender histories through Scottish dress

The use of tartan as a signifier of Scottish identity, culture and politics has a history stretching back to the 16th century (Cheape, 1995). The development of the plaid or the *breacan-an-feileadh*, a long piece of tartan 'up to 20 feet long and 5 feet wide' and worn loosely over the shoulder, was designed by Highland Scots to protect them from harsh climatic conditions and difficult topography (Henderson, 2000: 60). Prior to the mainstreaming of the short kilt (the *philibeg*), Highland people often used the *plaid* or the *breacan-an-feileadh* as a versatile, untailored, tartan cloth to defend themselves from the elements and as a light-weight and adaptable garment. The untailored *plaid* was used by both men and women in different styles (Figure 4.1a and 4.1b). Before considering the kilt and its likeness to what many understand to be a skirt, I will look more at the history of Scottish dress and provide a historical account of gender ambiguity and traditional Highland clothing.

Following the failure of the Jacobite rebellion in 1745 (Porter, 2011), the Hanoverian British government took oppressive steps to quell Scottish rebellion, with the ultimate aim of 'opening up' the Highlands to rid them of their assumed backwardness and barbarity at a time when the rest of Britain was thriving economically. This imagined geography created by the British establishment sought to stigmatise colonised cultures, imagining them as unproductive, backwards and as a culture of mass pauperisation (Banaji, 1972). These rural-urban, progressive/backward, wealthy/poor dichotomies generated a condition of social othering and painted the Highlander as a threat to the safety and morality of ruling classes.



**Figure 4.1: Very similar male and female versions of the *breacan-an-feileadh*. ([www.folkcostume.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.folkcostume.blogspot.co.uk), 2012).**

Enshrining these public imaginaries in law, the Dress Act (1746) pragmatically sought to expel Jacobite-related politics and affiliations. Hanoverian propaganda used this act to paint the kilt as an unhygienic costume of criminals, who used it as a camouflage to hide from the law (Carse of Gowrie Shop, n.d), and as decidedly un-British:

No man or boy within that part of Britain called Scotland, other than such as shall be employed as officers and soldiers in His Majesty's Forces, shall, on any pretext whatever, wear or put on the clothes commonly called Highland clothes (that is to say) the plaid, philabeg, or little kilt, trewse, shoulder-belts or any part whatever of what peculiarly belongs to the Highland garb ... For the first offence, shall be liable to be imprisoned for six months, and on the second offence, to be transported to any of His Majesty's plantations beyond the seas, there to remain for the space of seven years (Scottish Tartans Authority, n.d)

The harsh sentencing associated with 'Scottish garb' at this time graphically conveys the politicised charge that clothing, and the way that it is culturally understood, can acquire. The kilt and tartan became understood as a material representation of anti-British, anti-imperialist politics, meaning that Highlanders had to negotiate their relationship with the state and civil society through the way that they dressed. Understanding the material as political – either as a sign of regulation or of resistance – emphasises how gender and cultural norms can be transgressed through the clothing that is worn. This colonising of localised, material knowledges meant that the kilt itself was (re)appropriated for other means. In attempting simultaneously to 'modernise' Scottish society and to degrade a rebellious and politically

disjointed Highland society, the plaid was modernised to make it more functional in a fast-changing society. To many researchers' dismay (BS Historian, 2008; Pittock, 2010), Trevor-Roper (2014) controversially says that the short kilt as we know it today (the *philibeg*), with its distinctive tartan pattern which finishes just below the knee, was designed by an Englishman between 1727-1734, to make it safer for Highland men to work around factory machinery (Anderson, n.d). BS Historian (2008) however, forcibly argues that Trevor-Roper, in his book *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History*, does not give adequate attention to the evolution, cultural depth or historical basis of the kilt as a legitimate way of dressing for Highland cultures. Instead, they argue that a variation of the kilt had been worn in Scotland for over 200 years before the infamous Dress Act (1746).

During the late-18<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the Highland dress became synonymous with the whole of Scotland, whereas prior to this it only existed in the Highlands (Anderson, n.d). With this popularisation, the style of the *plaid* began to change. While once being worn as a loose cloak, it was adapted to be part of normal dress worn by all genders (Anderson, n.d). The plaid was used in a variety of styles, depending on the functionality, with men often belting it around the waist to form a 'short-skirted shape' (ibid.). Women used it to cover their head and shoulders, and men wore the same garment in a loose, flowing style. In spite of this gendered distinction, Trevor-Roper (2014) still writes that the belting of the *plaid* by men formed a type of 'skirt or petticoat'. This un-gendered clothing was used by Hanoverian propaganda against the Highlanders:

Set in the folds and the girt round the waist to make of it a short petticoat that reaches half-way down the thigh, and the rest is brought over the shoulder and then fastened before, below the neck, often with a fork, and sometimes with a bodkin or a sharp-ended piece of stick, so that they make pretty near the appearance of a poor woman in London when they bring their gowns of their heads to shelter them from the rain. (Edward Burt, English officer posted in Scotland as a chief surveyor (1725-1726), in Trevor-Roper, 2014: 197)

Reading men's clothing as being as like a 'woman' neatly illustrates how materialities and their relationship to gender ontologies are geographically contextual. The (mis)reading of gender through a geographical account of clothing epistemologies shows how masculinity and femininity, and the ways that they are materialised, has deep cultural histories. Furthermore, this quote denotes a form of emasculation against Highland men, rendering them as other, feminine and failing to mean standardised notions of British masculinity. Burt also articulates those in Highland clothing to be 'poor' in comparison to London, thus noting the Highlander's failure to meet industrialised standards of productivity and economic value.

Burt's likening of the *plaid* to a petticoat and saying that the Highlanders looked like 'poor women in London' shows how bizarre Highland folk looked to others in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The location-based fashions (or lack of) is another example of how Highland Scots were depicted as 'other', contributing to their own alternative understanding of what it is to *be* male or *be* female. As fashion became a signifier of social currency in the rest of Britain, the Highlands remained removed from this trajectory. The misunderstanding of the colonial gaze, which sees the 'other' as feminine, becomes a disciplinary act of surveillance articulated when those bodies that disturb cultural and gendered norms are controlled by colonial authority (Bhabha, 1984). The lack of distinction between men and women when it came to clothing and fashion became a point of suspicion and obscurity. It was a key move in blurring the boundaries between men and women, exposing the ways in which this blurring might come to be done through cross-dressing and de-gendering clothing to create gender-queer gender performances within a historical Scottish context.

Following the repeal of the Dress Act in 1782 (Porter, 2011), the popularity of the kilt spread, becoming incorporated into fashion both north and south of the border. A stylisation of tartan gave rise to a range of new fashions, including tight tartan trousers (*triubhas* or *trews*) and tartan shawls. *Trews* were worn by men, especially by 'chieftains, the leading men of the clan and the well-to-do' (Cheape, 1995: 19). However, in this modernisation, the purpose of the kilt and other tartan clothing changed. Not only had it become stylised, and in turn hierarchised, dissolving its egalitarian heritage as a cloth of all people (Michaelman and Miller-Spillman, 2006), it also became increasingly gendered and differentiated from the simple *plaid*. This (re)appropriation of Scottish cultural understandings of the kilt was here instrumental in a binarisation of gender ontologies and practices. This rewriting of normalised ways of being gendered, classed and hierarchised duly led to 'the subjugation of previously established erudite knowledges and of local, popular, indigenous knowledges located at the margins of society. These subjugated knowledges have been exiled from the legitimate domains of formal knowledge' (Hartman, 2000: 20). The appropriation of these material knowledges led to an 'othering' (and queering) of Highland epistemologies, further castigating Highland socio-cultural lives.

#### **4.2.1 Decolonising gender knowledges through gender ambiguous clothing**

Michaelman and Miller-Spillman (2006) suggest that the gendering (or non-gendering) of men and women's clothing is both culturally defined and geographically located, and is

central in distributing and reproducing mainstream understanding of what it means to *be* a man or *be* a woman. For example, the use of men's skirts or a single piece of fabric which is folded or wrapped around the waist in other parts of the world, such as the sarong in South East Asia, is not read as being female (Thorpe, 2017). In addition to this, and in the case of Highland garb, I would suggest that the defining power that clothing has in assigning gender is geographically and temporally placed. Cheape (1995: 52) says that 'Highland dress became Highland costume, with little regard for function' in the later-18<sup>th</sup> century. The non-gendered *plaid* became an 'interpretation of an imagined past, reinforced by strict conventions of dress' of the British. Before the imposition of strict gender binaries, the Hanoverian imposition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, less emphasis was put on the use of clothing as an indicator of gender, social standing or identity.

With regard to the colonising of gendered knowledges and the ways that they are materialistically articulated, how can gender non-conformity be understood as being both geographically and historically contingent? Deploying non-conformity as a queer tool can allow scholars to (re)read gender across historical and geographical contexts. In questioning the notions of 'progress' impressed upon Highland populations by Hanovarian authorities, non-conformity can be used to shed light on the colonisation of localised gender knowledges and the imposition and enforcement of a strict gender binary: one which only allows the existence of 'man' or 'woman' and stigmatises evidence of gender non-conformity, cross-dressing and gender transgression. While gendered ontologies are understood in different ways in different places, it is important to consider how these knowledges travel. Other examples of how gendered knowledges have been imperialised can be seen across the former British Empire, particularly in the cases of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Han and O'Mahoney (2014: 269) discuss at length the relationship between British colonialism and the criminalisation of homosexuality through sodomy laws. They posit that the 'British Empire was responsible for spreading laws that criminalise homosexual conduct amongst its colonies', adding that ex-British colonies have been particularly reluctant to overturn sodomy laws<sup>50</sup>. Before colonialization, numerous gender non-conforming identities existed in India and Bangladesh (Hijra) and Pakistan (Zananas)<sup>51</sup>, which were then stigmatised by

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<sup>50</sup> Much research has been undertaken looking at the 'criminalisation of same-sex sexual behaviour across the British Empire' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the relationship between colonialism and the parameters of gender/sexual acceptability (Lennox and Waites, 2013: 1). However, less research has focused on the earlier regulation of gender and sexuality in Scotland by the British establishment.

<sup>51</sup> A comprehensive list of gender-diverse identities can be found at [http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits\\_map-html/](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/).



British Sodomy Laws which viewed these third genders as deviant and dangerous (Bolich, 2007). Again, this draws into question how gender non-conformity and its connection to sexual otherness are embodied in different places and how this complements or conflicts with what is considered ‘conformity’ in different socio-spatial contexts. The interconnective relationship between gendered knowledges and the ways in which it can be transgressed contributes to contemporary gender geopolitics, exposing how non-conformity is a part of a rich history in Scotland and beyond. It is the endless ways that gender non-conforming can be (re)read across and between different spaces that have made it such a useful tool in this thesis.

### **4.3 The kilt as a political garment**

The kilt as a tool of political rejection, social resistance and a signifier of radical identity has played an important role in challenging power, normativity and hegemony (Betker, 2000). Cheape (1995: 13) says that since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the cloth was used as a form of identity, displaying clan, family or district, which was ‘simply made, versatile and classless’ (and, I would argue, genderless?), ‘worn from the lowest to the highest’. It was used as an egalitarian tool to unsettle political stability and socio-cultural normativities, creating a unique identity politics unto itself. Michaelman and Miller-Spillman (2006) say that ‘dress can be a powerful, nonverbal indicator of political belief’ and thereby highlighting a very particular politics. Indeed, in 1746 the kilt became a tangible point of difference from the English: a sign of Scottish nationalism and identification. Sharp’s (1996: 98) work to gender the nation, draws upon elements of ‘nationalism-through-difference’ positions as a feminist endeavour. She argues ‘the nation is created not through an ordinary moment or culturally distinct essence but through the repetition of symbols that come to represent that nation’s origin or uniqueness.’ Neatly tracing the commonalities between national identity and gender identity and drawing on Butler’s (1990) performativity, Sharp states:

Like national identity, gendered identity takes on its apparently ‘natural’ presence through the repeated performance of gender norms. In the performance of identity in everyday life, two identifications converge. The symbols of nationalism are not gender neutral but in enforcing a national norm, they implicitly or explicitly construct a set of gender norms. (Sharp, 1996: 98)

In this context, the kilt becomes a symbol which not only conveys a materially unique national identity – distancing Scots from English hegemony – but also is used as a way to construct alternative ways of being gendered because of its repeated use as a skirt-like garment which was used in a way which did not conform to binary understandings of gender.

This attempt to undermine authority and strict norms contributed to a propaganda campaign against those who sought to distance themselves from the ruling classes (Tuckett, 2009). Central to this ‘othering’, the British government reiterated the essential difference of the kilt as a skirt-like garment. A fear of those who did not comply with strict gender roles increased distrust as the government sought not only to colonise and control Highland territory, but also to colonise geographically-placed ontologies in ‘a systematic social, cultural and economic assault on communal labour and Gaelic culture’ (Friseil, n.d). As a result, the Hanoverian government began to paint Highlanders not only as rebellious, but also as socially degenerate and civilly backward:

[The kilt] is not only grossly indecent, but is filthy, as it admits dust to the skin and emits the foetor of perspiration. The parts concealed by all other nations are loosely covered; it is also effeminate, beggarly and generally disreputable’ (Pinkerton, an iconoclastic scholar in 1789 in Trevor-Roper, 2014: 210).

Being read as ‘effeminate’ reiterates how the kilt as skirt impacted upon the reading of Highland Scots by the British establishment, a central feature of how Highland Scots were painted as ‘other<sup>52</sup>’. Because of the loose covering of the genitals beneath kilts, the Hanoverian government decried that Highland Scots were ‘lice-ridden cannibals with insatiable and disorderly sexual appetites’ (Pittock, 1999: 27) (Figure 4.2). Here, (perceived forms of) cross-dressing sparked prejudice and disgust, articulated through a dehumanisation relating Highlanders to savagery and ‘backwardness’. Chapman and Anderson (2012) remind us that disgust can be expanded from an avoidance of the threat of disease and filth to entrain social and moral spheres. They note that social disgust is triggered by transgressions that contain reminders of physical disgust related to depraved sexual crimes through perceived transgressive sexual practices, such as cross-dressing and easy exposure of those genitals ‘concealed by all other nations.’ Pinkerton’s quote above embraces disgust simultaneously through a threat of filth and a depiction of supposedly disgusting gross indecency. Painting Highlanders as less-than-human and a threat to ‘civilised’ British morals, the propaganda became a powerful tool in associating Highlanders with ‘unnatural’ behaviours such as cross-dressing and dangerous sexual behaviour. This perceived threat of those who wore Highland garb was also used as a means to depoliticise Highland men (Betker, 2016), both through attempts to remove their political potency with the Dress Act

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<sup>52</sup> Queer theorists such as Puar (2007) have also discussed the importance of emasculation as a means of political and social othering. In her book *Terrorist Assemblages*, she notes how the image of the Islamic terrorist was marked as feminised, stateless and perverse following 9/11 as an attempt to securitise, and surveil a perceived moral, cultural and safety threat to the majoritarian public.

and also through perceiving Highland men as ‘effeminate’ and ‘beggerly’ at a time when the political sphere remained the realm of male elites. Contemporarily, when writing about the dehumanisation of transgender lives, O’Shea (2018) notes that embodiments of social transgression leads to a dehumanisation and abjection that may be common to the precarity of the lives of those who sit outwith the gender binary (O’Shea, 2018).

The materiality of the kilt clearly holds political, cultural and identitarian importance when theorising what Scottishness might look like. While scholars such as Connell (2004: 254) claim that Scotland should not be asserted as a colony of England because ‘historical evidence suggests that Scots retained considerable control over the process of modernisation affecting Scotland during the eighteenth and nineteenth century’, he also adds that attempts at cultural homogenisation which create an emblematic and centralised British culture through Anglo-Scottish relations cannot but erase the nuances of local cultures and knowledges. When thinking about non-conformity, then, the political and cultural importance of the kilt can be used as a material emblem of Scottishness juxtaposed against Englishness. In this case, Scottishness, and the ways in which gender in Scotland is materially embodied using the kilt, is has fashioned – and arguably continues to fashion - a distance from English conformity, socially, culturally and politically.



**Figure 4.2: Hanoverian propaganda showing the ‘unnatural-ness’ of Highland Scots as they abduct English women on their ‘broomsticks’. ‘Greedy, noisy, violent and sexually disordered, the Scots are also agents of the devil. (Pittock, 1999: 28)**

#### **4.3.1 (Cross)dressing/gendering the Dress Act**

As women were not impacted by the Dress Act, which only prevented Scottish men and boys from wearing kilted Scottish attire, a culture of cross-dressing among Highland women

emerged as a method of pledging allegiance to the defeated Jacobite rebellion. Tuckett (2009) writes that, while women often wore kilts, which by this time were often understood as masculine by the British, this was often counterbalanced by feminising the kilt; for example, by wearing a white rose as part of the uniform.<sup>53</sup> This expression of disidentification – transgressing traditional markers of gender for political and resistive means – shows how a (gender)queer politics was effectively adopted to subvert regulatory regimes for political gain. Muñoz (1999: 12) notes that ‘the disidentificatory subject [is someone who] tactically and simultaneously works on, with and against cultural form.’ Rather than an absolute rejection of majoritarian British social and gender codes, Highland women sought to find cracks within regulatory regimes to reframe and reconfigure their own gender expression in ways which strategically embodied the local and everyday struggles of resistance. This demonstration of ‘feminine loyalty’ (Tuckett, 2009: 144) allowed Highland women to pledge allegiance to the Jacobite cause. This could be read as a paradoxical role reversal of traditional gender roles not only in terms of political cross-dressing, but also where femininity and womanhood became intertwined with militarism and rebellion. Fears of such female-to-male cross-dressing were also seized upon by Hanoverian propaganda against rebellious Scots, which denounced these ‘unnatural women’ (Pittock, 2010: 37). Faiers (2008 in Pittock, 2010: 37) says that a woman dressing in men’s clothes made from tartan was a ‘compelling intensifier of tartan’s radical message’. It was also seen as part of a ‘refusal to bow to the code of the eighteenth-century politesse and was part of their patriotism’ (ibid.). Women, filling the traditionally political roles of men while wearing men’s clothes, shows an absolute rejection of imposed gender roles and begins to transgress the assumed gender politics of the time.

Clothing and (cross)dress have also played a historically significant role in Scotland. Perhaps the most notorious example of this cultural erasure is the Highland Clearances, when much of the Highlands were cleared of dispersed settlements and practices as land owners sought to make the land more productive, erasing ‘backward’ and ‘old-fashioned’ ways of life which were seen as ‘out of step with the rest of Scotland and the recently United Kingdom.’ (Stewart, 2018: n.p). The adoption of such imperialist practices against Highland populations

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<sup>53</sup> More recently, the white rose is also a representation of Scottish political sovereignty and national identity after Hugh MacDiarmid (a committed Scottish Nationalist) wrote ‘The Little White Rose’. It should not be reduced to mere decoration but also holds political meaning (National Records of Scotland, 2016). The political significance of the white rose was also discussed in 2015 when 56 newly elected Scottish National Party MPs wore white roses in the Westminster parliament, showing its ongoing political and symbolic importance (*Scotland Now*, 2015).

had wide-ranging and long-lasting geographical consequences. Scholars have discussed the effects of emigration from the Highlands to Lowland Scotland and other parts of the Commonwealth following the Clearances and the shifting agricultural and economic landscapes of the Highlands (Devine, 1979). However, less attention has been given to the effects of what Richards (2012) describes as ‘the crudest type of social engineering’ that was brought about by the clearances<sup>54</sup>. Through the erasure of Highland culture and the imposition of strict laws into place as a means of securitisation against Highland rebellion, localised knowledges and ways of life were also erased. A few researchers have nonetheless noted the ways in which the Highland Clearances were resisted. Rather than focusing on the masculinist image of the strong Highland warrior, Lodge (1996) references the importance here of women and their role in Highland resistance and riot against landlords. Writing women into Highland political history and struggle leads to Richards (in Lodge, 1996: 127) stating how ‘to a remarkable degree, Highland riots were women's riots.’ This militarisation and politicisation gave rise to a queering of gender performances of female masculinity were carried out for strategic benefit. Because of strict gendering schema and British obsessions with gender roles as a means to order, Lodge (p.128) notes that at a riot in 1813 ‘no women were arrested or conspicuous in their actions, and therefore the female element remains anonymous,’ but the queering of gender roles did not end there. Thomis and Grimmet (1982) note how cross-dressing became an integral part of Highland resistance practices as men took advantage of the less-harsh treatment of women when rioting. Disguising themselves as women and transgressing hegemonic gender ontologies, these men found that ‘wearing feminine clothing created anonymity and de-emphasised a specific person as leader of the protest’ (Erwin, 2018).

## 4.4 Queering gender normativities

A small body of work has been done to question the assumed (hyper)masculinity of the kilt (as a men's skirt), recognising its political potential in deconstructing the gender binary and rereading the kilt as a tool to unsettle hegemonic gendered narratives. In a modern sense, the kilt may be seen by many in Western society as a masculine garment which is associated with masculine-coded activities such as fighting in war and manual labour (Tye, 2014). It

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<sup>54</sup> Within academic geography, Withers (1996: 2005), rather than focusing on the realities of time and space, has considered the geographical imaginings and memories that are read through the Highland clearances. He notes that Hanoverian authorities believed ‘that the landscape could not be economically ‘improved’ upon without outside agency; the people were innately incapable (either by virtue of social system, moral turpitude, intrinsic sloth, from a barbarous language, or because the environment determined otherwise)’ (Withers, 2005: 34).

would be an oversight not to question the kilt's similarity with the skirt – a 'typically female garment' (Hansson, Mörck and McIntyre, 2010: 181) – and the impact that this similarity has on gender performance and the understanding and deconstruction of the gender binary. As briefly stated already, this garment has now become associated with hypermasculinity and the performativity of a masculinist gender but can also be an ideal vehicle for exposing gender-based prejudices. It has been argued by Trevor-Roper (2014) that the hypermasculinisation of the kilt is a response to the Dress Act of 1746. Also noted above, the Act stated that no men in Scotland, *except* soldiers in the government's army were permitted to wear the kilt. From this point on, the kilt not only had to be worn in a very particular style as part of a regimental uniform, but also became associated with the bravery and strength of soldiers (ibid.) (figure 4.3). In essence, the kilt was weaponised, symbolising aggressive male soldiery and compliance. This deployment of the kilt brought to an end the more fluid nature of wrap-around tartan plaid as a gender-neutral garment, solidifying too its association with masculinity. However, even with this masculinisation, Michaelman and Miller-Spillman's (2006) claim that gender ontologies are geographically situated remains true in that while it was now read as a hypermasculine garb, from another standpoint it was re-feminised. Indeed, BS Historian (2008, n.p) writes that the Highland regiments in World War One became known as the 'ladies from hell' by the German army as they took the kilt (as skirt) to be feminine (although then realigned with militaristic and stereotypically non-feminine activities). This exposes a confusing transgression of stereotypical gendered attributes whereby soldiers had become 'so tough that they can cross-dress and still be shining examples of fighting manhood' (ibid.). In a sense, wearing the kilt made Highland soldiers become still more transgressive and an unreadable phenomenon, contradictorily making them appear still more masculine and terrifying. This outcome presents somewhat of a paradox whereby German soldiers became frightened of what was understood as cross-dressing male embodiments of femininity.

#### **4.4.1 Coding a skirt for a man**

More recently, the use of kilts and male unbifurcated garments (MUGs) (Kiltmen, 2003) as a type of clothing for uniformed workers has gathered media attention (BBC News, 2013). Companies such as Blåkläder ([www.blaklader.uk](http://www.blaklader.uk), 2016) and Utilikilt ([www.utilikilts.com](http://www.utilikilts.com), 2016) have made the case that male skirts are beneficial to their labour forces and often more practical than wearing trousers. While strict gender norms often restrict men from wearing skirts, Blåkläder have sought to masculinise the skirt in attempting to break down gender barriers (Lorentzi, 2013), while also selling a new product to men.



**Figure 4.3: Photograph of a member of the Blackwatch – the Highland Regiment – during world war one, wearing military uniform (WW1 photos, 2003)**

Porter (2011, n.p) says that the functionality of the skirt is key as ‘there needs to be a reason behind’ men wearing feminine clothing. Thus, cross-dressing can be permitted and justified for a specific purpose within a specific place (i.e. the work place rather than a covert practice taking place in private) but, Ryan (2005: 58) says that cross-dressing is still often seen as a challenge to masculinity and the fetishistic sexualisation of dressing in women’s clothes considered a ‘perversion’. By taking steps to ‘prove’ masculinity, the Blåkläder move queries anxieties provoked by the practice of cross-dressing and (homo)sexualisation. This redressing of gender expression expands understandings of things assigned to being *of* male or *of* female. Justifications are made to shift the boundaries on what is considered masculine. For example, Utilikilt, while being read as a skirt, is also ‘loaded with masculine attributes’ (Lorentzi, 2013) such as a tool belt and its association with an industrial type of masculinity, promoting functionality of the garment and reducing the femininity of the skirt. Hansson, Möck and McIntyre, (2010: 182) write that this coding ‘helps to legitimise the otherwise somewhat contradictory or provocative clothing amongst building workers.’ McIntyre (in Lorentzi, 2013) proposes that it is the kilt’s ambiguity and versatility (not in terms of functionality but as a (non)gendered garment) that makes it so interesting. By merging the masculinity of hard labour and functionality with the femininity of wearing a skirt, the kilt deconstructs standard understandings of fixed and distinct genders:

The kilt is ambiguous from a gender perspective – it’s a masculine, even macho garment in Scotland ... but it resembles a skirt. It’s a garment a man could wear without fear of being assaulted in public for wearing women’s

clothes. It's the ambiguity of the kilt which makes it so versatile. (Steele in Herman, 2015, n.p)

Herman goes on to question the paradox of how a man taking on *certain* feminine items makes him become even more masculine, as mentioned in the World War One example above. They argue that when female fashion is appropriated by men, they are often performing male characteristics such as bravery and therefore certain variations of masculinity are exacerbated. Porter (2011) says that these men often felt *more* masculine in this skirt-like garb and that, in wearing a skirt, they became increasingly aware of their bodies and their masculinity. Similar arguments could be made here in that the 'regimental style' (Tye, 2014: 192) of not wearing underwear under a kilt or a skirt is also a factor. By having the genitals free of any restriction (Seamus, 2013), men have also said that this freedom contributes to a feeling of masculinisation. The material ambiguity of the kilt can indeed be (re)read geographically to question how Scottish gender ontologies are performed, so as to embody a national form of masculine identity through a process which could be considered a femininisation by others.

#### 4.4.2 Contemporary examples of the kilt as a political tool

The transgressive political power of the kilt is ongoing as it continues to be 'layered with many meanings, such as culturally appropriate gender behaviour, codes of dress and gender, historical perspectives of gender and dress ... [and] social resistance to gender markers' (Michaelman and Miller-Spillman, 2006). Here, then, I consider how the kilt can still be used today as a vehicle to challenge hegemonic gender practices and politics. There is much discussion over the political statement made by wearing a kilt, since come the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the prevailing cultural understanding of the kilt deem it to be a masculine, or even hypermasculine<sup>55</sup>, garment. In spite of this, Marciniak (in Reese, 2002) argues that, while a man wearing a kilt 'might not claim that he's consciously engaging in a political act of gender disruption, ... that's exactly what it is.' The rejection of more conventional men's clothing, and the blurring of the binary between what is to be associated with male or female,

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<sup>55</sup> When carrying out empirical research in Seattle's bondage, dominance, submission and sadomasochism (BDSM) community, Childs (2016: 1317) warns against using 'hypermasculinity' to perpetuate essentialist notions of what hypermasculinity means. Instead, encouraging geographers to highlight the 'contingency of gender to space, place and embodiment', he to discusses how performances of hypermasculinity might contribute to the ways in which masculinity can be supported and subverted through practice.



is also something tackled in a political way by Kiltmen (figure 4.4)<sup>56</sup>: a group of men in the USA who advocate the use of the kilt and men's skirts (although the use of the term 'skirt' is limited) to release themselves of what they call 'trouser tyranny', therefore distancing themselves from binary forms of dress:



**Figure 4.4: Screenshot from Kiltmen.com reiterating the masculinity of the kilt as a man's 'skirt-like garment.' (Kiltmen, 2019)**

We are an international band of men who enjoy the freedom, comfort, pleasure, and masculine appearance of kilts or other male unbifurcated (skirt-like) garments, and who reject the absurd notion that males must always be confined to trousers. We are men in kilts, Utilikilts, and other kilt-like clothing. Our purpose is to liberate men from the “tyranny of trousers” that has been imposed upon us by Western society. We encourage and promote the wearing, acceptance, and availability of kilts and other unbifurcated garments for men (Kiltmen, 2003: n.p).

This quote notes the importance of the kilt to many of the non-conforming political and social interventions central to this thesis. Firstly, while the Kiltmen do replicate binary notions of gender, they advocate for a gender politics that redefines how masculinity is ontologically understood. While work has been undertaken to note the importance of space to performances of masculinity (e.g. Jackson, 1993; Berg and Longhurst, 2003), the Kiltmen, rather than desiring to embody a feminised masculinity, advocate for a loosening of gender stereotypes. The liberating of men from the ‘tyranny of trousers’, hence, has double meaning. Firstly, it refers to the ‘freedom, comfort and pleasure’ that can be experienced from skirt-like garments, perhaps hinting at a lack of constriction on male genitals when wearing skirts.

<sup>56</sup> The Kiltmen (2003: n.p) may pursue a somewhat more radical attitude towards the deconstruction of the gender binary, believing themselves to be taking the ‘Braveheart approach’ (attributing bravery to this radical intention while also drawing connection to the 1995 film telling the story of William Wallace and Scottish revolt against English ruling (IMDb, 2019)). They say that ‘combatting homophobia is a separate issue’ and that, by using kilts, they are able to emphasise their masculinity, distancing themselves from any feminising challenge to their masculinity.

Secondly, the trouser tyranny refers to the socialised restrictions of masculinity. Scholars have noted how masculinity can be detrimental to mental and physical health (e.g. Kupers, 2005) enumerating the ways in which toxic masculinity – articulations of masculinity that ‘encourage men to be sexually aggressive, to value dominance and control, and to position women as inferior’ (Hess and Flores, 2018: 1088) – is detrimental to emotional and sexual relationships.

However, as the Kiltmen use the skirt to advocate for a gender politics that reframes what constitutes as masculinity, other scholars have discussed how men perform non-hegemonic performances of masculinity recognising the importance of place, culture and discourse (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). The quote also demonstrates how gender non-conformity is geographically contingent, noting the imposition of western gender binaries which usually deter men from wearing skirts. Thus, the Kiltmen use the skirt as a way of traversing situated gender ontologies, looking for alternative ways that masculinity can be understood within different contexts. Finally, the Kiltmen go on to say that intolerance towards practices comes from ‘fears, prejudices, and homophobias.’ Through the use of the male-skirt, the Kiltmen seek to decentre notions of masculinity and femininity commonly deployed to oppress homosexual and trans identities. By using the skirt as a vehicle for challenging gender-based prejudices (and their socialised connections to sexual prejudices), this shows the political and social importance of clothes and the political potency of (cross)gender expression and how it can be used to challenge normativities. In rejecting the dichotomy of male dress and female dress, the Kiltmen are able to challenge and transgress hegemonic understandings of what it is to *be* male or female, blurring the lines of distinction between masculinity and femininity in order to generate a non-conforming gender politics.

Throughout this section, I have used the Kiltmen to demonstrate the material ways that the kilt can be used to queer the distinction between hegemonic articulations of masculinity and femininity. However, it is also worth noting that the Kiltmen are an American organisation and not a Scottish one. Firstly, this indicates that Scottishness can be translated, appropriated and read differently across geographical contexts, highlighting it not as a bound identity but one which has a history and a geography which is not territorially bound and is imagined in different ways in different places. It works to disrupt national borders, providing a counterpoint to more widely understood Anglo-American embodiments of gender. Secondly, this also illustrates how Scottishness *as* non-conformity can be appreciated across different contexts. Here, the kilt, synonymous with Scottishness, is used as a material way

to challenge gender normativities in an American context, reiterating how (non-conforming) Scottishness can be used to disrupt gender across geographical divides.

#### 4.4.3 The kilt and exposing gender-based prejudice

The kilt also allows us to question the relationships between (and across) genders, destabilising cisnormative assumptions about gender identity, gender expression and sex. In pursuing a politics of gender equality, it can be used as a tool to expose certain sexism or prejudices. Following a flurry of controversy over men wearing kilts as skirts at a fashion show, Christina (2013) positioned this dissent as highlighting major inequalities and materialising a sexist narrative. She says that similar attention would not have been paid to women wearing trousers or a suit. She writes that, while masculinisation is seen to be moving up the social hierarchy, a man becoming feminised – in this case by wearing a skirt – is still widely seen as an active surrendering of his social standing. When this happens, masculinity becomes threatened, creating fears over weakness, homosexuality and lesser respect<sup>57</sup>. Sexisms and homophobia have been noted by other writers. The Kiltmen (2003), in advocating for a relaxing of gendered clothing, say that the prejudices generated by a gender binary result in the policing of the performance of gender. They argue that, while women in Western societies are free to wear trousers or skirts, this is not the case for men. As sexism reduces women to a lower social class, they add, ‘women’s clothes will be linked with effeminacy and homosexuality’, and it is this sexism that upholds the gender binary and prevents a blurring of gendered lines while also perpetuating sexism, homophobia and transphobias.

In an interesting response to this line of reasoning, Fry (2007) has written about how men can also be subjected to sexism when wearing kilts. Within popular discourse, when the kilt is read as a skirt, this also evokes a certain sexualisation, in a similar way that the skirt may be sexualised within sexist narratives. Tye (2014) suggests that it is often women who are able to police and regulate the gender performance of men in kilts:

As women turn the tables on men, they physically show what it means to be read as sexually available because of one’s clothing. Their performance might

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<sup>57</sup> Conversely, McDowell and Court (1994: 244) note the ways in which women undergo material and behavioural processes of masculinisation within the male-dominated merchant banking sector. They say, ‘A common option that many women take at work in order to minimize their difference is to become “an honorary man” adopting masculinist norms and behaviour and, often, a variant of the male business dress’. This step up through social and organisational hierarchies means that their participants feel more respected and authoritative within highly competitive, masculinist business environments.

be interpreted as a mimicry of how men more often regard and approach women's bodies. (Tye, 2014: 199)

Tye argues that the kilt reverses sexism and distorts stereotypical gendered behaviour as those wearing the kilt find their gender (or sexuality?) questioned by both men and women. In her research, though, Fry reports that men more often became the victims of abuse from other men, as 'onlookers assert a hegemonic form of masculinity' upon the wearer while also distancing themselves from any transgressive form of masculinity or 'visual ambiguity' (Tye, 2014: 201). Here, there is a clear link to Browne's (2004) work on 'genderism' and the ways in which non-normative performances of gender expression are regulated (also see Chapter 7). Any perceived interpretation of male femininity is policed through various practices in order to uphold the gender binary, regardless of whether this blurring of gender expressions is intentional or not.

As well as the gender policing of the kilt-wearer, Fry also writes about the sexualisation of the kilt, in this instance by women. Indeed, genderism manifests in this case, through sexualising the men who are wearing kilts. She writes that a type of role reversal takes place whereby the kilt becomes a garment of fascination: one of 'ready access to Highland masculine sexuality and so to passion' and an 'unbridled virility at the flick of a hem' (Chapman, 1995 in Fry, 2007: 10). The women in Fry's research are gripped more by what was underneath the kilt and the 'easy access', rather than on the garment itself. The kilt provides a way of rethinking about how clothing is read to render one more or less 'sexually available', contributing to contemporary and essential debates about sexual harassment, consent and gender equality (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2018).

It is hence clear that the kilt allows us to challenge gendered norms as it exposes the troublesome relationship between clothing, gendered performance and sexuality. Saenz-Herrero and Diez-Aledria (2015) assert that these gender stereotypes are conditioned within us at a young age, deeply rooted in our social understandings of what it is to *be* male or *be* female. Kasunik (in Fry, 2007) adds to this point by underlining that garments in themselves are neither male nor female, but are appropriated and gendered over time. That said, the kilt, despite its deep historical roots, distorts the taken-for-granted bi-gendered model and provides a deconstructive tool – for academics and others – to begin to challenge the binary of masculinity and femininity, opening up an in-between space for alternative gender identities and politics.

## 4.5 Queering the kilt

As discussed, the kilt can question masculinity and femininity, and can be used to open up a space that blends these two opposing positions. However, Michaelman and Miller-Spillman (2006) say that it is short-sighted of us to assume that, just because hegemonic interpretations of anatomical sex are understood as being binary, this dichotomy should be translated into a corresponding gender binary, deconstructing the cissexist trinarities of male/man/masculinity and female/woman/femininity. I now wish to go further to queer the kilt in this context – using it as a tool to provide space for non-normative gender identities and to disturb normalised notions of gendered performance. By rereading the kilt in this way, it can be used as a proxy for questioning gender epistemologies.

Because of the stark similarities between the kilt and the skirt, some writers (Bolich, 2006; Fernandes, 2011; Rogers, 2012) have begun to create a more gender ambiguous narrative that considers the distinction between them to be porous and precarious. Herman (2015) states that a growing number of people are dis-identifying with the male/female binary, although, in her pursuit of a queer agenda, she adds that this move does not necessarily equate to trans identities. The portrayal of such non-binary or androgynous<sup>58</sup> genders, can be expressed in numerous ways, including the use of different pronouns, changing a name and also, in a very material sense, by changing the clothes that one wears. In a similar sense, Fernandes (2011) adds that wearing non-bifunctional garments, such as the kilt gives us a material way of understanding gender (and sexuality) as being more fluid than is conventionally thought:

The kilt's own ambiguity is a multivalent signifier of ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and significantly, it opens up these areas for consideration at a time when ideas of masculinity and manhood are being challenged, deconstructed and redefined. (Tye, 2014: 193)

This gender ambiguity is a threat to conservative gender roles as it actively seeks to reject the gender binary and to disrupt power-driven sexism. In opening 'areas for consideration', the kilt is able to create a gender non-conforming epistemology that challenges the

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<sup>58</sup> I use 'non-binary' and 'androgynous' as examples to indicate that gender non-conforming identities can 'space' both gender identity and gender expression. I refer to non-binary as a term to describe a gender or sexuality 'borderland' – free of the confines of 'male' or 'female' – that 'provides a critical site for the investigation of how sexual (and gender) identity are both constructed and de/reconstructed' (Callis, 2014: 63-64). Androgyny focuses much more on the visual distortion of what we consider to be male or female while 'fundamentally exhibiting ambiguous gender characteristics ... and gender ambivalence, both simultaneously' (Polvin in Fernandes, 2011).

distinction between masculinity and femininity, while also opening up a myriad of ways in which masculinity (and femininity) can be expanded to create space for those who do not adhere to binary configurations of gender. Fernandes (2011) also speculates that this explanation is particularly problematic for heterosexual men who see this as an emasculation attempt, questioning the social power existing within the bi-gender model and both ‘confirming and subverting conventional expectations’ (Riach, 2010: 118).

#### 4.5.1 Cross-dressing and the kilt

The thin line between the kilt and skirt has made it the ideal garment in cross-dressing practices. Cross-dressing and wearing skirts has long had an association with effeminacy and homosexuality, heralding back to ‘dandy<sup>59</sup>’ culture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bard, 2014). Because heterosexist prejudice denounces cross-dressing<sup>60</sup> because of its association with homosexuality (Herman, 2015), wearing a kilt has allowed individuals who desire to cross-dress to go ‘under the radar’ (Rogers, 2012). One of Rogers’ participants admits that, “I sometimes wear a kilt, but I wear frilly panties underneath, so I feel like I am wearing a skirt even though no one else knows.” Rogers (a trans journalist himself) says that trans and non-binary people attend a Celtic festival in Knoxville as a way to wear a kilt as a skirt in public. Although the time and place of this cross-dressing pseudo-acceptance is very specific, he says that the kilt provokes lots of questions, asking whether an attempt to impose the gender binary upon a non-bifurcated garment is indeed possible:

If a cisgender female wears a kilt, does it de facto become a skirt? Is it different if the wearer is a trans woman? Is a plaid non-bifurcated garment a skirt or a kilt when it is worn by a trans man? (Rogers, 2012, n.p)

Rogers finds attempting to connect binary gender with non-binary (yet culturally laden) clothing as problematic. This disruption of the normative mode of masculinity by non-binary or trans identities provides political scope for a new reading of the kilt, promising new ways for it to be reread through a non-binary gender lens. As mentioned earlier, however, it is

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<sup>59</sup> Boudelaire (in Kaye, 2009: 111) describes the 19<sup>th</sup> century figure of the dandy as a man who is ‘slightly effeminate aesthete, who is rich, idle, and blasé; a man whose existence is defined by luxury, elegance and the perpetual pursuit of happiness: ‘these beings have no other calling but to cultivate the idea of beauty in their person, to satisfy their passions, to feel and to think.’

<sup>60</sup> I will use ‘cross-dressing’ as an umbrella term for those who dress, fully or in part, using clothes that are not usually ascribed to their perceived gender. Clothes, and dress, ‘without which cross-dressing is impossible’, influences not only the way in which gender is read but also the way that it is expressed and experienced (Bolich, 2007: 6).

perhaps the interpretation by the reader of gender, rather than the wishes of the ‘performer’ of gender, that holds control over another’s gender identity<sup>61</sup>:

[The case of] the man who wears a kilt thinking that it is a woman’s skirt? Here the intention is to cross-dress but a kilt is masculine apparel. Does that person’s error in what he chose to wear render his behaviour innocuous? Observers are unlikely to regard the behaviour as crossdressing unless they, too, don’t know a kilt when they see one. Does cross-dressing then depend on the perception of the observers who judge that gender lines have been crossed? If so, intent is determined by others than those to whom the intention belongs – an odd situation almost certain to result in numerous errors in judgement. (Bolich, 2006: 230)

As cross-dressing is regarded as a non-normative gender expression, the mis-reading of gender is likely. The Costume Institute (2003) says that fashion designers and countercultures, for example crossdressers and rockers with long hair and painted nails (Harmen, 2015), continually transgress moral and social codes, ‘redefining masculinities’ and decentring a stringent male-female binary. The political ambitions of the 2003-2004 ‘Braveheart: Men in Skirts’ exhibition at the Victoria and Albert museum in London was designed to be ‘resistant ... and rebellious’ to the gender binary; refusing societal norms and focusing instead on individual fluid identities, transgression of boundaries and self-expression. The exhibition focused on the taboo of men wearing skirts. Rather than focusing on the practice of cross-dressing as something done through a particular queer identity, the exhibition framed those who wear skirts as queer bodies – those who ‘characterise themselves as resistant, rebellious or simply contrarian [adopting] skirted garments as a sign of their refusal to meet societal expectations,’ while also looking at how men’s skirts are present through non-western cultures (ibid.). This focus on the potentials of the kilt and of male skirts offers a queering of the gender binary that goes beyond gender identity, expression and cultural interpretations of masculinity and femininity, making it an ideal material way through which gender non-conformity can be explored by researchers and/or gender non-conforming individuals.

## 4.6 The kilt and gender non-conformity

By reconsidering the kilt as a *provocateur* for unsettling gender certainty, I have begun to

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<sup>61</sup> Though positioning her research within a binary gender framework, Betker’s (2016) thesis discusses the historicised importance of the kilt to gender identity, rather than expression, noting the ways in which the kilt and tartan historically have been used to subvert gender assumptions, politically challenging authority and creating space for masculinity and femininity to be transgressed.

discuss Scotland's long history of gender non-conformity and gender transgression. Kilts and tartanry in the Scottish Highlands have contributed to a long history of gender ambiguity, as gender transgressive practices were effectively subjugated and erased by the strict social, economic and cultural conditioning of Hanoverian policy and propaganda (Betker, 2000). In this chapter, I have begun to address those gender transgressive histories by showcasing how the kilt distorts binary modes of gender in Scotland. I have set out ways in which the kilt as a cultural signifier of Scottish identity has contributed to both gender transgressive histories and to gender non-conforming presents, allowing research to reread contemporary social and gender geographies in Scotland. The political importance of the kilt, and the way that it has been used as a material device through which to produce gender, political and material non-conformity, is central to this thesis. These gender transgressive regional histories are vital to my study, as explained in Chapter 1 when elaborating on the historically-located Scottishness of my study, but clothes and material accoutrements are drawn upon to convey materially non-conforming lives in a contemporary sense as well (as set out in Chapter 7).

I have also taken a feminist perspective, looking at how the gender transgressive body of the 'cross-dressing' Highlander became associated with a politics of resistance or rebellion, precisely through using the kilt (Porter, 2011). Regardless of the gender of the individual wearing this Highland dress, the kilt is a clear example of why the materialities of clothing should be taken seriously as an exhibitor of political potency. Finally, I have looked at how the kilt can be queered and how it has been used by individuals (and sometimes groups) to disrupt gender systems, and to explore how, materially, it can be used to queer what is hegemonically coded as masculine or feminine. Firstly, this queering is done to widen the possibilities of what might be considered masculine or feminine, questioning non-hegemonic performances of gender and how these might be embodied through everyday geographies (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005). Secondly, the kilt as a tool-to-queer allows individuals to create and advocate for a range of alternative genders and identities (Tye, 2014). Finally, the kilt, because of its similarity to a skirt, has been used within cross-dressing practices either to go 'under-the-radar' of gender regulation or as a political move to reject the confines of gender expression. By looking at gender through a tartan lens, I hope to have exposed the power that the kilt holds in not only exposing what is commonly thought of to *be* masculine and feminine, but also how this binary itself can become disrupted and rethought.

The kilt's well-engrained cultural importance in Scotland alongside how it is understood as a man's skirt across diverse geographical contexts, makes it a useful way of threading



together a longitudinal account of gender non-conformity in Scotland and potentially beyond. It is true that while the kilt can be used as a vehicle to challenge gender normalities in a Scottish context, this distinctly Scottish garb as an icon of Scottish-ness, now travels globally, complete with certain potentials for queering masculinity and femininity in a wider context. Reappropriating the kilt in this way emboldens its use as a national symbol but also allows Scotland to project these queer potentialities globally. Thus, taking the kilt seriously as a men's skirt is one material way that Scotland is an intriguing place in which gender non-conformity can be explored, opening up potentials for queerings and creating a much wider/global geography of gender non-conformity. By using it to frame those who do not fit neatly into hegemonic bi-gender ontologies and who are susceptible to gender-based regulation, the kilt gives a Scotland-specific lens through which to consider gender non-conformity.

As discussed throughout this chapter, the material importance of the kilt and the impact that it has on gender non-conformity and various manifestations of Scottishness (and Scottishness as a form of non-conformity) is a central tenet of this thesis. By using the kilt as a political and material signifier of otherness in comparison to the hegemonies of Englishness, the kilt offers a visible counterpoint to political, gender and national norms. However, rather than being in strict opposition, how might non-conforming Scottishness be interrogated as something more closely aligned to Englishness – converging *and* diverging from norms in a variety of ways. In Chapter 5, I will consider Scottish pantomime, giving insight into how localised articulations of gender can be challenged materially through pantomime performance in uniquely Scottish ways.

## Chapter 5 Transgressing the stage: Scotland, cross-dressing and pantomime



**Figure 5.1: Dan Leno as Dame Trott from Jack and the Beanstalk in 1899.**  
([www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org))

Dan Leno (Figure 5.1) (1860-1904), known as ‘the funniest man on earth’ (Bowers, 2007: 30) and a much-loved performer in Victorian music halls, is widely credited with creating the pantomime dame (The Dan Leno Project, 2016), which exposed and challenged strict Victorian attitudes towards cross-dressing, gender transgression and sexuality (Davis, 2014). His ability to play a man burlesquing himself as a woman, while engaging with the audience while cross-dressing, led to him becoming a radical figure whose performances destabilised the gender binary.

### 5.1 Pantomime: The Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame

Pantomime has long been associated with the extraordinary, creating a world of fantasy and inversion that has provided entertainment to Scots since the early-1800s (Bruce, 2000). Originating from popular mime performance, the pantomime gradually became synonymous with the Christmas holiday season. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, pantomime in Scotland

had begun to adopt fairy tale story lines and to develop some of the attributes, characters and traditions still seen in pantomime today (ibid). Pantomime, often seen as a lower form of entertainment because of its farcical nature and the perception that it is a form of children's entertainment, has been somewhat neglected by scholars in theatre studies and largely ignored as a point of investigation for geographers.

Here, I will consider the importance of on-stage cross-dressing in Scotland as a praxis for destabilising gender norms. The pantomime Dame, a man who plays the lovable, middle-aged matriarch, and the Principal Boy, the hero of the story played by a young woman, are two traditional characters who challenge audiences, encouraging them to think about gendered bodies differently and to question the portrayal of gender-bending characters. The pantomime's ability to transgress erotic, sexual and gender boundaries juxtaposes Scottish traditions of masculinity and the Presbyterian social structures which permeate through Scottish culture (MacKenney and Tiffany 2002). The cultural significance of the stage as a space of cross-dressing is clear, with scholars such as Cressy (1996: 438) noting that this 'points to a sex-gender system under pressure and a patriarchal culture disturbed by profound anxieties and contradictions.' While onstage performances have been dismissed by scholars such as Mayer (1967) for being 'not real' and unworthy of scholarly investigation, I argue that onstage performances of gender transgression had implications for those offstage, in the audience and beyond, using the pantomime to disclose difference to the everyday world. However, Browne (2005: 241) questions 'how much of the gender transgression can be dismissed as entertainment, humour, surreal and not 'real', because the 'where' of the performance influenced the reading of the performance. In this chapter, I take seriously the spatialities of gender transgressive performances and the ways in which they may be read by audiences in onstage contexts, while also questioning there are subject to change across contextual and temporal contexts.

Using material found online (including newspaper articles, comment pieces and social commentaries) and published academic work, this chapter will explore Scotland's relationship with the transgressions of pantomime, questioning how it became known as the 'national theatre of Scotland' (MacKenney and Tiffany, 2002). Through this, I will assess how cross-dressing and pantomime came to be situated within Scottish culture. Secondly, I explore how cross-dressing came to be accepted within theatre spaces, despite its obvious (and legal) tensions with societal attitudes towards transvestism and cross-dressing. Next, I look at the characters of the Principal Boy and the Dame specifically, discussing how these gender transgressive characters and bodies question sexual and gendered normativities

through performances which blend and bend gender expression. Finally, I will consider the different ways in which the pantomime has been queered and how it can be used as a tool for creating a revisionist history and geography of gender politics in Scotland that decentres the dichotomous gender binary. The nuances and traditions of Scottish pantomime work to queer social worlds and gender through creating space for realities extending beyond binaries and normalcies. As pantomime queers gender identities and expressions, it is a useful tool for illuminating non-conforming gender realities. Because of its long history in Scotland, it is also useful in being able to curate non-conforming pasts and how these may inform how non-conforming gender geographies take shape today.

## 5.2 Pantomime in Scotland: a ‘national theatre’?

Scotland’s long relationship with pantomime as a form of festive entertainment began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Seen as a blend of comedy performances from Europe and ‘the raucous British music halls’, the first recorded pantomime (as audiences would recognise it today) took place in 1751 (*The Scotsman*, 2010). Qdos Entertainment (2019), who produce pantomimes, say that in 2010 they held 22 productions across Scotland with numerous smaller-scale, localised productions also taking place. Perhaps some of the popularity of the pantomime is derived from its image as an old-fashioned form of entertainment ritualised as part of the Christmas celebration each year. Its associations with working-class populations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its inter-generational ability to entertain led to it being seen as a production of ‘the people’. Its ability to cross social and class barriers, while appealing to an egalitarian and community-driven narrative of Scottish tradition and Scottish family values, fuelled its increasing popularity (Smith, 2013). Writers such as Mayer (1967) have denounced pantomime as an illegitimate form of theatre because audiences often lack the formal education which demarcate those of a social standing ‘suitable’ to occupy theatre spheres<sup>62</sup>. Because of this supposed lesser standing, pantomime could be used to create – to be a spur for creating – minor or ‘low’ theory, in that everyday working-class spaces become complex counterpublics set against the more respected and professional art of theatre. Halberstam (2011: 2) uses low theory as way ‘to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony,’ wherein the pantomime arguably becomes a spaces of alternative gender knowledge production. Katz (1996: 489) notes that minor theory should be envisaged to create and investigate ‘subjectivities, spatialities and temporalities’ to

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<sup>62</sup> An attitude that pantomime is seen as a lower form of entertainment, and the notion that it is not an ‘authentic’ form of theatre may explain why it has been deemed as unworthy of serious research (Korneeva, n.d).

challenge the production of knowledge within spaces thought to be proper and majoritarian. Davis (2010) argues that it is the capacity to transgress social and class distinctions that contributed to the successes of pantomime:

Generally, though, whether through the agency of the audience or through the power of performance, the pantomime created a sort of commonwealth in which the crowd came to order and willingly formed a cohesive community of boisterous but engaged spectators (Davis, 2010: 8)

This ‘commonwealth’ proved to be very appealing to Scottish audiences. The localisation of theatre and comedy, being familiar with the actors on stage, alongside small-scale and low production costs, gave an inclusive edge to the pantomime that more professional theatre lacked, appealing to an audience largely neglected by other theatre productions. The cultural importance of the Scottish music hall, such as the Britannia Music Hall in Glasgow, also contributed to the impressive popularity of the pantomime, and was especially important amongst ‘Glasgow’s hardest working and poorest populations, [who] squeezed themselves next to others on the wooden benches, with not a hair’s breadth between them’, opening up theatre to new audiences (Bowers, 2007: 28).

This opening-up of theatre spaces allowed pantomime to become socially diverse, but it is the use of localised knowledges as part of the script that led to a ‘sense of ownership’ over the pantomime by audiences in Scotland (*The Scotsman*, 2010). Elaine C Smith<sup>63</sup>, herself having appeared on the pantomime stage, says that pantomime ‘is a celebration of local and popular culture. No one in Aberdeen gives a toss what’s happening in Edinburgh and nobody in Edinburgh gives a toss what’s happening in Glasgow. It’s all about their roots.’ This localisation can take many forms. For example, the 1905 performance of *Aladdin* at the Royal Theatre in Glasgow, a Glaswegian character, Roderick MacSwankey, was added to the plot (STELLA, n.d). Also, in 2017, the story of *Alice in Wonderland* was renamed *Alice in Weegieland* to appeal to local audiences (Tron Theatre, 2017). The importance of ‘familiarity’ in the pantomime should not be underestimated (Smith, 2013). MacKenney and Tiffany (2002) agree that it is the localisation of theatre that plays a central role in community cohesion, while also tapping into a traditional Scottish sense of humour stemming from the entertainment traditions of the music hall: comedic sketches, audience interaction and song singing. Even on a localised scale, small community productions have created transgressive and boundary-straddling worlds that hold on to the realities of the actors but distort theatrical

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<sup>63</sup> Elaine C Smith is a Scottish actress and comedian.

traditions to provide an exciting and comedic alternative to the everyday world.

The development of these ‘thoroughly localised librettos’ (Bruce, 2000: 63) meant that pantomime began to take on a Scottish flavour, as Scottish stories, literature and folklore were ‘pantomised’ in an attempt to relate to a greater audience. This story-telling created a schism with English pantomime, which focused more on traditional fairy tale stories (ibid.). The differences between Scottish and English pantomimes did not stop there. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Scottish pantomime focused more on audience participation, with audiences becoming ‘almost like another actor’ (*The Scotsman*, 2010), and with the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame often being the mediator through which this interaction takes place. In this, the fourth wall – the metaphorical wall between the stage and the audience – is pulled down, allowing the audience to interact with the transgressions taking place on stage to a greater extent: an invitation to the audience to be part of the fantasy world of inversion and ‘pantomime’s self-proclaimed absurdity’ (www.york.ac.uk). Here, the sharp juxtaposition between onstage/offstage performances of gender non-conformity becomes blurred as audiences interact with the non-conformity on stage. Within the temporal and spatial boundaries of the theatre at least, gender non-conformity is more fluid, co-produced by performers and audiences as the voyeuristic engagement with non-conformity onstage becomes more interactive with offstage audiences. The ‘otherworldly’ and the transgressive nature of the pantomime shows its social, cultural and historical position in juxtaposing with the everyday and allows audiences to interact with this positioning very directly.

However, given the mass advertisement and high-profile pantomimes now produced in cities across Scotland, it is clear that pantomime has undergone numerous changes since the small, rudimentary, community-based productions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Scottish pantomime now seems to be mired by a problem – ‘how to be glitzy and yet homely?’ (Bruce, 2000: 70). How can productions stick to their roots as localised forms of theatre while also drawing in large audiences and being profitable? Bruce notes that the ability to strike this balance is what makes Scottish pantomime so popular:

Its adaptability has enabled pantomime to survive in Scotland in several guises. While the number of small-scale variety-shows has declined, pantomime has become a refuge for the Scottish variety tradition. (Bruce, 2000: 70)

The casting of top music hall performers, such as Dan Leno, became essential for pantomimes in order for them to succeed financially setting a trend that can still be seen today as production companies seek to draw in Scottish ‘celebrities’, comics and actors (e.g.

The Krankies and Michelle McManus in *Pinocchio* in 2013 (Fulton, 2015) or John Barrowman in *Dick Whittington* in 2013: [www.johnbarrowman.com](http://www.johnbarrowman.com)) in attempting to conjoin certain type of lavish celebrity-ism with ‘home-grown’ actors.

Central to attracting a large and enthusiastic audience is the casting of the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame. Bruce (2000) says that, as pantomime productions go into competition with each other every year, there is a desire to be bigger and more lavish than the year before, with actors, scenery, special effects and costume adding to this spectacle. He acknowledges that the casting of the Dame in particular is a draw for audiences, but this claim casts a confusing point of investigation: how can the cross-dressed Dame and Principal Boy, bodies through which Scottish masculinities, traditions and culture are questioned, be so essential to drawing large crowds? The paradox seemingly existing here, between traditional Scottish views and cross-dressing can be both exposed and explored using the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame as vessels for undertaking a deconstruction of the gender binary and developing a revisionist geography and history of gendered hegemonies in Scotland.

However, how can the particularities of the Scottish pantomime contribute to discussions of gender, Scottishness and non-conformity? Pantomime performances are indeed staged across the UK, but here Scottishness is developed alongside English traditions to show difference and also similarity. What highlights the pantomime as being a non-conforming performance in cultural terms is the manner in which Scottish pantomime is developed in localised ways: through using local ‘celebrities’; creating ‘localised librettos’; greater audience-participant interaction and involvement. These localisations, rather than creating a performance set in opposition to Englishness (as in the case of the kilt), highlight the Scottishness of the pantomime as demonstrated through a reworking of performance, creating similarity alongside difference and placing it as non-conforming in comparison to English pantomime: converging along lines of gender performance in pantomime while also through difference, creating a more complex, locally-rooted form of engagement with non-conformity on stage. Indeed, many reflections frame the uniqueness of the Scottish pantomime through comparisons made ‘south of the border’ (Smith, 2013), showing a disidentification and a distancing from English pantomime to create new, non-conforming performances and changing how pantomime can be performed.

### 5.3 Pantomime going beyond the binary

Victorian Britain was described as the ‘golden age of pantomime’ by Richards (2015: 1), as productions continued to grow in popularity and diversified to appeal to audiences at both the national and the localised scale. However, as Bullough and Bullough (1993) explain, Victorian society also became a time of increased prudishness about ‘abnormal’ gender identities, especially those not complying with the hegemonic gender binary. McNay (1992) draws on Foucault’s work (particularly in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, 1976) to explain that these in-between gender identities were demonised and then criminalised:

Gender is understood as an effect of dominant power relations which is imposed upon the inner bodies of individuals. This static model reifies sexual difference and implies that the assumption of gender identity is unproblematic and total. It also obscures the slippages and multiple experiences which occur between or outside of the polarised options of masculinity or femininity. Foucault’s later idea of practise of the self implies an understanding of gender as an active and never-completed process of engendering and enculturing. (McNay, 1992: 71)

While I do not wish to assume that those who cross-dress on stage self-identify as something other than male or female (although this may also be the case), the challenge of staging non-normative expressions of gender – one that challenges masculinity and femininity, or merges aspects of the two – certainly could have been deemed unacceptable in Victorian society. Cross-dressing in Victorian Britain became increasingly problematic as clothing became a primary marker of the differences between men and women, with Rose (2010: 20) noting that ‘gender and social status are both historically constructed and constructed through clothing ... illuminat[ing] the ways in which social changes were experienced and conceptualised by individuals.’ Dressing became a means of drawing attention to the difference between gendered bodies (i.e. accentuating the waist, breasts and buttocks of women), and cross-dressing of course scrambles this polarity: questioning the assumed ‘naturalness’ of male and female clothing and blending various aspects of masculine and feminine (King, 2013). Dressing became a way to ‘define and redefine the gender boundary’ (Wilson, 1985: 117), and this constant (re)production of such gendered norms invariably further stabilised the gender binary and drew more attention to the ‘abnormality’ of those whose gender expression seeped across and between this gender divide. As an increasingly socially conservative Britain became ever more cautious about cross-dressing and its presumed association with homosexuality, the Labouchere Amendment (1885) (The British



Library Collections, 2018) criminalised homosexuality *and* cross-dressing<sup>64</sup>. This act put into law the ‘rigid system of gender separation’ (Robson, 2001: 4) or strict categorisation of male *or* female which sought to prevent immoral behaviour and make-impossible any blurring of these categories.

### 5.3.1. Cross-Dressing and the stage

Perhaps precisely in response to the strict gender structures imposed upon Victorian Britain, the stage, as a place where cross-dressing *was* still apparently permitted, allowed the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame roles to develop. The transgressive nature of the pantomime, with men dressing as women and women dressing as men, was not only permitted, but was hence even expected in Victorian pantomime. Pantomime and its ability to transgress strict Victorian boundaries (not only that of gender but also of eroticism, sexuality and class) created paradoxical transgressions, framed as carnivalesque<sup>65</sup> and non-threatening and perceived as central and necessary to the spectacle of pantomime performance. The pantomime provides some interesting comparisons with carnival and the way that the latter allows audiences to engage with non-conformity:

What lies at the core of carnival is the knowing temporary inversion of the social order as a means of allowing ordinary people to feel that they have some freedoms and that they are valued members of the community: ... they have licence to enjoy themselves in ways that would be inappropriate and disrespectful at other times. Through this licence they can explore different persona and different relationships to others, safe in the knowledge that this is a legitimate short- term activity after which ‘normal’ relations will be resumed (Ravenscroft and Gilchrist, 2009: 40).

Pantomime then, in a similar vein to carnival, provided a temporary inversion of gender and other highly regulated forms of social governance. It allowed participants to engage with

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<sup>64</sup> The Labouchere Amendment (1885) was seen as a replacement of the Buggery Act (1533). The act made male homosexuality, in public or in private, a criminal offence (Behaviour, and Not a Person, 2013). In 1921 MPs made attempts to amend the Bill to make same-sex relationships between women illegal, but this was dropped out of concern that legislation ‘would only draw attention to the offence and encourage woman to explore their sexuality’ (British Library, 2018). Cross-dressing, synonymous with the deviances of homosexual men (see Chapter 2), was also part of this legislation (Meek, 2015).

<sup>65</sup> Bakhtin’s (1984) work on the cultural importance of the ‘carnavalesque’ works to research carnivals as occasions which permitted the inversion of political, cultural and ideological order to take place, within a set-apart-time-space. In terms of this thesis, the pantomime-as-carnival allowed audiences and actors to engage with transgression, most notably along gendered lines.

disorder, creating gender non-conforming worlds both spatially and temporarily bound by the stage. Davis (2010: 16) writes:

It [pantomime] engaged with politics and social issues, and explored class, gender and race in ways which were often paradoxical and complex, for it could be radically subversive one moment and highly coercive the next.

This distinction between the strict gender roles off-stage and the expectation of cross-dressing roles on-stage led Ardener (2005: 119) to state that, while cross-dressing on stage was embraced, ‘if we were to meet such oddities and inversions on the street, we might pass with a giggle, but most likely would accord them ‘civil inattention’ from embarrassment or disgust’. However, why was such a distinction made between stage and public space? Ardener goes on to suggest that it is the British obsession with viewing ‘the grotesque and vulgar’ that permits gender-bending on stage. To view transgressions from a distance, the audience were encouraged to interact with gender non-conformity and the blending of the strict gender binary. It could be argued that Victorian social structures, to an extent, enabled the stage to become a queer sphere where social norms and a questioning of gender categories was possible. Pantomime provided space for these boundaries to be ‘discussed, rehearsed and changed’ and ‘legitimately subverted’, thus, questioning the absoluteness of gender dichotomisation (Ardener, 2005: 134), but without the authorities perceiving a more pervasive challenge to gender and social order.

Furthermore, as the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame were viewed as exaggerated caricatures of gender normativity, they were not thought to be real enough to question gender ambiguity to the point where it becomes ‘threatening’ (Bullough and Bullough, 1993: 227). Whereas Shakespearian theatre, for example, often cast men in women’s roles at a time when women were not permitted to act on stage (Howard, 1993), pantomime cross-dressing, with its cautious treading to ensure that the audience did not feel threatened by gender alteration, created characters that, instead of simply swapping genders, created ambiguity<sup>66</sup>. While Radcliffe (2010: 118) articulates that the pantomime Dame was ‘a necessary and ritualistic inversion of social hierarchy and gender,’ I would suggest that, rather than looking at a pantomime as a show where a man plays a woman and a woman plays a man, combinations of both the masculine and the feminine are being used to create characters who indeed

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<sup>66</sup> Douglas (1966 [2002]: 127) in her book *Purity and Danger* discusses how danger is created through encounters with ambiguity. She writes that power is used to reduce ambiguity, to ‘protect the system’. Pantomime provides a space in which gender could be situated in a state of ambiguity without necessarily being read as dangerous.

‘gender-bend’. In Ardener’s book *Changing Sex and Bending Gender* (2005: xi), she writes that gender bending involves recognising the non-fixity and plurality of gender. She argues that:

Anomalies and ambiguities inevitably arise as humans seek to create and maintain a social system’ and that to bend gender, is to push the boundaries of categorisation. It is critical to ‘focus on situations of ambiguous or changed sex and on transformed gender roles and categories. [This] can illuminate cultural perceptions of what constitutes ‘normal’ sexual differences and appropriate cultural perceptions of gender, and therefore enrich our insight into different symbolic and social constructs of gender. (Ardener, 2005: 2)

While Ardener (2005) excellently discusses gender bending, I want to push this conceptual move further to question how ‘gender-blending’ might be conceptualised as a way of merging performances of masculinity and femininity. While gender bending encourages us to consider how traditional genders (male/female) can be pushed and extended, the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame can be better understood through gender blending, accounting for the merging of masculinisms and femininisms to create gender transgressive bodies that inhabit a unique position, incorporating aspects of both, rather than portraying any kind of gender-swap. By looking at the nuances of cross-dressing in pantomime and abandoning the definitive male-female binary, a queer reading of gender can be considered as the pantomime ‘self-consciously disorganises the ordinary world’ ([www.york.ac.uk](http://www.york.ac.uk)). Through accepting possibilities outwith the male-female binary, pantomime, suggests Korneeva (n.d), allows audiences to ‘consider the potential existence of other ontological possibilities that may have remained unarticulated’.

Pantomime, as a medium to expose anxieties over gender and sexual deviation, gained political potency. Many writers (e.g. Eigner, 1989) have commented upon the power that pantomime acquired to cause gender confusion and challenge Victorian prudery. Additionally, Davis (2010:7) contends that pantomime is responsible for creating a world of ‘anarchy and subversion’, with pantomime having the adaptability both to satirise and to endorse social and political hegemonies. In her paper, Schacker (2013) writes that the use of the cross-dressing woman playing the strong heroic male part during the Boer War had the power to blur the boundaries between masculine/feminine and real/fantasy, and also to express, even to condemn, ‘nationalism, patriotism, imperialism, the status quo, social hierarchy, racism, gender stereotyping and much else’ (Davis, 2010: 9). Cross-dressing, particularly the role of the Dame, seemed openly to reject the Labouchere Amendment (1885) as the stage was seen as a ‘privileged site of transgression’ that both accepted and, to

an extent, encouraged cross-dressing (Korneeva, n.d). Korneeva goes on to say that pantomime was used as a queer<sup>67</sup> tool that can be viewed as a political statement to disrupt the status-quo, and thereby to distort the ‘othering’ of non-heterosexual and non-binary gendered assumptions in Victorian Britain. This said, Senelick (1993) warns against conveniently using pantomime outwith an entertainment context, responding that researchers should note how hegemonic power structures, mainstream social ontologies and common understandings of gender and sexuality were institutionalised to such a degree that it makes unearthing subversive narratives difficult. He hence warns scholars not to overestimate nor inaccurately use the evidence available. Despite contention over to what extent pantomime created a radical, alternative politics, it is clear that, given the strict social structures of the day, pantomime produced something extraordinary. At the very least, it messed the taken-for-granted assumptions of what constitutes masculinity and femininity, blurring these two poles and allowed characters, audiences and actors to play with a variety of alternative and queer genders and sexualities.

### **5.3.2 Pantomime and the development of alternative identities**

Pantomime assumed an extraordinary power as an agent of destabilisation, desire and fantasy. It’s use of cross-dressed casts helped establish havens of ambiguity in which marginalised sexual identities were given room to develop but also offered the general public a way of, or around, the binary system of gender. (Korneeva, n.d)

During this time of intense social structuring and categorisation, from the Victorian era in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century Britain, an obsession with the ‘other’ or the ‘deviant’, especially when it came to sex, sexuality and a growing awareness of homosexuality, began to appear in the wider psyche. In a conflation of gender and sexuality, those who did not adhere to the gender binary were often associated with homosexuality, maybe too, with sin, and were branded as ‘deviant’ (Adams, 1995)<sup>68</sup>. As previously noted, the stage became an early safe space for those who did cross-dress, but I now want to question how this shift created space for non-normative identities on stage, before proceeding to look at how audiences reacted to cross-

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<sup>67</sup> Lipton (2008: 471) says that pantomime could and should be described as a ‘queer’ practice because ‘its diegetic world is one of inversion where gender categories and sexual identities are disrupted’ to create gender and sexual ambiguity.

<sup>68</sup> Adams (1995) does note that gender deviancy and sexual transgression in Victorian Britain should not be entirely conflated, as the secrecy of homosexuality often elicited a heightened level of suspicion and hostility, whereas non-hegemonic forms of masculinity (such as the figures of the dandy) were often more visible in public.

dressing in the forms of the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame.

Looking at gender-bending in pantomime within the context of everyday cross-dressing, Davis (2014) suggests that the stage played an important role in the emergence of transgender or transvestite identities. Garber (1992) notes that much of the research diverts attention away from the transvestite in pantomime, however, and instead refers to cross-dressing simply as a type of gender-swap whereby the male actor is playing a woman and the young woman is playing a man. This, in turn, inadvertently rejects any possibility of in-between identities or gender expressions and gives (another) structured reading of the gender binary, a point already anticipated and critiqued above. The common view that off-stage cross-dressing was a 'potential or even indelible marker of male homosexuality' meant that cross-dressers were indeed, often judged by the Labouchere Amendment (1885) (Davis, 2014: 218). Davis draws attention to the case of Boulton and Park (figure 5.2), two cross-dressing stage performers (Stella and Fanny) who were arrested for the 'abominable crime of buggery' in 1870 (Hughes, 2013). However, because of their profession, their 'offensive' effeminacy as men, and inconclusive evidence that they had engaged in anal sex, they were found not guilty (Sinclair, n.d). Senelick (1993: 88) surmises that this pair 'were probably not unique in transferring their private predilection from the demi-monde to the public sphere.' He adds that this route was likely exploited by those who cross-dressed once it became economically successful, meaning trans and transvestite performers could adopt cross-dressing on stage as a profession. Interestingly, as Stella and Fanny adopted the modest female dress of Victorian Britain, they were often viewed as less transgressive as women than they were as men, when they wore 'tight trousers and open-throated shirts with powdered necks and rouged cheeks' (Senelick, 1993: 88), for the latter embodied the dandy image (see footnote 60) associated with male homosexuality.

Richards (2015: 33) proposes that the adoption of cross-dressing in pantomime and theatre was used to 'defuse sexual tensions and anxieties' around homosexuality and transvestism. The protection of the stage not only allowed alternative genders and sexualities to exist, it allowed them to perform, explore and enable their identities. This possibility leaves us with a juxtaposing situation whereby the protection of the stage allowed individuals to cross-dress to the public, while simultaneously going 'under-the-radar' of illegality and the Labouchere Amendment (1885):



**Figure 5.2: Boulton and Park as Stella and Fanny were two of the most celebrated cross-dressers in Victorian London. (Teeman, 2013)**

Homosexual men and women, as well as heterosexual transvestites, could experiment with gender shuffling in a context that won them approbation; the audience could savour sexually provocative behaviour because it had ostensibly been neutralised by the transvestism. (Senelick, 1993: 93)

The ‘neutralisation’ that gender non-conformity brought meant that gender-queer actors could diffuse across the male-female divide in a professional environment. While the stage may only have presented a temporally and spatially bound environment where gender non-conformity could be explored, it did expose audiences to alternative genders. Korneeva (n.d) proposes that it was this limited ability to explore alternatives that made cross-dressing radical and deconstructive, and that the normalisation of cross-dressing on stage created a space where gender and sexuality could not only be subverted with an audience but also between actors on-stage.

Garber (1992) states that this interconnectivity between gender, sexuality and space means that, not only must scholars be critical of Victorian views towards non-compliant identities, they must also be cautious of assuming certain categorisations for individuals:

Transvestism is a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture: the disrupting element that intervenes, not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself. (Graber, 1992: 32)

While Graber discusses pantomime through the practice of transvestism, (something not specifically analysed in this thesis), his nod to non-conformity and the break-down of

categorisation is key. Pantomime – was and still is – a space through which gender non-conformity is expressed and played with for political, personal and performance reasons, creating non-conforming gender geographies that span different scales and spaces. This attempt to consider the pantomime and on-stage transgressions through a queer lens is something to which I will now turn when considering the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame, addressing how they are in a constant state of revealing, playing-upon and queering aspects of masculinity and femininity.

## 5.4 The Principal Boy

One of the two cross-dressing roles in the Christmas pantomime is the Principal Boy. The part is traditionally played by a young woman who performs the leading male character. Roles such as Peter Pan, Dick Whittington and Aladdin became popular in Scotland as women took on the ‘breeches parts’ on stage (its-behind-you, n.d). The earliest known example of a woman playing the Principal Boy role was in *Jack and the Beanstalk* in 1819. She was noted as being ‘an attractive actress prone to slapping her thigh’ (Gore-Langton, 2014, n.p). Perhaps the most famous of the Principal Boys was Vesta Tilley, a cross-dressing pantomime regular who starred in a short tunic, which showed her ‘legs and her ample figure’ (Brandreth, 1973: 43). Vesta Tilley featured in Scottish pantomime in 1877, when she arrived to play at the Britannia Theatre in Glasgow. Here, she became renowned in her male impersonation with ‘skill at portraying the male romantic or heroic lead ensuring that pantomime became a regular feature in her annual diary’ (Bowers, 2007: 57). Despite her convincing ability to perform the Principal Boy, however, this the character is a complex, infusing blend of gender expressions. In this section, I wish to look at some of the intricate ways that gender-b(l)ending takes place through the Principal Boy before looking at the (de)sexualisation of the character and how it evokes anxieties over same-sex attraction and non-normative sexualities. Finally, I will reflect upon some of the potential reasons behind the demise of the Principal Boy in recent years.

### 5.4.1 Masculinising femininity

The Principal Boy became a vessel for gender-bending not only in terms of cross-dressing, but also as a complex conglomeration of gendered behaviours, materials, parodies and sexual anxieties. Simply to view the Principal Boy as a young woman cross-dressed in men’s clothes would be overly simplistic and erase many of the intricacies and gendered antagonisms embodied through this playing with the male-female binary. As previously

mentioned, the most obvious confusion caused by the Principal Boy is that is that of aesthetic. While the audience is aware that an actress may be playing the leading male role – one of heroism and bravery – her costume is often one which accentuates femininity (Figure 5.3). This material feminisation of the male lead has led to contention over to what extent the Principal Boy can be read as a transvestite character. While Bowers (2007: 57) writes about ‘the male impersonations<sup>69</sup> of Vesta Tilly’, Pickering (1993: 159) replies that the Principal Boy was ‘most definitely not a male impersonator and [had to] retain their femininity’. Richards goes on to explain that Principal Boys are never expected to be convincingly male, and that they are supposed to avoid confusing audiences over what can be read as their ‘true’ gender, but these authors all ignore the myriad of different ways in which gender could be read by audience members, instead centralising upon their own perceptions. If the femininity of the Principal Boy is not accentuated enough, Richards warns that this absence may begin to provoke anxieties over sexual orientation with the audience.



**Figure 5.3: The Principal Boy roles of Dandini and Prince Charming from Cinderella. (Taken from Ardener, 2005: 131)**

Not depending purely on aesthetic to play the Principal Boy, the character has often adopted a series of behavioural transgressions and parodies further to blend femininity with masculinity. The over-exaggeration of masculine behaviours became important not only to gender-bending, but was also used startlingly to juxtapose with, and to bring into focus, the femininity lying under the costume:

<sup>69</sup> Senelick (1993) notes that ‘impersonator’ was a neologism of the 1850s and was used to describe a type of performance that lacks, or did not fulfil, traditional labels. The impersonator did not necessarily attempt a gender swap and rarely was one gender trying to be the other.



She is imitating some lost vision of a man when she adopts a resolute and deliberately unladylike stance, feet firmly planted apart ... she is assuming postures which are meant to be recognised as manly, but she is not trying to create the illusion of manhood. (Ward in Holland, 1997: 198)

The behavioural performance of the Principal Boy is something which has been written about far less than the visual reading of gender transgression. While perhaps deemed as less important, I think that to avoid looking at the portrayal of masculine behaviour may mistakenly lead us to overread the Principal Boy's looks, dress and feminine body, and thereby, to produce a misogynist reading of femininity based on thigh-slapping and fleshy exposure. The Principal Boy seems to queer Butler's performativity, in that, rather than creating a representation of gendered life that simply (re)creates and (re)enforces the gender binary, the Principal Boy character takes deliberate steps to distort those repetitions. With the Principal Boy, the female performance of masculinisms arguably distorts the ongoing (re)creation of the gender binary, opening up a space where aspects of the binary are conflated to create new combinations of being both masculine and feminine. The role itself, often one of bravery and 'saving the day', simultaneously solidifies and distorts the distinction between the masculine and the feminine. In keeping with hegemonic gender discourse, the woman playing a man's character is also playing upon the coded assumption that hegemonic masculinity is embodied through heroism and strength, but pantomime prompts audiences to think differently about gendered behaviours. The Principal Boy could do things forbidden to women, especially in Victorian Britain – show lots of leg, save maidens, kill dragons and outwit enemies yet, I would argue that, in order to consider critically how the Principal Boy is created, a more nuanced look at the arguments should be taken.

While few writers would argue that the Principal Boy is an example of a transgendered identity, 'he' should not be considered as being wholly male or female, but as a non-conforming combination of them both. Perhaps, then, the character could be used as a queer provocateur – one who should be seen as an extension of the standard understanding of gender, rather than restricted by it. The mix of both masculine and feminine attributes and markers creates a queer character who disrupts the bi-gendered model, producing an in-between gender expression that plays with and seemingly mocks the restraint of the gender binary. In this case, onstage performances of female masculinity are permitted as a fantasy and gender transgression is understood as humorous and as entertainment. However, as noted by Browne (2005), gender transgression and female masculinity are always understood spatially, in which regard it is telling that offstage performances of female

masculinity are not accepted but instead questioned, challenging gender norms and boundaries. Thus, the space in which female masculinisation takes place is pivotal in how audiences interact. Onstage performances of the Principal Boy are constantly in a state of incompatible merging, showing that the Principal Boy is ‘not in fact a boy, or a girl, or a man, or a woman – but otherworldly and ideal within the frame of the pantomime performance’ (Schacker, 2013: 62).

### 5.4.3 (De)sexualisation of the Principal Boy

The sexualisation of the Principal Boy is something that has been considered by theatre studies. How does the character develop masculinisms without evoking anxieties over homosexuality, and how has a desexualisation of the character been used to relieve such tensions? As Eigner (1989: 67) writes, ‘women in tight-fitting male costumes had been delighting prurient male spectators<sup>70</sup>’ in pantomimes since the 1830s. This sexualisation of the female boy leads to a plethora of questions that ask what it is that male audiences are supposed to find titillating – the feminine body, the masculine clothes, the masculine postures and behaviours, the masterly, domineering nature of the feminine or perhaps a queer, multi-gendered combination of all of these things? This invariably also challenges the assumed heterosexuality of audiences. Interestingly, Lipton (2008) notes that, while the Principal Boy was often seen as a sexual object by heterosexual men, writing has not questioned why it was seemingly viewed benignly and not as a threat to female heterosexuality, or even lesbian sexuality in the same way that male cross-dressing became synonymous with male homosexuality<sup>71</sup>. Lipton suggests that the reason may be linked to the criminalisation of male-male sexual activity by the Labouchere Amendment (1885), whereas lesbian sexuality was never illegalised.

In an attempt to desexualise the Principal Boy, commentators have begun to put emphasis on the Principal *Boy*, rather than the cross-dressed *female*. Davis (2014: 227), however, frames this matter through a problematic and masculinist lens, compartmentalising the sexuality of women and children as simply non-masculine and lacking agency over

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<sup>70</sup> I was unable to find any literature on the relationship between non-heterosexual pantomime audiences and cross-dressing.

<sup>71</sup> There is a marked silence on lesbian sexuality between the pantomime and the audience still exists in literatures. All queer sexuality work on the pantomime, as far as I can find, focuses on the cross-dressing man, the Dame and male homosexuality.

sexuality. He writes about ‘becoming a boy’ as a desexualised, transgressive middle-space that allows for cross-dressing without assumed adult sexuality<sup>72</sup>:

Female to male cross-dressing became important in offering an on-stage exploration of the meanings, not of being a man or a woman but of being a boy ... testing the assumptions of the binary they crossed [and] resetting the boundaries of acceptably gendered behaviour. (Bratton 2007: 240)

This leaves the Principal Boy in the interesting position of being in an ambiguous state of feminised masculinity because the woman playing the boy will never grow-up to be a man (in a Peter Pan-esque avoidance of adult sexuality.) Graber (1992) supposes that, while the character straddles the boundary between female and boy, the childhood of the Peter Pan<sup>73</sup> character directs attention away from the potentially sexualised cross-dresser. This queering of male and female, adult and child, and sexuality and asexuality, hence creates a truly problematic body that Davis (2010) suggests draws intrigue from all gazers. Bullough and Bullough (1993) echo this intrigue, saying that it is the Principal Boy’s ability to provide gender ambiguity which pleases audiences. While Holland (1997) argues that the Principal Boy should be played as an asexual character, Schacker (2013: 51) draws attention to the relationship that exists between the Boy and the leading lady which is often one of ‘flirting, embrace, and banter heavy with double entendre,’ although, perhaps this encounter should be viewed as a type of playful, child-like proto-sexuality – a sexuality of naivety, subtlety and unassuming-ness. Even if sexuality is not displayed in a manner as it is commonly understood or categorised, Senelick (1993) speculates that the audience is still presented with blatant cross-dressing and with an in-between figure who occupies, to one extent or another, a non-conforming blend of masculinity and femininity. Schacker (2013: 63) follows this point to say that the character is not only transgressionary in terms of gender, age and sexuality, ‘s/he is capable of inspiring multiple forms of desire and admiration’; and that it is precisely this indeterminacy which makes for an effective Principal Boy.

#### **5.4.4 The demise of the female Principal Boy**

It has been noted by numerous writers (e.g. Hodgson, 2010; Radcliffe, 2010) that the role of the female-played Principal Boy is in decline. By looking at this phenomenon, it is possible to consider public attitudes towards gender and gender transgression. Modern pantomime,

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<sup>72</sup> Geographers such as Philo and Smith (2013) have written about the vexed issues of children’s own sexuality and how it might be preyed upon by adults, however, this remains a field rarely analysed by geographers.

<sup>73</sup> *Peter Pan* is itself a regularly performed pantomime (Theatre Royal, 2017).

while still operating in a transgressionary space, has arguably changed to become more aware of gender and sexual minorities, while also attempting to erase what maybe read as a sexist past. While this move has been denounced as zealous political correctness by Blacker (2013), who argues that it has put an end to the traditional fun of pantomime, others say that pantomime needs to adapt to more cautious attitudes now held about gender discrimination. Radcliffe (2010) concludes that, while pantomime once reinforced different Victorian prejudices such as genderism, sexism and ageism, these out-dated social attitudes now create a problematic and misogynistic representation of the Principal Boy. To use the Principal Boy as a sexual spectacle for (presumably heterosexual) audiences to ogle reinforces sexism while promoting a specific way to be attractive to men. Alternatively, making the Principal Boy more masculine and androgynous can create a modern-day deconstruction of cisnormative discourses, allowing the female actor to be more stereotypically masculine, and thereby reinforcing pantomime's modern-day influence as a queer performance while still not erasing the traditional Principal Boy. The upshot becomes a performance of gender non-conformity that challenges standardised notions of gender held by audiences.

Also, as awareness and acceptance of gay, trans and queer identities has become increasingly mainstream – both socially and legislatively (Scottish Government, 2015) – having a female-boy playing opposite the leading female (who is usually a woman cast in a female part) has led to anxieties over lesbian desire on stage<sup>74</sup>. Gore-Langton (2014) notes that the part is now very rarely played by a woman as this would cross social boundaries on stage and lead to the 'homosexualisation' of children's entertainment (the idea that pantomime is 'good *clean* fun' (Hughes, 2013: 147) contrasts with the seeming 'dirtiness' of non-normative relations and something that should not be exposed to children). Instead, it is now more common for men to play the Principal Boy, with Qdos casting no women in Principal Boy roles in 2006-2007 (Lipton, 2008) although, some pantomime performances in Scotland have kept to their transgressional traditions. Hodgson (2010) argues that, rather than the Principal Boy being removed as a character, it is masculinity itself which has been challenged. Whereas the traditional Principal Boy was seen as the site of masculine femininity, it is now viewed as an attempt to feminise masculinity which may be done by using 'camp' male actors to fill the traditionally female role. Actors such as John Barrowman (in Glasgow) and Julian Clary being cast as Dandini in *Cinderella*, (Figure 5.4) has forged a cross-over between a public exposure of homosexuality and various aspects of masculinity

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<sup>74</sup> This was an anxiety not felt during Victorian 'mainstream' audiences because lesbian identity or sexuality were not acknowledged.

and femininity. I would argue that this cross-over may also be done in an attempt to domesticate male homosexuality, since their (homo)sexuality is here tamed through becoming romantically intertwined with the leading (female) character. It is this quality, pantomime's ability to continually queer (and perhaps to re-queer) character relationships, even to morph into a relevant and politically challenging tool, that has kept audiences transfixed over generations.



**Figure 5.4: Julian Clary playing Dandini, a traditional Principal Boy role. Make-up and a feminine coded costume are used to queer the principal boy role. (Express & Star, 2014)**

## 5.5 The Pantomime Dame

Perhaps the character most associated with pantomime cross-dressing though, is the Dame. A man often playing a middle-aged woman, the Dame, is charged with the role of encouraging audience interaction. Because of supposedly greater communication between actors and audiences in Scottish pantomime as compared with elsewhere (*The Scotsman*, 2010), the role of the Dame is of vital importance as she aims to bridge the gap between actors and audiences through humour, glamorous costume and comical dance routines (Stanton, 2016). The importance of the Dame provokes many questions about the relationship of masculine-to-feminine cross-dressing and traditional, Scottish masculinity. How did the pantomime Dame become such a spectacle and come to be such a critical part of Scottish pantomime? In this section, I track the development of the pantomime Dame before looking at her sexualisation as she attempts to avoid a hostile reaction from predominantly heterosexual audiences. Finally, I will consider the numerous ways in which the Dame can be read as a queer portrayal of gender, capable of distorting the gender binary and developing non-normative gender and sexual expressions.

The portrayal of the pantomime Dame has changed numerous times in response to audience views on cross-dressing and due to changing mainstream opinions towards cross-dressing and transvestism (*The Scotsman*, 2010). Holland (1997) maps the development of the main 'types' of pantomime Dame. The first of these is the 'believable Dame' or the 'traditional Dame', of which Dan Leno is often thought of as the primary example. Dan Leno's attempt to 'domesticate the Dame and to imagine her as a mother, facing problems which he and his audiences know knew all too well: poverty, unemployment and abandonment' (University of York, n.d). The Dame was supposed to be seen as both a female and a clear example of gender swap – from man to woman – to express the melancholic struggles of the older widow, while also inviting the audience to engage in the plot. This ability to converse with the working classes and wide publics is what made Leno's Dame so popular. Radcliffe (2010) nonetheless urges scholars not only to pay attention to what extent the believable Dame looks like a woman, but also to her adoption of 'female' characteristics:

Emotions are gender-identified and that 'playing the other' (or cross-dressing) opens the masculine self to usually banned 'female' emotions such as fear and pity. [In this] the man acquires a double consciousness by dressing as a woman, enabling him to experience femininity. (Radcliffe, 2010: 127)

It was the ability of Dan Leno, who performed regularly in Scotland (Bowers, 2007), to make the audience temporally forget that he was a cross-dresser, embodying femininity, that made audiences to feel affection and sympathy towards the pantomime Dame. This, portrayal goes against the commonly held masculinist idea that Scottish men should be strong, of course, and also against any view that seeking help or sympathy was a sign of weakness (O'Brien, Hunt and Hart, 2005). Here, Leno clearly provides an example of how the masculine was able to take on what were commonly thought of as feminine attributes, challenging the exclusive distinction of Victorian social structures. Radcliffe (2010: 124) questions whether treading Leno's pantomime Dame through a Butlerian lens can allow researchers to question what is 'normal'. The convincing portrayal of a woman provides us with the opportunity to ask what can be considered masculine and feminine, while also amalgamating these categories by 'subverting the naturalised categories of identity and desire'. However, because of an increased awareness of the 'dangers' of homosexuality following the Labouchere Amendment (1885), Dan Leno's Dame had to change to become *less* convincing as a depiction of womanhood and to depend more upon being the parody Dame. This shift allowed Leno to dispel the idea that the Dame was a female impersonator (associated with homosexuality) and hence, to avoid conflict with homophobic discourse.

Following this shift, the ‘camp’<sup>75</sup> Dame’ and the ‘over-the-top Dame’ (Holland, 1997) became increasingly popular. With less emphasis on convincing audiences that the Dame is a woman, she now played the role of the parody character, one of ‘bawdy, fun-loving and often compassionate energy of an older woman’ (Lynam, 2005). Danny La Rue (1927-2009) (Figure 5.5), a female impersonator in the UK from the 1960s, became renowned for his interpretation of the ‘camp Dame’ or the ‘over-the-top Dame’ (Barker, 2009). Here, more attention was paid to the distinction *between* male and female and the creation of a parody character who adopted juxtaposing elements of both the masculine and the feminine, but never to the extent where the audience felt threatened by an assault on masculinity. The ‘ridiculously gaudy, often grotesque version of a woman’ (Williams, 2014, n.p) is one which therefore became (de)sexualised in numerous ways to ensure that transgressed gender markers were challenged to a degree whereby neither audience or actor heterosexuality was questioned.



Figure 5.5: Danny La Rue playing Mother Goose in 1984. ([www.its-behind-you.com](http://www.its-behind-you.com))

### 5.5.1 (De)sexualisation of the Dame

Some writers (e.g. Ardener, 2005; Davis, 2010) have written about how cross-dressing and the pantomime Dame have been used as a means of allowing audiences to question the gender binary, but this claim has been disputed, with Radcliffe (2010: 122) saying that, by unsex-ing the Dame, she is able to ‘avoid any hint of ambiguous sexual implication.’ Thus, it is clear that a precise balance of masculine and feminine needs to be struck by the Dame – one that questions the absoluteness of the gender binary, while also refraining from provoking homophobic anxieties. When done effectively, Lipton (2008: 474) says that,

<sup>75</sup> More on the importance of ‘camp’ to gender non-conforming conversations can be found in Chapter 2.

through the character of the Dame, the actor has the ability to disclose how gender alteration and switching impacts upon heteronormativity, while still creating a way to challenge ‘a rigid concept of constructed sex and gender boundaries whose membership is based on shared values of heterosociability, utility, devoid of queerness’.

Many researchers have focused on the aesthetic of the Dame as a way of both challenging gender boundaries and stabilising the fact that audiences are not seeing a man attempting to *be* or *become* a woman. Davis (2014: 224) suggests that the Dame cannot and should not look too feminine to avoid risking ‘the possibility of arousing male desire.’ While the Principal Boy’s feminine body was originally used as a tool to provoke hetero-male arousal, researchers write that this move is actively avoided in the case of the Dame. The materiality (of the enormous costumes, the fat suits, the dowdy, old mother clothes) is used to extinguish any attempt by the male actor to become too (sexually) feminine<sup>76</sup>. Sage (1889 in Radcliffe, 2010: 122) says that, because of growing distrust towards men playing realistic women, the Dame had to become ‘unsexed’. Lipton (2008) adds that it is this unsexing that keeps the Dame firmly as male, and it is here that this distinction between the man dressing as the woman and the female impressionist becomes most apparent. Yet, in opposition to this desexualisation, De Souza (in Sladen, 2017: 209) refers to the Dame as a ‘weighty, oversexed woman played by a man.’ Rather than erasing the sexuality of the dame, it appears that the actor can play on sexual anxieties and desires through the image of the middle-aged woman for the benefit of comedy. This sexualisation and the innuendoic way that it is performed to audiences is offset, then, by the dowdy appearance of the Dame. The use of gender transgression on stage is used as a means to quell the sexuality of the Dame, in order for her to embody a non-conforming form of femininity. This is not necessarily to render the Dame entirely asexual, but rather acts as a restructuring technique through which non-conforming assemblages of gender and sexuality can be performed without causing gender confusion<sup>77</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> It is important to note the latent ageism present here. Davis (2014) notes the different ways in which the figure of the older woman as the Dame is denied sexuality. However, this in turn erases the potential sexuality of older women, and recognising the sexualised older woman as a legitimate form of femininity is surely still important.

<sup>77</sup> Further questions could be asked about the extent to which the Dame’s character is set by the actor, by other actors/characters, by the pantomime production team or by stage directions. This could open a range of other geographical and empirical research which could be undertaken in conjunction with elements of theatre studies. Within academic geography, Amanda Rogers (2012: 60) uses performance acts to ‘reveal the experiential qualities of space and place, they also provide a way to think about their power-laden politics’, discussing how ‘staged’ performances can reveal much about the agencies, producers and audiences involved.



### 5.5.2 The Dame and Scottish masculinity

Given the literary attention which has been given to the strong Presbyterian tradition in Scotland and the masculinist image of the strong, working-class Scottish man (Johnston and McIvor, 2005), I wish to consider ways in which the transgressive pantomime Dame challenges this identity. As previously mentioned, the pantomime's attraction for the working classes surely caused audiences to question the assumed binary of what is male and what is female. Lipton (2008) uses the pantomime Dame as the provocateur of Freud's castration anxieties, arguing that the pantomime Dame, and cross-dressing more widely, holds the potential to ignite male fears over emasculation. She goes on to suggest that localised understandings of masculinity are important, and that such understandings duly alter the Dame from place to place. To have audiences who are 'sensitive to hyper-masculinity and its association with the representation of men' (p.473), such as those found in industrial, working-class Scottish communities, must influence the extent to which the Dame can be used to challenge such sensitivities. With this anxiety towards the questioning of masculinity comes a homophobic discourse around both the sexualisation of the pantomime Dame and the misconstrued assumption that a lack of masculinity equates to effeminacy and to homosexuality. These anxieties are provoked by the Dame and the blending of the gendered body that she inhabits:

The Dame is never effeminate; she is never a drag artist, since she retains her male identity. Such acts are, characteristically, harmless ways of breaking certain sexual taboos. They evoke ... fears of feminine aggression and overt sexuality at the same time as they play upon anxieties about male homosexuality; all of these fears are subtly represented and then detonated. (Ackroyd, 1979: 103-104)

Dames then, embody a version of femininity that could be considered non-conforming, maybe as a way to play upon anxieties about homosexuality with audiences. This delicate balancing act intertwines formations of gender and sexuality in order to frame the Dame as a queer figure who exposes audiences to overt queer sexuality and gender in material and affectual ways. Perry (2013, n.p) notes that this transgressive figure of the pantomime Dame offers audiences the opportunity to question gender stereotypes, since the Dame's 'cross-dressing can be a much-needed licence for subversion' that this should not be undermined by the 'forces of marketing and PR ... to appease the supposedly discomfited public.' While criticism has been made of the mass-marketing strategies of large-scale pantomime performances (Lipton, 2007), some writers have argued that this has been done to less of an extent in Scotland, with an emphasis still being put on local 'intimate scale' productions that

do not depend on big budgets or celebrity casts (Fisher, 2017). This smaller scale perhaps gives the Dame more artistic scope in how s/he is able to queer gender and sexual normalcy in Scottish pantomime, deploying mis-matched and transgressive performances of gender and sexuality, and in effect critically deconstructing cisnormative and heteronormative articulations of gender and sexuality.

### 5.5.3 Queering the pantomime Dame

More recently, attention has been given to the queering of the pantomime Dame. Recent changes to the Dame have seen her become an increasingly distorted body that has begun to interact with, and be accepting of, different interpretations of gender and sexuality, although little has been written about the gendered experience of the Dames themselves. Most relevant literature seems to take a detached view of gender, and understands gender construction through an audience's gaze, questioning the impact that gender transgression has on the audience, but the impact upon the actor playing the Dame himself is relatively unexplored. A series of video clips showing interviews with pantomime Dames provides an insight into the 'affect' that costume, make-up, and the process of Dame-ing has on them. While all men were keen to point out that they identify as male, it is clear that to be a Dame requires a certain amount of gender blending and a bringing together of masculinity and femininity:

“It's extraordinary because this is where the change starts – just by putting on make-up. I find myself smiling more like a woman than as a man. I wouldn't be doing this if I was making-up as a man. That's where the change starts when turning into a Dame. I ask you – how could anyone feel masculine when you've got all this [make-up and costume] on? You don't need to think about being a Dame. You just put it all on and you are.” (The Art of the Pantomime Dame: George Lacy (1904-1989): (Youtube, 2013)

The wearing of female materials such as dresses and make-up clearly has an affect on how the Dame understands and performs 'their' gender<sup>78</sup>. This point is echoed by Meloy (in Williams, 2014) who recalls that becoming a Dame allows you to 'go through a transformation. I'm just quite a normal bloke – then I put on a dress and she comes out ... as soon as the tits are on, the dress is on, it's a different person.'<sup>79</sup> Lacy recognises in himself

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<sup>78</sup> This prefiguring begins to open up discussion on the importance of affect, objects, clothing and materials which will be further explored throughout the thesis.

<sup>79</sup> It is important to point out the distinction between performance and performativity. While early trans scholarship rightly critiqued theory which reduces gender performativity to mere performance (e.g. Jeffreys, 1997), silencing the everyday struggles which trans people face genderism and transphobia, with Dame-ing, and the portrayal of a character on stage, the Dame has agency to perform a certain gender for spectacle rather than being a legitimate gender expression.

that using female materials invariably brings the power to feminise the masculine, while also acknowledging that he feels completely ‘natural’ in doing this feminisation. This gender blending, rather than bending, allows the Dame to incorporate masculinity with femininity, while the audience remains aware that they are watching a man play a female role, giving the Dame a “very unique licence” with audiences (ibid.).

In an extremely honest interview, Terry Scott<sup>80</sup> (YouTube, 2013) articulates that “most people will understand that there is male and female inside them”, and that he used the Dame as a way of exploring this complex state. An understanding of how gendered hegemonies can be challenged by the Dame herself is something this is largely omitted from literature, but Scott suggests that audiences are able to use the Dame as a way to explore their own gender; adding that there might be women that feel a bit “mannish” and men that feel a bit “womanish”, and that pantomime allows them to do this “without feeling peculiar”. By performing the Dame in a particular way, Scott recognises that it is possible to engage with audiences in a manner that goes beyond comedy, but also hails questions that fundamentally challenge how masculinity and femininity can be blended to create a more individualised understanding and portrayal of gender.

More recently, some Scottish pantomimes have queered the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame still further. By stepping away from the male portrayal of a middle-aged woman, the Dame has become a figure of ambiguity, crossing boundaries of both gender and sexuality. The use of openly gay men and drag queens as pantomime Dames became increasingly popular in the 1990s, as already briefly discussed. Danny La Rue was seen as a pioneering stage performer who took his open homosexuality to the stage in 1964 (Tarbuck, 2014). He became an increasingly popular pantomime Dame who effectively queered the Dame as a character, meshing different identities and exploring these through the Principal Boy and in relation to the pantomime Dame; a note that La Rue himself occasionally took:

An interesting twist is when a ‘gay’ performer, who habitually dresses on stage in gender-intermediate clothes, and adopts a high camp manner, takes the role of the Principal Boy. (Ardener, 2005: 132)

The same could be said for the pantomime Dame. When portraying an attraction or sexual lust for men, as a gay man playing a woman, the categories or labels of homo/heterosexual or even of camp man/woman do not seem accurately to fit the queering of cross-dressing

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<sup>80</sup> George Lacy (1904-1989) and Terry Scott (1927-1994) were both English actors and entertainers who played the role of the pantomime Dame.

that occurs here, often prompting more questions than they answer. On the stage, as a place of gender and sexual blending and mis-match, the Dame's desire becomes momentarily normalised through their non-conforming and shifting gender expression. This confusing and multi-layered creation of a character whose gender and sexuality cannot be read easily allows audiences to engage with the queerness on stage, perhaps unknowingly or without even feeling threatened.

Lipton (2008) notes that since the 2000s the 'normal' Dame has often been replaced by a female impersonator or drag queen. The queer Dame, playing a man's role of playing a woman, shows how the Dame can complicate and question gender, sexuality and performance. Drag queens, and the often gay actors who play them, blur the boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality on stage which leaves the audiences with a dilemma: how would they read the homosexual anxieties about, and sexualisation of, a drag queen who was playing a woman but whose humour often exposed an unfilled desire for men? While this may have been understood as harmless humour with the traditional Dame, audiences are now faced with a seemingly genuine expression of homosexuality played through the veil of the Dame's character. Holland (1997), on the other hand, denies this augmentation of the Dame's character from a gender transgressive character to a sexually transgressive character. He insists that there is always a difference between the Dame, who does not try to pass as a woman for comedy, and the female impersonator, and yet the drag queen too often incorporates comedy into the portrayal of the Dame, while extravagant women's clothes are used by both the Dame and the drag queen to become a 'glitzy object of gaze' (Lipton, 2008: 477). Considering Lily Savage<sup>81</sup> (figure 5.6), a popular British drag queen from the 1980s (Nicholson, 2015), Holland argues that, when the Dame becomes too womanly, this risks a certain sexualisation which detracts too far from the Dame and instigates a certain homophobic awareness by audiences. However, drawing a distinction between what is/is not a Dame/female impersonator is counterintuitive. Where is the line between the two to be drawn? Is the label attributed to the character given by the audience or crafted by the person playing the role? How is gender being read and how does it impact upon a sexual reading of the Dame? Williams (2014) contends that an attempt to use categorisation to define the modern pantomime Dame is futile. While a man might be playing a woman, she says that the point of the Dame is not to remain as a man or to become a woman, but rather to take what can be constructed as a politically queer role. Instead, then, the Dame should occupy a transgressional zone, taking some aspects of femininity and

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<sup>81</sup> Lily Savage was a popular drag queen in the UK played by comedian, Paul O'Grady.

conflating them with some masculine (even some anti-feminine) characteristics for the sake of comedy, and to provoke a sense of gender-confusing shock for audiences.



**Figure 5.6: Lily Savage playing Widow Twanky in Aladdin in 2010. (British Comedy Guide, 2012)**

Following the challenge to sexuality and gender, and given the use of gender transgression, pantomime as a form of entertainment has come under scrutiny by writers and queer activists. Blacker (2013) argues that political correctness is putting an end to the traditional fun of the pantomime, saying that ‘gender confusion’ is losing its appeal with audiences. As audiences become more aware of transgender identities, Blacker (2013: n.p) says that, ‘rather reassuringly, young audiences are unlikely to see the joke. At a time when one cross-dresser ... is preparing to run for election as Mayor of London, the idea that a man in a skirt is funny clearly belongs in the past.’ Doble (2015) echoes this point, claiming that having a long tradition in pantomime is not a good enough reason to keep her, and that the Dame now gives an unhelpful representation of what it means to be gender non-conforming. This increased awareness of gender non-conforming identities may also be seen as an inappropriate form of children’s entertainment, since any comedy derived from the Dame’s cross-dressing no longer seems to go ‘over the heads’ of children. Some have argued that the use of comedy by pantomime Dames to laugh at gender transgression even raises questions of transphobia:

[The pantomime Dame] raises questions concerning transphobia and the portrayal of transgender lives. The idea that the Dame ‘lets slip’ her character from time to time invalidates trans people’s constant struggles to prove that their gender identity is more than a character – something that can be ‘put on’ and ‘taken off’. (Doble, 2015, n.p)

An increased awareness of trans and queer identities has given the pantomime another incidental role, not only one of gender questioning, but one of gender invalidation. The playing of a character who is laughed at and enjoyed by audiences arguably undermines the battle that non-conforming gender identities have in proving that their gender expression is something that can be described as 'real' (Cashore and Tauson, 2009). Doble (2015) warns that this may lead to a self-hatred of those who transgress gender norms and maybe devalue it as a source of comedy. Finally, Doble argues that the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame are unhelpful to many aspects of gender and sexual politics. By creating potentially harmful stereotypes that risk equating gender identity with sexuality, and by creating characters with a comical focus, some writers argue that the Dame perpetuates damaging transphobia (Sommers, 2015). Rather than the Dame being the site of gender transgression, she may now be viewed as the site that invalidates such transgressions. This modern politics of the pantomime Dame is set to challenge how cross-dressing is viewed on stage and will force that role, and hence the importance of the pantomime Dame in Scotland, to change again, as it has so many times before.

## **5.6 The Pantomime and non-conforming gender geographies**

In this chapter, I have discussed the many ways in which pantomime contributes to a non-conforming gender history and geography in Scotland. The way that pantomime deconstructs normality and hegemony allows it to create a spatially and temporally bound queer world that allows ordinary to become extraordinary through the spectacle of performance, transgression, humour and audience interaction. Acting as a medium that stealthily brings embodiments of gender non-conformity to a breadth of audiences, the pantomime has provided a multi-layered and queer art form to Scottish audiences, with its popularity meaning that it gained the title of 'national theatre of Scotland' (MacKenney and Tiffany, 2002). While it should not be suggested that pantomime was produced specifically for a particular class of people, annual festive productions held particular sway with working-class audiences (Mayer, 1967). Through considering pantomime as a way of producing 'minor theory' (Katz, 1996), it can be explored as a vehicle to de-centre metrocentric and middle-class accounts of theatre and performance geographies through a particularly Scottish focus on localised productions, creating their own working-class artistic spaces.

Pantomime holds particular resonance in Scotland as a form of entertainment of cultural

importance with a rich history. The nuances of Scottish pantomime, such as increased attention given to audience participation alongside an emphasis on locally produced performances and a keenness for creating small-scale performances, means that Scottish pantomime fosters its own non-conforming gender geographies as audiences are given a greater role within the performance itself. This ‘breaking down of the ‘fourth wall’ of the stage allows the audience to engage with non-conformity to a greater extent than is possible elsewhere. It is an invitation to be part of the fantasy world and ‘pantomime’s self-proclaimed absurdity’ (University of York, n.d). Bridging this gap creates an audience-performer dynamic whereby queer expressions of gender (and sexuality) can be co-created to develop local and contextual queer worlds and imaginings through performance. Despite this increased audience interaction, though, space is also central to audience engagement with cross-dressed and transgressive characters onstage. In the case of the pantomime a stark juxtaposition between onstage and offstage performances can be seen as onstage performances allow for gender transgression, where they can be dismissed as otherworldly and as satire, whereas offstage – both historically and contemporarily – embodiments of female masculinity and male femininity come under (sometimes hostile) scrutiny as they challenge gender and sex boundaries (as also discussed in Chapter 8).

Secondly, I have considered the importance of cross-dressing as a way of engaging with queerness in Pantomime performances. While this chapter does not explicitly deal with gender identity, the act of cross-dressing – of wearing clothes widely perceived to be of the opposite gender than the wearer – holds material importance in trans and gender non-conforming histories and contemporary geographies. The materiality of cross-dressing on stage has allowed performers to inhabit a gender transgressive space between binary gender markers, bending and blending masculine and feminine attributes to create a playful way of queering gender. Contrary to the idealist masculinity of Scottish, working-class society, the pantomime clearly perplexes the absoluteness of categorisation and encourages a questioning of gendered and sexualised assumptions. The opportunity that pantomime offers when attempting to create new ontologies of gender is something challenging to strict social hegemonies, particularly in Victorian Britain.

I have used the characters of the Principal Boy and the pantomime Dame to discuss the specific ways in which cross-dressing and gender transgression may be performed on stage. Both characters play with gender expression – materially, behaviourally and satirically – to question gender norms and to mock hegemonic and geographically contextual performativities of masculinity and femininity. This inversion works to occupy a role which

goes beyond the gender binary to create an aggregation of gendered markers that derive from, but are not restricted to, the male-female dichotomy, creating gender queerness on stage. The two characters also demonstrate the intersection between gender and sexuality, blending different aspects of gender to create a body that is (de)sexualised in a careful negotiation which teases audiences through pushing gender normativities but, without, usually, provoking (homo)sexual anxieties. Tracking expressions of male femininity (through the Dame) or female masculinity (through the Principal Boy), and the way in which these characterisations have been (re)negotiated, gives insight into how gender non-conforming geographies have been engaged with over time.

Finally, across Chapters 4 and 5 I have created revisionist geographies of both the kilt and Scottish pantomime, tracking ways in which they have culturally and socially changed as a device potentially to open up and to cultivate new gender non-conforming geographies in Scotland. By looking at gender non-conformity through a geographically specific and historical lens, I hope to have proposed lines of enquiry for fostering contemporary gender non-conforming geographies in Scotland. Kilt and pantomime can offer personal, collective, political and cultural ways of rereading gender hegemonies in Scotland, informing and questioning how the conventional gender binary can be deconstructed to allow geographical (and social, cultural and political) space for those who are positioned beyond the gender binary.



## Chapter 6 Spatialising non-conforming gender identity

### 6.1 (Re)reading gender through non-conformity

Self-identification, including the agency to deploy language that reflects the nuances of internalised gender identities, is a central tenet of progressive gender politics (Reilly-Cooper, 2015). The geographies and politically entwined genealogies of gendered identities are all questioned by the gender non-conforming participants in this study when developing ‘new’<sup>82</sup> gender identities and when positioning themselves within gendered society. Indeed, Johnston (2018: 18) notes that while gender identities may span across, between and beyond the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, they also ‘span across places.’ By asking participants to conceptualise their own gender, and also to reflect upon how their gender identity impacts their grounded attempts to challenge the gender binary, I will unearth certain contours of contemporary gender geographies in Scotland, painting, in the process, an incredibly diverse gender landscape. How do participants conceptualise their gender identity and how do they position themselves in an emerging politics of non-normative gender identities in Scotland (and beyond)? In this chapter, I give voice to those non-conforming conceptualisations of gender before proceeding to give an account of their geographies arising as individuals attempt to navigate bi-gendered space<sup>83</sup>.

This chapter hence chiefly considers how participants construe their own non-binary<sup>84</sup> identities, and in so doing, maybe incorporate aspects of masculinity and femininity, reject the concepts or assumptions of masculinity or femininity altogether, or establish a third gender – a middle ground which sits between the two polar positions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’. While it is impossible and indeed counterintuitive to attempt any definitive characterisation of how my participants self-identify, I explore some of the identities voiced most frequently. These terms are informed by my participants, ensuring that their power over their own complex identities is upheld at all times. I reflect on the flourish of identities that participants

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<sup>82</sup> I have used inverted commas to emphasise that, while the plethora of words used to describe gender identity might be ‘new’, transgressive and non-conforming expressions and understanding of gender have a deeper history and geography than is commonly thought (put forward in Chapters 4 and 5). In a sense, then, it is the language deployed to describe diverse ways of understanding gender that is new, rather than gender itself.

<sup>83</sup> I use bi-gendered as a way to describe space in which a dualistic understanding of gender (i.e. man and woman) is assumed and unquestioned.

<sup>84</sup> Here, I use the word non-binary as an umbrella term to describe those who do not identify with a binary gender (i.e. cisgender individuals and binary trans individuals).

perform and live, showing the possibilities and pitfalls of their developing such diverse gender identities. In addition, I outline the spaces, both epistemological and physical, created by gender non-conforming people in Scotland when reworking and disidentifying with Scottish understandings of gender norms.

Following this material, I consider who has access to this ‘new’ gendered language. By intersectionally considering my participant demographic, I look at the spaces through which gendered language is acquired, discussed and disseminated, before considering who is excluded from such conversations. This excavating of ‘local knowledges<sup>85</sup>’ and languages allows geographers to map how the situating of self is a complex and contradictory process, one acknowledging ‘perfect language and perfect communication’ as nothing but a ‘god trick’ (Haraway, 1988: 589). I will discuss what Foucault terms ‘subjugated knowledges’: modes of understanding gender that have always existed beneath hegemonic Scottish understandings of the gender binary, but which are arguably always ‘buried or masked in functional coherences of formal systemisations’ (Foucault, 2003: 7). By asking how queer lives participate in the circulation of these knowledges while keeping disciplinary<sup>86</sup> knowledges at bay (Halberstam, 2011), I discuss the geographical spreading of a rich language for expressing gender non-conforming knowledge, from individual gender identities to wider gender narratives, allowing for the dissemination of an overall non-binary ontology of gender.

This diversifying of gendered terminology cannot be done unproblematically, however, and I question whether an endless number of labels can suitably satisfy the desire for a queer way of thinking about gender. While using any ‘label’ as a social signifier risks creating its own set of insiderness/outsiderness, the dizzying multiplicity of terms suggests an attempt to reject the fixity of labels and an emergent strategy of avoiding gender homogeneity. However, in constantly reinventing identity and disrupting categorisation, it could be argued that political potential is limited. Here, I turn to Spivak’s (1996) ‘strategic essentialism’ to create a ‘collective of gender queer identities’ (Sophie) for a specific political ambition – as

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<sup>85</sup> Geertz (1973: 5) uses ‘local knowledges’ as an anthropological approach to understanding contextualised comprehensions of the world. He writes ‘man is an animal suspended in the webs of significance he himself has spun ... and the analysis of it is to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.’ He uses it ‘not to exalt diversity but to take it [local knowledges] seriously as object of analytic description and interpretive reflection’ (Geertz, 2000: 154).

<sup>86</sup> I use disciplinary here not as a way of discussing academic disciplining but to nod to a Foucauldian interpretation of discipline: one which is used to impose order and hierarchy (see Foucault, 1995).

a way of gaining political traction to embolden a new queer politics. In this respect, I take my cue from how some participants in my research call on queer gender identities to craft a vehicle for deconstructing power, without being limited to an over-emphasis on an individualised framing of gender. While arguing that queer bodies cannot escape categorisation or identity politics, Oswin (2008: 96) argues that identity should be used – collectively, politically – as a vehicle to challenge the oppressions of non-normativity, not through ‘the search for an inherently radical queer subject [but through the] advancement of a critical approach to the workings of sexual normativities and non-normativities.’

Finally, I go on to consider why these discussions hold importance within a contemporary Scottish context. Gender politics in Scotland is shifting, opening up new gender possibilities as queer politics enters national discourse. Developing non-conforming gender politics across scales of representation is seen as a central tenet of liberal thought:

Within liberal thought, personal identity is considered an epicentre for representation, a tool for the creation of cultural meaning and social acknowledgement. Moreover, identity politics is a liberal democratic component, in which the state serves as a mediator of the dialog between cultural groups. (Hartal, 2018: 5)

The interplay between individual and the state impacts upon the shifting political geographies of Scotland. By looking at the ongoing ‘Equal Recognition Campaign’ (2016) headed by the Scottish Trans Alliance (STA) and the Equality Network (EN), I consider debates taking place, following the Scottish National Party’s (SNP) pledge to introduce a third legally recognised gender category before the end of the current Scottish parliament in 2021 (Brooks, 2016). This pledge, a key move in giving gender non-conforming individuals political and legal legitimacy, is fraught with contentions over how such a category can be introduced without excluding certain identities<sup>87</sup>.

## 6.2 Conceptual gender geographies

Many participants discuss the language that they use to describe themselves, talking introspectively about how non-conforming gender positions can be developed and situated within worlds that are socially and physically constructed to privilege a dualistic gender

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<sup>87</sup> While much has been written about sexual citizenship within academic geography (e.g. Bell, 1995), this chapter will begin to question what potentials exist for a gender citizenship, questioning what this would look like and how this would be used to challenge the relationship between non-conforming gender identities and the state.

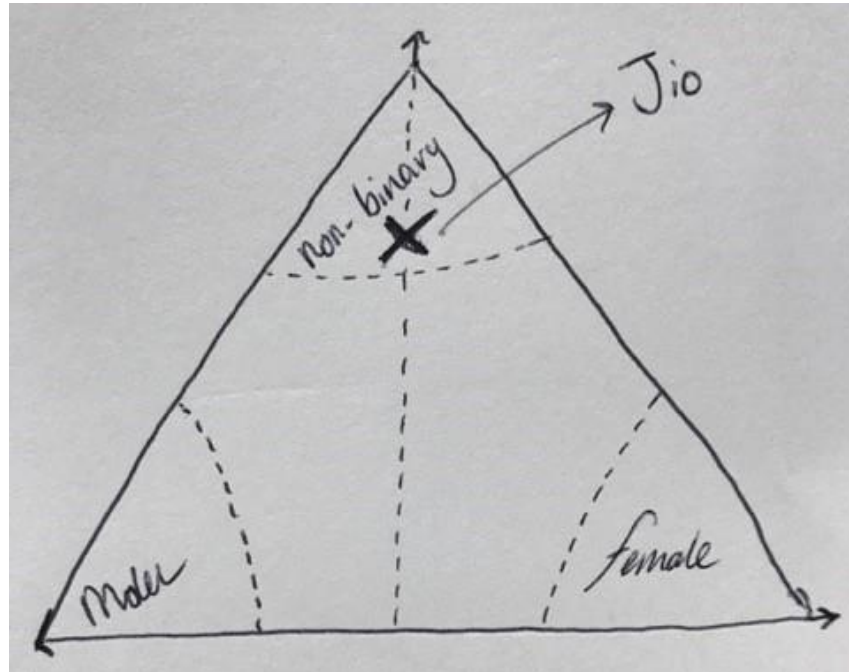
ontology. While 26 out of my 27 participants do put a label on their gender identity, many express a discomfort with the idea of labelling their gender because they lack adequate language to describe fully their gendered experiences (Cal, Chris). Liberal notions of gender often focus on the individual, giving rise to no less than 12 different named gender identities across my 27 participants. These identities, each with their own nuanced way of conceptualising gender, deconstruct dominant and hegemonic gendered positions. Knopp (2004: 123) describes this self-identifying as a way of ‘testing, exploring and experimenting with alternative ways of being, in contexts that are unencumbered by the expectations of tight-knit family, kinship or community relationships.’ However, this testing and exploring of gender non-conformity at the scale of the individual has political and structural consequences. The politicisation of non-conforming bodies that do not comply with normative formations of gender, marking them as ‘other’ through dominant discourse which ‘defines them in terms of bodily characteristics and constructs [their] bodies as ugly, dirty, defiled, impure, contaminated or sick’ (Young, 1990: 123), cannot but leave them vulnerable to group oppressions such as homophobia or transphobia. These oppressions are often experienced in mundane ways – through gestures, speech, movement and momentary reactions – but do have very consequential impacts on and for the geographies (both bodily and spatial) for gender non-conforming individuals (ibid.).

Gender identity creation is an explicitly geographical project as participants seek emotional and ontological security from localised understandings of masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, because of this highly contextual process, even those who use the same labels to describe their gender held differing epistemic positions. This art of ‘disidentifying’ with a universalised ‘truth’ of gender (i.e. man and woman) prompts queer genders to develop ‘revisionary identification’ (Muñoz, 1999: 26). Muñoz describes this approach as a ‘different strategy of viewing, reading and locating “self” within representational systems *and* disparate life-worlds that aim to displace or occlude a minority subject.’ Inhabiting a gender-queer life is to find position within a bi-gendered system, while trying to create queer worlds between the epistemological cracks and crevasses which exist in that system.

### **6.2.1 Positioning gender**

Through trying to decentre the pervasiveness of the gender binary, many participants refer to it as a relational point from which to build non-conforming lives. Jio says that they think of their non-binary identity as occupying ‘a space beyond binary genders. It’s everything except from male and female.’ During the interview with Jio, they began to question

themselves and their own understanding of their gender. I write in my field diary, ‘The interview seemed to stall with Jio staring thoughtfully into the middle distance behind me. I give them the opportunity to sketch how they might position themselves in gendered terms’ (figure 6.1).

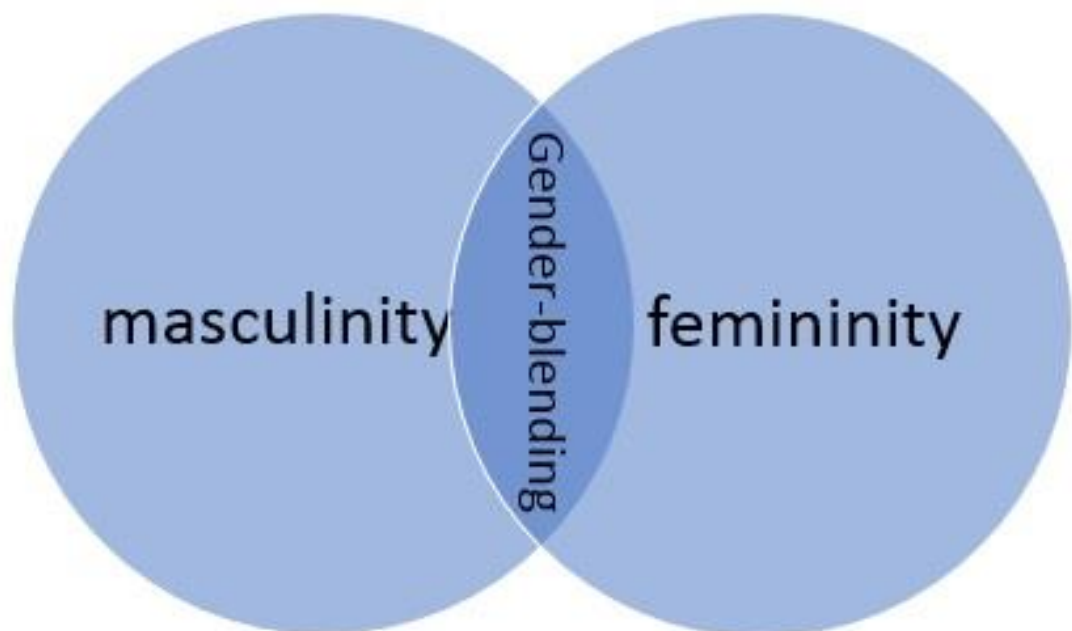


**Figure 6.1: Jio's diagrammatic interpretation of their gender positioning.**

Jio's diagram shows that, by positioning themselves outside the gender binary, yet accepting that their body, behaviours and aesthetic are laden with socio-cultural gender markers, they are able to begin to develop a third way of *being* gendered: one that establishes its own conceptual space beyond the gender binary, but 'allows you the freedom to do your own thing' (Sparrowhawk). Such visual representations are useful in considering how gender can be bended and blended to create gender non-conforming or in-between spaces outwith binary categorisation. While Jio considers themselves within a non-binary category, they also leave an empty central space for those who might imagine themselves to be conceptually outwith three gender options. This makes it possible to consider how male and female attributes can be decentred, but also how they might be distanced from categories to show to what extent the individual (dis)identifies with a particular gender. This queer empty space has perhaps been framed by Bulldagger (2006: 148), who says that this state of gender chaos is an unavoidable part of being gender non-conforming since it is a 'refusal of both M[ale] and F[emale] but is a hell of a lot more. The up-in-the-air, inconclusive, discomfort with the word *genderqueer* is core to its existence.'

Conversely, some participants argue that, rather than attempting to create a new gendered

space beyond the gender binary, they situate themselves in such a way as to incorporate aspects of both masculinity and femininity, without attempting to escape from these socially constructed categories in totality. Numerous conceptual images are offered here to describe this understanding of non-conforming genders. Some participants describe a ‘gender spectrum’ (Maud, Willow): a linear gender-transgressive space that exists between the bi-poles of man and woman, where individuals position themselves depending on how strongly they associate with hegemonic understandings of masculinity or femininity. Furthering this, Alex suggests that gender non-conforming identities should situate themselves in the overlapping spheres of what gets conventionally understood as masculine and feminine (figure 6.2):



**Figure 6.2: Gender Venn diagram reflecting Alex’s attempt to live in an epistemological centre ground, blending elements of masculinity and femininity (author’s own diagram).**

For me, the only way to be gender non-conforming isn’t by looking for a completely new configuration of gender and rejecting [masculinity and femininity]. For me, it is about embracing both. We can have a mixture of stuff and we should be able to embrace these. I think we need both to thrive. If we don’t have it, we fall into the trap of limiting ourselves. (Alex)

Alex notes a different way of spatially imagining how her gender is positioned, mixing masculine or feminine ‘stuff’ and using this mix to embody a gender situated between polar positions, reading this as neither strictly male or female. By embracing both masculinity and femininity, Alex argues that she is able to find solace in the fact that she exists within the confines of gendered assumptions. By blending these understandings of masculinity and femininity, she is able to reconceptualise her own gender in a manner that challenges

hegemonic Scottish gender codes. The degree to which Alex is able to ‘challenge’ gender perceptions confronts a unique geography and history of the way that masculinity and femininity are understood in a Scottish context, as set out in previous chapters.

A third conceptual position developed by participants is often framed as a rejection of the gender that the participant was assigned at birth (i.e. assigned male at birth (AMAB)/assigned female at birth (AFAB<sup>88</sup>)). Here, the primary stimulus for establishing a new way of conceptualising one’s gender is an internalised discomfort or dysphoria with the gender that one is assigned. Of course, this experience was different for each participant. While Linda states that, ‘I used to get so frustrated at being told I wasn’t feminine enough by my parents’, Sidonie says that ‘my dad cooks all the time and cries so I never had that distinction between masculine and feminine gender roles at home.’ The family home, as an important space of learning gender norms, is mentioned by seven participants, who agree that exposure to their parents’ gendered geographies impacted how they position themselves as they attempt conceptually to (re)situate their own gender. Hall (2016: 1023) points to the family home as central in the ‘passing along of social and cultural norms and ideals between individuals and generations,’ while Hussain *et al.* (2015: 2) write about the importance of the family home as a space of socialising gender roles. They write that ‘family as a foremost socialising agency transmits simplistic labels and deep-rooted messages considered specific for feminine women and masculine men.’ Understandings of traditional and locally understood femininity and masculinity seep through socially structured gender norms to regulate home lives, providing a performative repeating of stereotypical gender behaviours learned through exposure to what it means to *be* a boy/girl, man/woman. Some participants give introspective accounts of how being raised as either a boy or a girl negatively impacted upon them, leaving them with lasting memories of gender dysphoria<sup>89</sup> and culturally policing expectations of what it means to be a boy/man or a girl/woman:

I was brought up as female and that’s something that makes me uncomfortable.  
It’s probably my parents, at home, even now if they ever point out something

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<sup>88</sup> Confusingly, in Scotland, when a birth is registered, the ‘gender’ of the baby is recorded as ‘male’ or ‘female’ and is assigned by medical staff at the birth. This inaccurate recording of ‘sex’ rather than ‘gender’ and the conflation of the two terms poses challenges for those who wish to create a more nuanced understanding of gender identity. The Gender Recognition Act (2004) enables ‘transsexual [sic] people to apply for [a] Gender Recognition Certificate’ (National Records of Scotland, 2017), but no non-binary option currently exists in Scotland.

<sup>89</sup> I refer to a social dysphoria, where participants face discomfort based upon how they are socially positioned by themselves and by others, rather than a bodily dysphoria which refers to a feeling of dislocation between the participant’s interpretation of their gender and of their anatomical body. Ace draws on this distinction, saying ‘I don’t think that my internalised gender is connected to my body very much. I don’t want medical transition ... it’s more about how other people perceive me.’

about me and they link that to me being female ... For example, if they say that I'm 'girly' or if I do something that isn't typically feminine, they'll point it out – they seem ... not disappointed ... just judgemental towards the way that I'm behaving. That makes me uncomfortable and that irks me. (Sharon)

Rather than complying with gendered expectations, many participants resituate themselves in a fashion that rejects the gender in which they were raised. Sloane says that 'I wanted to get away from the old feminine part of me as much as I possibly could. It was a rejection of all those things – to get away from that discomfort.' A distancing from assigned birth gender is often seen as central, as participants seek to reject gender assumptions.

### 6.2.2 Fluid identities

Some participants described their gender as being fluid, rather than constant or static. This fluidity, forever in flux and subject to change as individuals move through space, renders their gender constantly in a state of reformation, continuously reassessing how gender identity can be positioned on a variety of geographical and temporal scales. Knopp (2007: 53) argues that this 'fluidity, hybridity [and] incompleteness' should be an integral part of queer geographies, with Dias and Blecha (2007: 7) adding that gender should be informed as much by 'embodied experience as by theory.' A third of participants identify in some way as genderqueer or genderfluid, with participants reporting that their gender is understood as an ongoing process of *becoming*, rather than being fixed (Sophie). The metaphor of a 'gender journey' (Chris) is adopted by many participants as a way of describing an ongoing process of amorphaically shifting gender identity, with Cal saying that 'I don't know where I'm going to go with it next. I suppose I just need to be receptive to the way that I feel at any time.' While this 'journey' may be something that some participants regard as intentional and directional, as a set of origins, directions or destinations, for others it may be framed as a constant meandering through a gendered landscape fraught with gendered expectations, assumptions and stereotypes.

Here, academic geography has a unique opportunity to explore the ways in which gender identity can change depending on perceptions of social space and political ecologies. How participants self-identify and situate themselves within a gendered landscape and how they tra(ns)verse across this terrain is key. These 'grounded' gender positions feed into an emerging gender non-conforming politics in Scotland, while always being linked to and influenced by hegemonic understandings of gender, localised social attitudes and situated encounters with the gender experiences of others. Participants are affected by and entangled within hierarchised understandings of power, problematically positioning themselves in



contestation with the 'regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms' (Butler, 1990: 24). This dynamic process and its affective consequences are described by Sophie Gnosis:

I don't think of my gender identity as a stable thing. I don't think of it as a describable thing. I don't think it's ever possible to pin it down, even in the moment. When I say that it's fluid, then I don't mean that it shifts from one thing to another. It's fuzzy. It's being confused and unstructured because it's a negotiation between the person and the world and the place that you are and the people that you're with. (Sophie Gnosis)

Sophie's quote is explicitly geographical. The affective link between participant and place and the ongoing reinterpretation of and negotiation through gendered space means that Sophie sees their gender as continually positioned within, against and often in contestation with their environment, thus rendering gender as fluid and changeable. However, Davis (2009: 102-103), while appreciating that gender positions are often thought of as relational, questions the limits of fluidity, warning against seeing this as an autonomous free search for selfhood. She questions when and where fluidity is recognised as such, adding that non-conforming genders are always positioned within 'the boundaries of cultural intelligibility', leaving bodies juxtaposed against localised calibrations of 'intelligible, coherent, stable [and] hegemonic' gender normalities. While for some participants, this unfixity instils a feeling of 'stress and confusion' (Cal), for Sophie it is not the case. They accept that gender is something open to constant (re)interpretation: 'the more I *do* or *am* genderqueer, the happier I am ... and the more at ease I feel in my body.'

### 6.2.3 Agender identities

Some participants position their gender identity in a manner that rejects not only the gender binary, but also gender itself. Participants who identify as *agender* express a feeling of 'not feeling gendered' (Joey) or 'not understanding gender' (Seumas), avowing that they do not associate with the system of gender. Four out of 27 participants identify as *agender*. This feeling of genderlessness often led to participants finding themselves at odds with others:

It's kind of weird because when I use the term 'agender' and being genderless, I feel like I am just myself and anything that I do is going to be ... just me. I was raised as feminine but I kind of just brushed it off. I thought that the choices that I make are just the way that I do it, it's not necessarily trying to be something or not something. It's a bit odd because I don't think I've ever met anyone else that would say that they feel the same. I've met a lot of people who can get more out of gender or feel restricted by it but I kind of feel like getting rid of it. (Sharon)

For Sharon, even being able to position themselves within a queer context is difficult, questioning, ‘How can I place myself in those queer spaces that are influenced by gender and sexuality, when I don’t see myself as having those. It can be quite alienating for the most part.’ While figures 6.1 and 6.2 reflect the experiences of those who want to evoke binary gender ontologies to ‘get more out of gender’, looking for ways to expand upon the categories of man and woman, Sharon arguably wants to ‘get less out of gender’, removing themselves from gendered space. However, Sidonie describes her agenderism differently, acknowledging that her history of being raised as a ‘cis woman’ means that she cannot distance or separate herself from gender entirely. While stating that she does not have ‘that innate sense of having a gender’, she neatly balances this claim with her gendered childhood, describing it as ‘having had a girlhood, but not having grown up into womanhood’<sup>90</sup>. This distinction shows how participants begin to take authority over their own gender identity to create queer worlds and non-normative epistemological positions, thus fostering their own queer positionalities and existences. However, this ‘care of the self’ or self-building should be understood as geographically contextual, always situated against hegemonic social practices and discourses. Iftode (2013: 78) uses Foucault’s (1986) construct of ‘care of the self’ to discuss identity formation:

Fundamentally, the care of the self would not have been about self-discovery but rather about self-creation, of self-fashioning; not a turn inward but rather a modified relation to the ‘exterior’, that is to the entire web of social practices and discourses that equally express and constitute this self which is always outside of itself. So the subject of ‘care’ is not the solitary narcissistic individual, but the human capable of regarding his [sic.] life as a raw material that has to be shaped by rules of conduct.

Iftode rightly points to the dialectical process of ‘self’ or identity building as not just a process of redressing one’s own gender but, rather, as a culmination of prescribed and geographically contextual social norms that the individual negotiates in attempting to care for and nourish an internalised notion of gender which does not always sit comfortably within ‘rules of conduct.’ This moulding of the self (as a raw material) is often an ongoing and geographically contingent process, giving range to a broad set of experiences which have been set out by participants. This ‘care of the self’ is an attempt to find satisfaction and pleasure within the confines of hegemonic gender norms and allows researchers to decentre knowledges (Browne and Brown, 2009), reducing the individualised consequences of gender

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<sup>90</sup> The notions of ‘boyhood’ or ‘manhood’ were not mentioned by any participant.

non-conformity, such as gender dysphoria, while collectively opening up queer possibilities for identity formation.

While I have attempted to impose a systematic breakdown of how participants view their gender non-conforming identities, this move of course, falls short of accounting for the nuances and complexities of individualised gender identities and experiences. The importance of localised knowledges and languages in allowing participants to ‘come out’ and express their internalised gender is key for all participants. Haraway (1988: 588) states that a feminist focus on embodiment is not about ‘fixed locations in a reified body ... but [is] about nodes in fields, inflection in orientations and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning.’ Scaling the body beyond the individual, Young (1990: 137) notes the consequences that these gender non-conformities can have. She says that ‘codes of bourgeois respectability made masculinity and femininity mutually exclusive and yet complementally opposites. As such, gender dichotomy is ruled by the logic of identity that denies or represses difference, in the sense of plurality, heterogeneity, the incommensurability of experiences that cannot be brought under common measure.’ Therefore, individually held knowledges and languages have very political, geographical and embodied consequences for those who do not comply with the binary model of gender. The quest of discovering and disclosing the self within geographical contexts is about seeking out and changing places in a way that facilitates this reflexive and relational practice (Knopp, 2004). In reality, there are innumerable ways in which participants understand their gender, and near-endless ways of bending, blending and contorting gender, based on desperate internalised notions of the self and an entangled relationship with hegemonised and localised gender norms. To structure such an obstreperous list of identifiers, each with its own genealogy and political positioning, would prove an impossible task (a full list of my participants’ gender identities can be found in Chapter 3).

### **6.3 Access to ‘new’ gender language**

Given the multifarious ways in which participants do/do not identify with the gender binary, it is important to question where participants learn these localised knowledges and how these dialogues are adopted and disseminated. A greater gender non-conforming lexicon is central to the development of non-conforming identities, with participants indicating that the prolificacy of the gender binary means that non-conforming language is often learned after childhood and is then adopted to describe an internalised feeling of gender identity. Rory describes the lasting restrictiveness of the gender binary:

Because you've always been told that there's a binary, you are trying to reconcile your new identity with that always being in your head. Learning this language means that you can say 'I'm not a boy and I'm not a girl. I am non-binary.' If you're born in a world that is so heteronormative and so cisnormative<sup>91</sup>, finding the language and people to describe that feeling is such a support.

hooks (1989: 19) discusses the importance of language as a place of struggle for queers as 'our living depends on our ability to conceptualise alternatives. Language is crucial to non-conforming gender lives as being on the transgressive edge of gender discourse is also an epistemological position, developing a particular way of viewing the world from this peripheral space.' However, if for the majority of my participants, gender non-conforming languages were *not* a part of their lived experiences and histories, how and where was this language acquired and how does it leak across different geographies to create queer worlds so as to enable an alternative epistemological understanding of gender?

Considering the demographic breakdown of my participants and the disproportionate number of young, educated people who participated in interviews (more on this in Chapter 3), I want to draw attention to the importance of university LGBT societies in the learning and dissemination of queer and non-conforming gender ontologies. Ellis (2009) pays attention to the importance of university spaces in the lives of young queer people. University LGBT societies are present at the majority of universities in Scotland and have numerous political and social aims. These include 'providing a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ individuals' (GULGBTQ+, n.d) and creating 'a supportive space for LGBT+ students to socialise, relax, discuss issues, and get involved with the wider community' (BLOGS n.d). Half of my participants mentioned university LGBT groups, proving the importance of these spaces for young queer people. Central to each of the societies' mission statements is a sense of geography through intentions to render space as 'safe'. Luke says that the Aberdeen University LGBT Forum was critical in allowing them to discuss and explore gender alternatives. Maud states that the feeling of being in a place constructed as 'safe' for gender non-conforming people is important, because 'when people don't understand you in the wider world, it's easy to feel that you're strange and wrong. If you create representation, even if it is limited to that time and place and with those people, you feel protected.' By using university spaces, Ace is able to find security, even though they 'don't know what [they] are' (with regard to gender). Being able to take advantage of this

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<sup>91</sup> 'Cisnormativity' is used to describe the assumption that it is 'normal' to be cisgendered (i.e. to identify with the sex that one is assigned at birth: Schilt and Westbrook, 2009).

unknown-ness of gender, without the pressures of being situated within hegemonic gender frameworks, allows participants a more open forum in which to deliberate upon their own gender. More than being spaces where non-conforming gender ontologies can be discussed and learned, these spaces ultimately allow for gender non-conforming lives to be recreated.

Doan (2007: 63) warns not to accept this possibility without question, though, adding that these 'queer spaces' rarely live up to their 'radical and inclusive vision', evidencing that gender-variant identities remain peripheral. Some participants are also sceptical of the queertopian image set out by university societies, bemoaning that queerness still seems to be defined by structured and hegemonic understandings of gender (and sexuality). Jio says that 'people still presume things about me – that I'm a lesbian or something. Some people even in LGBT spaces have no idea about gender identity. Sometimes they try to be so inclusive but they're actually not with regard to gender<sup>92</sup>.' Terry is also sceptical of the supposed sanctuary that societies provide, reflecting that 'I'm not convinced that 'safe' places necessarily are [safe]. I remember gay guys that went were really judgemental. They misgendered me as a guy and thought that I was too effeminate because of the way I dressed.' Even within 'queer' spaces discrimination can arise against those gender non-conforming bodies who are subject to the cissexist narrative that gender identity and gender expression must correlate. Participants who do not uphold this assertion are still deemed as 'out of place'. Within these spaces of queer community-building, participants can still be faced with gender-normative expectations. In keeping with this claim, Browne (2006a: 888) adds that queerness should be 'inclusive beyond white, gay, male homosexuality:' rather than simply replicating gender-normative discourses, she argues that queer space should entail radical '(re)thinkings, (re)drawings, (re)conceptualisations, (re)mappings that could (re)make bodies, spaces and geographies.'

In considering how gender non-conforming language is learned and identities developed, it is important to detail who is included and excluded in the process, and how this influences non-conforming gender geographies. Interestingly, all participants had university or college education, with one third also having postgraduate education. This intersection with education gives insight into how queer ways of thinking about gender are learned and adopted, and so too about how educational institutions play an important role in allowing

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<sup>92</sup> While I have drawn attention to spaces and events arranged to be inclusive of non-conforming genders, a move is also being made to allow for a queer understanding of sexuality and sexual orientation. Kay talks about the Asexual Awareness Evening (GULGBTQ+) that took place in 2016, saying that 'it was well attended and I think it's good to teach people about different sexualities too.'

my participants to explore, contest and reposition their own gender through drawing on the experiences of others and having the ability critically to discuss the structures of gender, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. Age also gives an insight into how the language of non-conformity is disseminated: 21 out of my 27 participants were under the age of 30, indicating that it may be primarily young people who are having conversations about alternative gender identities. Johnston (2018) also notes the significant differences between older and young people when it comes to ‘coming out’. Chris, who is 57, believes that their experience of ‘coming out’ and gender non-conformity are different because of their age:

Because I’m older I think I’ll have a different experience to most. I’ve had a long time of not recognising this, which in some ways seems ridiculous. In some ways, I haven’t found the language and I hadn’t gone looking for the language.

Again, Chris notes the importance of language in the process of (non-conforming) identity formation. The spaces through which gender-transgressive ontologies and languages are disseminated are key, and in Chris’ case are limiting. As gender non-conforming knowledges are not part of hegemonic understandings of gender, Chris has, until recently, remained unanchored without the language to discuss their gender. They say that ‘because there are only two recognised genders in Scotland, you always feel left out – floating in the middle. But if you have the language to talk about these things, even if it’s at certain times and with certain people, it gives you that sense of validation.’ This distinction between different age groups is also mentioned by Jess (50), who claims that: ‘I think that young folk of today have done so much of the work for us auld yins because we kind of just blundered through with our very much rigid genders and sexualities.’ This lack of exposure to these conversations becomes cyclical: without access to gender-disruptive knowledges and spaces, older gender non-conforming lives can become increasingly isolated. Ace asks, ‘I wonder how many older butch dykes might have identified as non-binary if this whole thing had happened when they were young?’, showing how they acknowledge that gender non-conformity has always existed in Scottish society, yet, without having the abundance of queer language used by gender non-conformists today, it remains unexplored and unquestioned. It is worth noting however that Ace questions how many ‘older butch dykes might identify as gender non-binary’, using it as an identity marker should they have had access to new non-conforming languages, rather than invalidating expressions of butch gender. I do not wish to create a false dichotomy between butch lesbian identities and gender non-conforming identities as this would invalidate the multiple ways in which butch identities queer everyday gender binaries across different spatialities. Using language that I

have drawn on throughout this thesis to discuss gender non-conformity, Eves (2004: 487) notes that butch identities ‘disrupt the sex-gender-sexual identity continuum’, adding that butchness demonstrates ‘personal histories of gender ambiguity and non-conformity which positions butch and masculine/androgynous lesbians as outside ‘proper’ gender’ (p.489). To invalidate these positions would be arguably to cede too much ground to contemporary ‘TERF’ politics which seek to reify biological distinctions, diminishing the possibilities for life outside the gender binary (also see section 8.4).

Furthermore, 21 out of my 27 participants also drew attention to the importance of online spaces as a site of sharing gendered ontologies. Numerous websites and blogging sites were mentioned, with participants often saying that having access to the internet means that they were able to communicate with other gender non-conforming people and identify with non-normative gender identities. Using the internet as a self-help tool to learn about non-conforming gender is seemingly crucial when identifying and understanding social and gender dysphoria. Blogging sites such as Tumblr (Ivor, Jio, Joey) give participants the ability to learn about non-conforming gender in a way that is private and personally considered when ‘sitting in bed late at night when I couldn’t stop thinking about it’ (Ivor). Elliott echoes this point: ‘I think ... because we’re having those conversations, that allows people to legitimise the way that they feel about things and they are more likely to accept it.’ Rather than seeing online spaces as sites of either knowledge production or consumption, participants talk about the potentials of conversing online: contributing, sharing and co-creating stories and experiences, developing what Faraj *et. al.* (2011: 1224) describe as ‘knowledge collaborations’ within online communities. They assert that, precisely because of the collaborative nature of forums and websites, they allow individuals to contribute in a way unconstrained by ‘structural mechanisms, partly freeing the collaboration from concerns of social conventions, ownership and hierarchy’ (p. 1225). Within a Scottish context, websites such as [nonbinaryscotland.org](http://nonbinaryscotland.org) are clearly used as a site of reference, providing ‘support and social opportunities for people who identify as outwith the gender binary ... or are questioning whether they might be’ ([nonbinaryscotland.org](http://nonbinaryscotland.org), 2018).

Legitimation of identity through the consumption of online resources is something that is extremely important for participants. It not only allows them the language to reconceptualise gender in a non-binary way, but also gives them access to other people’s stories and experiences, creating an online, gender non-conforming network through which experiences are exchanged. Jio says that, ‘I used online spaces as a way to look into what other people had said ... about their gendered discomfort.’ Here, the experiences of the ‘cybersubject’

inform and affect my participants by evoking a discursive resistance in cyberspace against the gender binary (O’Riordan, 2005), while also being able to undermine the importance of physical geographical location (some of which spaces may be more unforgiving, such as schools and the family home) through the cyber-spreading of experiences, knowledges and language. This allows participants to reconceptualise gender in a fashion that undermines Scottish configurations of masculinity or femininity, creating ‘shared conversations of epistemology’ responsible for creating a web of connections and solidarities integral to community building and world making (Haraway, 1988: 584).

#### **6.4 “When you meet other people who face the same oppressions and you organise together – then you can beat oppressions”**

A question arises, however, about how the fixity of labels and language can be integrated into a queer framework: one that holds instability and unstructured-ness as a central tenet. While in academic geography sexuality has been queered in many directions (e.g. Oswin, 2008; Childs, 2016), gender-queerness has been explored to a lesser extent (although, of course, gender and sexualities can never be fully disassembled). Turner (2000: 133) argues that an openness to queerness should allow us to account for its complicated and unpredictable relationship with gender hierarchies. That said, a lingering emphasis on the fixity of identities, even an identity such as non-binary, buys into gender discourses as a description of what one is *not*, rather than what one *is*, seeming to work against the desire for unpredictability, and risking what Browne (2006a: 888) describes as a ‘solidifying, homogenising and “de-queering” ... through the act of naming.’ This standardisation of language creates numerous geographies of exclusion as identities become policed by those who seek to homogenise behaviours, practices and material aesthetics of bodies through categorisation. In contestation of this eventuality, Butler (1990) argues that any acceptance of identity (gender or otherwise) is always mediated through categories that are already culturally and socially understood, since ‘words and language will bring this body into being and shall always be viewed in relation to the performance of the norm’ (Watson, 2005: 72). Here, I consider these two points of view using interview material before considering to what extent strategic essentialism and collective identity may (or should) hold importance in the gender landscape of Scotland.

For many participants, giving their identity a label is an ongoing and contentious practice, ever positioned in relation to ontological understandings of the relevant language but also



influenced by a distinctively Scottish understanding of the gender binary. Ste argues that labels fall short of his understanding of queerness:

People can use whatever label they like to describe themselves, but ultimately who knows how another person experiences their gender – unless we talk about our individual experiences, rather than focusing on whatever words we choose to identify with? One person could identify as an effeminate man, and another person as genderqueer, but who's to say that two particular individuals with two such vastly different identities are actually experiencing their gender any differently from each other?

Ste believes identity to transcend the capacity of language in allowing individuals to express our identity. He argues that identities can be reread in a range of configurations, and that these labels are dependent on localised and individualised ways of conceptualising gender. He argues that, instead of looking at the differences between labels, queer politics should consider lives that exist beyond categorisation. Participants discuss their discontent at the lack of manoeuvrability stemming from standard gender discourse. Ace states, 'I use labels for other people, to get them to understand, rather than for me. I feel like I need to use them to explain myself.' This 'need' to explain is arguably forced by a normative gender narrative which means that those bodies/identities not sitting within the gender binary need constantly to justify themselves as they negotiate their way through dualistically gendered spaces. Ivor goes on to criticise the over-reliance on gender labels as an identity marker, suggesting that they work to exacerbate gender power hegemonies detrimental to gender non-conforming people:

I think that's just replicating gendered politics which already exist. I would always use the word 'queer' but, at the same time, that is the vaguest term possible. I don't like labels but that's because I can't find the words which will give me enough openness. If I call myself 'genderqueer,' what's to stop someone saying I'm not genderqueer enough or judging me on what I look like as a basis for that.

The regulation of identities and bodies by others who identify as gender non-conforming indicates a gender normative narrative which is present even within gender transgressive communities. As Sophie notes, using language and labels when discussing gender can invariably push notions of 'authentic' gendered experiences, while also excluding those who do not adhere to or meet specific gendered expectations. This policing, hypocritically based on aesthetics and behaviours rather than an internalised sense of identity, is 'fundamentally concerned with policing gender presentation through public and private spaces' (Namaste, 1996: 221) and reconstitutes a particular way of being gender non-conforming.

In conjunction with conversations around individualised gender identity, and the importance of the individual holding agency over their own gender identity, some participants believe that this individualisation of gender is counter-productive in challenging Scottish gender norms. Instead, they call for a non-conforming gender identity politics to be used as a vehicle for critically dismantling cissexism and (trans)misogyny. One participant whose views showed sustained political thought in this respect was Sophie Gnosis. In my field notes, I have ascertained that ‘Sophie was very much aware of their body, their identity and their behaviour as being politically significant while also being regulated, promoted or rejected by state processes – namely capitalism.’ Sophie suggests that, rather than looking at the nuances that exist between gender categories, the system of gender itself is exploitative and oppressive. They argue that this should be deconstructed and queered, rather than focusing on how gender must be queered at the scale of the individual:

To be conscious of your position within a gendered system is to see how you are related to everyone around you, how other people’s lives create your own life, how it is shaped by dynamics of power, where you do and don’t have power and also what you can do to push against that. Because of my gender ... I face various social and economic oppressions. That might be street harassment or finding it harder to get a job or being more vulnerable to mental ill-health or being more vulnerable to violence. That’s what it is to be class conscious. That has revolutionary potential because, when you meet other people who face the same oppressions and you organise together, then you can beat those oppressions. To be like, ‘this is who I am and this is what I am and this is my individualistic expression’ ... to an extent, that enables you to have a certain amount of pushing back which is quite nice, but also it focuses *your* action in the world in your individual actions, which individually are very easily encompassed into capitalism. It [capitalism] offers more and more minorities a certain amount of acceptance, never full acceptance but enough of it to detooth class consciousness and make people think, ‘this is fine<sup>93</sup>’.

I believe Sophie’s use of class consciousness to be two-fold. Firstly, they use it as a gender-collective position from which to understand gender oppressions suffered by those who do queer the gender binary. Secondly, they use it to allude to the various ways that a gender-queer critique can be intertwined with a collective critique of capitalism, noting the ways in which capitalism seeks to reaffirm the gender binary for productive, economic and

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<sup>93</sup> These debates circulated in Scotland following The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014, when some critiqued same-sex marriage as an unquestioned and final step towards full LGBT equality. *Against Equality* (Conrad *et. al.*, 2014) suggests that a queer reading should critique same-sex marriage as a ‘assimilation strategy into a fundamentally capitalist, racist and patriarchal structure – one in which queers will never be truly accepted’ (Stekl, 2011). Wilkinson (2013: 206) argues that, while queer people have seen ‘significant legislative reforms that saw lesbian and gay couples achieve almost full citizenship status’, this presumed desirability for coupledness is now promoted as ‘*mononormativity*’ by the state.

exploitative benefit (e.g. Pagano, 2017). Sophie refuses to be incorporated into a bi-gendered social and legal system, arguing instead that the influence of the state over gendered bodies is what should be challenged.<sup>94</sup> To develop collective identity by ‘meeting other people who face the same oppressions’ indicates Sophie’s desire for a strategic essentialism or a queer collective identity in Scotland, adding that, ‘I’m resistant to putting too much emphasis on an individual sense of gender and too much emphasis on linguistic positions.’

In order to give voice to those who experience such oppressions, it is possible to look towards the use of strategic essentialism as a way of establishing collective gender/class consciousness. Spivak (1996: 204-205) argues that, in order for alternative/subaltern identities to be given a voice, a ‘*strategic* use of positive essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest’ is necessary. This move could provide for a redressing of gender structures and provide political thrust to a ‘beyond-the-binary’ gender ontology, revaluing gender non-conforming bodies and identities. In attempting to create a non-conforming gender politics, this move would offer a political stance that looks beyond the liberal individualisation of alternative gender identity, instead considering ways in which the gender binary can be decentred. Critically, this is central to my usage of ‘non-conformity’ as a conceptual space for those who in any way question the solidity of their gender, rather than focusing on a specific identity marker such as ‘non-binary.’ Critiquing this stance, Wolff (2011: 691) affirms that questions remain over strategic essentialism’s lack of ‘accountability for the intricacies of identities, due to the focus on specific issues within a certain political, geographic and historical context’. Stone (2004: 136) also critiques the role of strategic essentialism in feminist and women’s politics, saying that ‘women always become women by reworking pre-established cultural interpretations of femininity, so that they become located – together with all other women – within a history of overlapping chains of interpretation’ (Stone, 2004: 136).

In problematising this critique of strategic essentialism, however, it is worth noting that non-binary gender politics, histories and geographies – those not based on masculinity/femininity, man/woman – are not socially engrained, having been historically eliminated from standard Scottish understandings of gender<sup>95</sup>. As gender non-conforming

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<sup>94</sup> Sophie’s articulations also nod to possibilities for combining work on queer geographies with an overtly Marxist perspective (e.g. Nast, 2002).

<sup>95</sup> While a dichotomous ontology of gender has been socialised as ‘normal’ for centuries (Chapter 4), leaving limited opportunity for gender non-conforming realities to exist, it is important to critique this ‘normality’ as a Western-centric understanding of gender. A full and detailed account of gender

identities do not have pre-established modes of being, strategic essentialism could be deployed generatively, rather than simply reworking a previously established interpretation that already exists within Scottish conceptualisations of gender. Faced with this tension between the importance of individuality and a political collective identity that risks erasing the specific experiences and voices of individuals, Cowan (2012) cautions that queer collectives and spaces must be critically aware of how they too can be ‘disciplining and exclusionary’ and alert to the ways in which quite nuanced disciplines and exclusions may still thereby be exerted. By providing physical and epistemological space for subjugated knowledges, bodies and identities, Elliott proposes that ‘different identities exist, but I think we’ve got bigger battles to fight. Being non-binary is an important part of me, but I’m also subjected to a lot more structural issues which I can’t beat alone.’ In this case, perhaps Sophie’s call to ‘organise together to beat ... oppressions’, and looking beyond the individuality of gender labels, has the potential to develop a wider gender non-conforming politics in Scotland.

## 6.5 Why does this matter for gender non-conforming people in Scotland?

Recognising the tensions running between self-identification and the establishment of a collective identity, and when searching for a constructive way to generate ‘progressive’ gender politics in spite of these differences, can inform contemporary non-conforming gender geographies in Scotland. With First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, pledging to “review the gender recognition law ... to have perfectly legitimate identity recognised legally” during a speech at the LGBTI Hustings<sup>96</sup> in 2016 (STA, 2016), discussions around non-conforming gender identities are now making headway within the period of the current Scottish Parliament<sup>97</sup>. Having a legally recognised third gender option (beyond ‘male’ and ‘female’) will establish legally binding protections for non-conformists within housing, education and employment, meaning that individuals should be able to secure documentation that ‘accurately reflects their sense of themselves’ (ibid.). This move will redraw the gender landscape in Scotland and drastically impact the geographies of gender non-conforming

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non-conforming histories and geographies can be found in *Transgender History and Geography* (Bolich, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> The LGBTI Hustings was held in Edinburgh in March 2016 and saw the leaders of Scotland’s main political parties discussing issues around LGBTI equality, answering questions on their policies and taking questions from an audience (Stonewall Scotland, 2016).

<sup>97</sup> The last Scottish parliament election was 5<sup>th</sup> May 2016 and the current session will end on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021 (Scottish Government, 2019).

people and how they interact with the state. Research carried out by the STA in 2016 found that 64% of non-binary participants across the UK wanted their ‘legal gender/sex recorded as something other than ‘male’ or ‘female’ on documents’ (Valentine, 2016: 68). The current lack of legal visibility makes gender non-conforming people feel as if their lives are invalid (Ace), exacerbating feelings of isolation, lowering self-esteem and leading to poorer mental health (Sidonie), as participants attempt to negotiate state structures that are intrinsically cis-sexist, privileging binary genders and erasing the existence of gender non-conforming bodies. Luke believes in the importance of changing the law, saying that ‘all we can do is speak up and stand up and lobby for law changes – things like being able to claim Mx as a title or use ‘they’ as pronouns. That will give us something to own, something which recognises us and something which gives us a right to exist legally.’

When attending an Equal Recognition Campaign consultation in November 2016, however, I began to appreciate the aforementioned tension between personal identity and any political attempt to be progressive, realising the acute questions to be posed about how best legislatively to include gender non-conforming people. The consultation was set up to gather views about how a third gender option should work and how best to campaign for it. With this context, questions over how to place the embodied experience of the individual within national law-making procedures seemed to cause great angst for, and discussion between, speakers. Central to much of the debate here were (and continues to be) questions around how to reconcile individual notions of identity within a collective politics, and how this ‘compromise’ could be put into practice as gender non-conforming individuals become integrated within policy and politics.

The different levels of political strata in Scotland<sup>98</sup> present numerous challenges to establishing a third gender option as a legal alternative, with the biggest challenge being to extend legislation that covers so-called ‘protected characteristics’ (e.g. sexual orientation, sex, gender reassignment) as set out in The Equality Act (2010). A more individualised look at gender also presents issues. Sparrowhawk argues that careful thought must be given to the

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<sup>98</sup> Vic [a policy officer with STA] talked about how a third gender option would work within a devolved Scottish Parliament. Family law and marriage law is devolved to the Scottish Government, but equality law is reserved for the UK government. This split obviously causes a problem for the campaign as, in order to include ‘non-binary’ under protected characteristics legislation that operates in the UK, the law would need to be changed from Westminster. However, this obstacle could to some degree be negated as, rather than changing the law, the campaign could seek to expand the inclusivity of the laws that already exist.

functionality of a third gender option, explaining that getting this wrong could prove to be detrimental to gender non-conforming people:

Not having that third category allows you the freedom to do your own thing, if you are privileged enough to have that freedom. However, if that third category existed but I didn't associate with it, or if there were parameters which said who would or wouldn't be counted, then I don't think there is any point in that. I think I would rather just accept that the two options don't work, rather than having a third one which doesn't work either.

Sparrowhawk spotlights the difficulty of attempting to categorise something that, for some of my participants, is indeed often something unamenable to *any* formalisation relative to the gender binary. Challenging this politics of inclusion, Sparrowhawk speaks to statements made by Hunt and Holmes (2015) who say that it is necessary to challenge queer nationalisms. Rather than creating new 'parameters', Oswin (2008) says that a queer politics can only be created when politics goes beyond the narrowing categorisation of gender and sexuality, striving in addition to critique imperialism, colonialism, globalisation, migration, neo-liberalisation and nationalism. Sparrowhawk believes that the creation of a third gender category would fall short of the queer potential which is possible from a redefining of gender legalities. When asking how legally recognised non-binary genders should be recorded, 27% of non-binary respondents did not think that 'a third gender category (such as 'other' or 'non-binary')', was a satisfactory way forward (Valentine, 2016: 73). Rather than adhering to a normative political approach to Scottish (and global) trans politics (i.e. recognising a third gender), some participants suggest that this move may be tokenistic and that more needs to be done to enable social understanding, rather than depending on an incorporation into state processes. Jess reflects that 'laws are fine and labels are fine, but I want to be able to walk down the street without people staring. That's what really bothers me. It's exhausting. I think about it all the time and it makes me feel bad.' Voicing frustration at political debate, Elliott reflects: 'I find them [political campaigns] superficial. It's just another way to put us into boxes and it forces you to settle for something which doesn't deal with the social problems. We need to change the way people think about gender.' Elliott argues that completely deconstructing the gender binary in Scotland, promoting instead a non-binary understanding of gender that does not focus on traditional Scottish ideals of masculinity and femininity, would be more effective in emboldening gender non-conforming lives and forging new ways in which non-conforming identities and bodies can exist in Scotland.

Rather than an identitarian, material or performative juxtaposition against Britishness or Englishness, Scottishness is emboldened through a particular form of nationalist politics

which is played out through the SNP's progressive public engagement with transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Indeed, Kay states that 'after living in England for a while, I came back [to Scotland] and it seems generally more of an open and accepting place', with Sloane adding, 'there's the sense that the government has your back right from the top.' However, this is not to suggest that an inclusive form of Scottishness, distanced from and non-conforming against Conservative rule in Westminster is united in the way that it approaches gender non-conformity. Seitz (2017: 44) indeed warns that inclusive public and political discourse can work to create the illusion of inclusion and equality:

Promises of citizenship – material support, social solidarity, sympathy, recognition – can sustain people's attachments to institutions and spaces in which they also experience sometimes devastating social exclusion.

In spite of these warnings, Scottishness here is built around a specific form of Scottish politics which is most vocally propagated by the SNP, and which has taken numerous high-profile steps to ensure that even the upper echelons of government are advocating for LGBT rights (see Khomami, 2018). This form of Scottish politics holds particular resonance with gender non-conforming participants because of the SNP's public approach to securing legal recognition for those who live outside the gender binary.

## 6.6 From gender identity to gender expression

In this chapter, I have looked at the importance of gender identity – its language, geographies and contestations – and at how non-conforming gender positions are situated and understood within contemporary Scottish gender debates. Having previously demonstrated how non-conforming gender has a deeper root in Scottish geography and history than is commonly thought, I have used this chapter – building on the voices of research participants – to offer insight into its contemporary politics. The challenges that participants face when attempting to develop confidence and comfort in their own gender identity are great. As they challenge hegemonic ways of *being* gendered, they learn and create their own queer ways of understanding gender and develop their own ways of living within these queer worlds.

Challenging the hegemony of a binary gender ontology places gender non-conforming individuals in a precarious position, occupying a realm often thought of as suspect or non-existent. While acceptance towards binary transgender people (transmen and transwomen) in Scotland has increased greatly (Scottish Government, 2015), those individuals who do not situate themselves within a male-female configuration of gender have remained peripheral,

often marginalised by those who seek to delegitimise ‘their languages, practise, theoretical analysis and ultimately, their very existences’ (Knopp, 2004: 122). Giving individuals agency to self-identify, rather than being limited to ‘normal’ gender categories, is seen as a key aspect of progressive social politics (O’Reilly-Cooper, 2015). Perhaps the most fundamental way of attempting to develop a sense of self, alongside a sense of legitimacy within the bi-gendered system, is through the acquisition of gender non-conforming language as a means of critically discussing and explaining the existence of gender non-conforming identities.

The geography of how this language spreads is integral to uncovering how non-conforming knowledges are learned and embodied by participants. Access to this language, through spaces that provide for a queer understanding of gender or through equivalent online spaces, is key to how gender non-conforming language spreads and how its vocabulary is learned and disseminated through and across space. I have demonstrated the varied ways in which participants self-identify and represent themselves as they inhabit unique gender positions that decentre hegemonic understandings of what it means to be a man/woman or masculine/feminine in Scotland, extending beyond the normalised landscape of binary gender. These ontological gender positions, however, also influence embodied geographies as participants attempt to navigate through gender-normative space, existing as bodies that problematise Scottish understandings of masculinity and femininity.

In contention with this individualised approach to understanding gender, critiqued for simply creating ever ‘smaller’ categories and generating ever more fine-grained geographies of exclusion (Fraser, 1999), some participants call for a more collective approach to developing a non-conforming gender identity. Since individualised understandings of identity have been critiqued as lacking political vigour (Oswin, 2008), some participants allude to the usefulness of a type of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1985) that could be mobilised to generate specific political ambitions, thereby creating a non-conforming gender politics able to critique power apparatuses that exist within and perpetuate a dualistic understanding of gender, thus making it a vehicle for challenging sexism and transphobia.

Finally, it is important to point out that discussions around gender identity do not simply take place at the scale of the body, but play an important role within contemporary national discussions. With the SNP pledging to introduce a new legally recognised third gender option, many participants see this pledge as an important step when striving for legal protections and as a way of having their gender identity legitimised at a national scale.



Precisely how such a politicised shift is implemented will have far-reaching consequences not just for the individual, but also affecting all state institutions and their interactions with gender non-conforming populations. Participants nonetheless question the extent to which these political decisions at the national scale will impact positively upon their everyday lives. Some participants argue that discussions wherein gender non-conforming lives and worlds are rejected and deprived of representation implicitly castigate their everyday ways of existing within public discourse, with the latter often met with mockery and prejudice.

Participants are required to negotiate spaces that are both socially and structurally designed to uphold the gender binary, privileging those who comply with Scottish embodiments of masculinity and femininity. How, then, are the embodied experiences of participants influenced by the distinctions made between men and women; and to what lengths do participants go to comply with the gender binary or to reject its authority? In the next chapter I hence switch from gender identity to looking at how gender non-conformity is expressed through material, behavioural and practical means as a way of existing within a dualistically gendered world.

## Chapter 7 Negotiating the gender binary through expression: material possibilities, spatial limitations

### 7.1 Spatialising gender expression

Gender expression is super important wherever you are. People see your gender expression and that is how you're read in that first second. (Aeryn)

The relationship between gender identity and gender expression is a complex one. Material, behavioural and medical and non-medical bodily alterations allow participants to embody their gender non-conformity differently across different spaces. It is widely acknowledged across the social sciences that hegemonic embodiments of masculinity and femininity are genealogically and historically produced through performativity (Butler, 1990), struggle, consent and resistance (Peake and Trotz, 1999). In attempting to reduce the social and bodily dysphoria triggered by these restrictive, legible notions of gender, participants purposefully make material and bodily alterations to reduce the disconnect that they feel between their gender identity and their gender expression, while taking seriously the geographical possibilities of embodying gender non-conformity differently across variously spatial contexts.

In this chapter, I will bridge the gap between gender identity and gender expression, considering how identity is expressed and presented across space. As discussed in Chapter 4, the importance of clothing and material accoutrements is often apparent when used to express a gender non-conforming position, as with the use of the kilt as a vehicle through which to occupy this non-conforming space in a thoroughly material way. Furthering this point, I will also reflect upon how participants work with, comply with or reject the normative masculinity-femininity binary and examine how this negotiation is in constant flux as participants negotiate different spatial contexts where they may or may not be read as 'non-aligned' bodies. When body, gender and sexuality do not correlate with cisnormative frameworks, participants reflect upon how this disconnect can leave them vulnerable to, at best, awkwardness, and, at worst, violence as they are seen to 'fail' their gender. However, as Wilchins (2002) questions, is it possible to fail gender on purpose as individuals deliberately find ways to embody a gender-subversive position? I consider the politics and possibilities of gender failure through questioning whether participants can create spaces in which social and bodily gender dysphoria can be eased, creating in such spaces, a gender expression which resonates more deeply with the individual.

Through discussing a politics of (dis)comfort, I consider how participants negotiate coming out and the process of exposing their internalised gender identity through its expression. I will use and problematise Sedgwick's (1990) notion of 'the closet' in geographical terms, to queer the 'coming out' (and 'going back in') process, when and where this process is made possible for participants, and what factors affect their negotiation of how they express and expose their gender identity through and over space. I will question what a gender non-conforming closet might look like: how it is negotiated by participants and focusing on the nuances of 'the closet' for gender non-conforming individuals.

Finally, I focus upon flashpoints discussed by participants, where their non-conforming gender identity and expression come into conflict with the social and physical binary logics expected in different spaces. I will pay attention to Browne's (2004: 332) concept of 'genderism' to describe 'unnamed instances of discrimination based on the discontinuities between the sex/gender with which an individual identifies', asking how this construction can be used through a lens which looks beyond the binary. This move is particularly pertinent in spaces where the gender binary is socially and/or architecturally constructed to separate genders: for example, in bathrooms and changing rooms. I will report on how participants negotiate these spaces and take steps to avoid conflict which may arise when the gender binary is regulated by others using those spaces, before considering how participants work to craft their own alternative geographies.

## **7.2 Masculinity and femininity: a binary ontology in non-binary lives**

When carrying out interviews, it quickly became apparent that all participants had a very complex and ongoing relationship with the binarisation of masculinity and femininity. As these notions here caused serious discomfort and dysphoria for some participants, they found themselves having to think carefully about how to express their gender identity in different places, reflecting on their quotidian encounters with the seemingly banal gendering of their local environments. In this section, I shall account for the innumerable understandings of masculinity and femininity, commenting on how the (frustratingly) binary understanding of gender expression can be decentred and critiqued by participants. What is common across many accounts is how gender expression is seen as something that alters in different spaces. Geography can play a particular role in critiquing the fashion in which masculinity and femininity are played out/played with, allowing participants to explore how they are

embodied in different spaces, thus shaping the very nature of their gendered experiences within social worlds.

### 7.2.1 Masculinisation

Rory starts to discuss their gender non-conforming expression, touching upon the geographical underpinnings of what it means to be a man or masculine:

‘We can question what masculinity is. Here it’s being strong and not showing emotion. But in different parts of the world, men are brought up in very different ways. So, for example, in Spain and Italy, where it is a lot more acceptable to be romantic and expressive.’<sup>99</sup>

Hopkins and Noble (2009: 813) call for geography to unpack gendered assumptions, saying that only through ‘situated, empirically grounded analysis of actual men (sic.) in actual places that we can grasp the shift[ing] dynamics of power’. In extending this premise to include gender non-conformers, I consider how geographically determined expressions of gender are affected by place, contexts, relationships and practices – something as yet under-acknowledged both in geography and within gender studies (Berg and Longhurst, 2003). Intersectional understandings of masculinity have also provided a useful framework for discussing how masculinity can be queered. Work carried out by scholars such as Walcott (2009: 85) note that masculinity is varied and ‘in a sense masculinity is theorised for its incoherence as a performance conditioned by the myriad of other performances, encounters and interpellations’. He uses the work of Halberstam (2005) to reflect upon black, trans embodiments of masculinity and how these may be classed, geographically placed and ethnically framed to provoke a shifting discourse within trans studies and allow for new intersectional possibilities of identity formation.

Aly says that, while their gender may ‘occupy a between space which goes against the gender binary’, they find that being able to make themselves more masculine in material terms is an important step in reducing gender dysphoria relative to the place that they are in. Ivor adds to this, suggesting that expressing masculinity can be a way to validate their own gender

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<sup>99</sup> Jackson (1991: 208) also discusses the geographical underpinnings of masculinity through the body of the Asian factory worker in northern British cities. He writes that ‘jobs that were formerly ascribed to women came to be associated with the ‘manual dexterity’ of immigrant men.’ While this connotation served to emasculate (and racialise) factory workers, in their countries of origin this work was thought of as skilled manual labour. Jackson therefore notes that ‘one task in building a social geography of gender, therefore, is simply to ‘map’ the construction of historically and geographically specific forms of masculinity’ (209).

identity. In trying to locate a space of comfort from the discomfort of sitting outside cisnormative boundaries, Ivor lists some of the ways that they attempt to provoke other people into questioning their gender:

I do things like lower my voice and I can change my mannerisms. Sometimes I use a packer<sup>100</sup> and that makes me man-spread more. I walk differently – I have a bit more of a swagger. I sometimes draw on a moustache or some facial hair because it makes other people read me as more masculine. I’ve learned ways that I can begin to feel more masculine in myself and that’s great.

Interestingly, Ivor suggests that their attention to masculinity not only allows them to consolidate their own gender identity in material ways, but is also used to challenge the assumptions made by others. This does not necessarily mean that Ivor wanted to straightforwardly present as male or as a man, but rather, they played with masculinity to express their gender in a non-conforming way. Using their body, voice and clothes as a means of subverting the gender binary, Ivor, in some senses, can exploit commonly held understandings of what masculinity *is* to distort the gender binary. This paradoxical upholding of the gender binary to deconstruct assumptions made by others has led some feminist scholars to critique the queerness or radicality of certain gender non-conformity tactics that do not ‘leave behind norms ... because they partake in binary stereotypes’ (Wilchins, 2002: 29).

### 7.2.1. Feminisation

Similarly, some participants take steps to feminise themselves in attempting to find a certain type of comfort alleviating feelings of social and bodily dysphoria. By making changes – material and behavioural – some participants attempt to limit the effects of gender dysphoria by appearing more feminine. For Sophie, this feminisation influences how they negotiated public space to avoid conflict. Responding to perceived threats to which they may be subjected, Sophie is aware of how people may respond to the illegibility of their body and their ‘failing’ to meet the standards of the gender category that they are assumed to have:

I felt a certain discomfort in my body and the way that other people looked at it. I used makeup, clothes, jewellery, posture, gait, my voice and other accessories to change that. All those material things. It’s all material. Learning to work with that and balance it – you learn what the lines are. There’s a line that I can cross – being someone with a masculine body wearing a dress for

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<sup>100</sup> A packer is a phallic-shaped object placed in underwear to give the appearance of having a penis. The packer itself also has its own geography, as individuals decide *where* to use the packer to reduce feelings of gender dysphoria.

example. But if I wear a dress, that's a major risk. If I wear a skirt, that's a major risk. If I wear a feminine top and shorts, then that's maybe okay. If I wear a feminine top and leggings or hot pants, then that's not okay. There is a certain amount of femininity that I can get away with without harassment. It depends on where I am and what I'm doing. (Sophie)

Sophie's notion of 'lines' of acceptability – where they can be permitted to express a form of subversive femininity – is intricately influenced by their understanding of space. Sophie's discussion of 'crossing' refers to the way in which their (cross)dressing<sup>101</sup> (in the sense that they are wearing clothes designed for the opposite gender to which Sophie is commonly read) along with the places in which they are able to do this cross-dressing, may manifest as crossing a boundary of gender acceptability. Sophie notes that 'it depends on where I am', indicating that this crossing of gender markers is also spatially determined as Sophie's material accoutrements, clothing and behaviours must be negotiated across different spatial contexts, one that may provoke gender-based challenges to their identity through genderism in its various forms. This geography of risk is constructed from Sophie's preconceptions of space and by past experiences of prejudice. Terry, talking about being read as feminine-leaning in public space, is also careful about where this feminisation is expressed. They say that, 'in my house I don't think about it. But when I'm out, I can be a bit feminine by wearing floaty tops or capes, but I really need to plan for where I am going to be and who is going to be there.'

Here, I want to expand Lim and Finghanel's (2016: 71) notion of 'safekeeping' to include gender non-conforming individuals. Defined as 'the discourses and techniques by which women are made to regulate and control their own behaviour to keep themselves safe from violent crimes,' this notion can also capture the regulating of one's own gendered behaviours and expressions as described by participants. Safekeeping is a technique used by many participants who see their non-conforming gender expression as a catalyst for provoking gender-based violence from onlookers, meaning that on an everyday (even a momentary) basis they are constantly rethinking how their gender expression may 'give them away' (Cal), encouraging them to 'react to and negotiate their fearfulness' (Pain, 1997: 239). In pushing gender 'boundaries of acceptability' in some places and attempting to 'go under the radar to avoid people staring' in others (Ivor), participants are able to conceive and act upon

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<sup>101</sup> Although Sophie gave no indication that they identified in any way as a cross-dresser as a specific gender non-conforming identity.

highly detailed maps of gender expression: carving up public space, measuring risk and questioning masculinity and femininity as differently distributed across this map.

### 7.2.3 Working with(in) masculinity and femininity

Some participants saw potential in more overtly expressing transgressive or blended versions of masculinity and femininity, demonstrating less of a readiness to ‘safeguard’. Pops says that, ‘I like mixing the two things up and not being able to be read. I have an issue with having to be one or the other.’ Adding an arguably more nuanced view, Alex challenges hegemonic gender expressions, attempting to render masculinity and femininity as independent from one another (rather than as a spectrum) and more diverse in how they can be expressed. She contends that, rather than leaving those gendered aesthetics behind, it is important to adopt elements of masculinity that contribute to, and complement, her femininity, thus positioning her body as queer:

I feel that subversion is really important here and your gender expression changes depending on who you are with and where you are. By becoming more masculine – things like maybe appearing quite authoritative at work or wearing a suit or men’s clothes – I don’t take away from my femininity. It’s not static. There are moments that I take pleasure in doing things that might be associated with masculinity, but at the same time, I like doing a lot of things that are feminine. I like to see those things moving and shifting all the time.

Alex again notes the importance of clothing in her analysis, as she uses clothing as a way of expressing her gender non-conformity differently in different places and at different times, creating her own gender non-conforming geography. Rather than thinking of gender as being on one spectrum, a metaphor which is commonly presented within both liberal literatures and public discourse (Gender Spectrum, 2017), Alex thinks of there being two gender spectra – masculine and feminine – which fluctuate independently of each other, related to her geographical location and social positioning, depending on how she imagines others will react. While still assuming that there are two corresponding gender expressions that relate to two gender identities/sexes (indeed, Alex acknowledges ‘I am not free of these categories’), Alex gains a certain amount of ‘pleasure in doing things that might be associated with masculinity, but at the same time I like doing a lot of things that are femininity’, thereby subverting the ways in which gender expression is upheld and binarised in public space (figure 7.1).

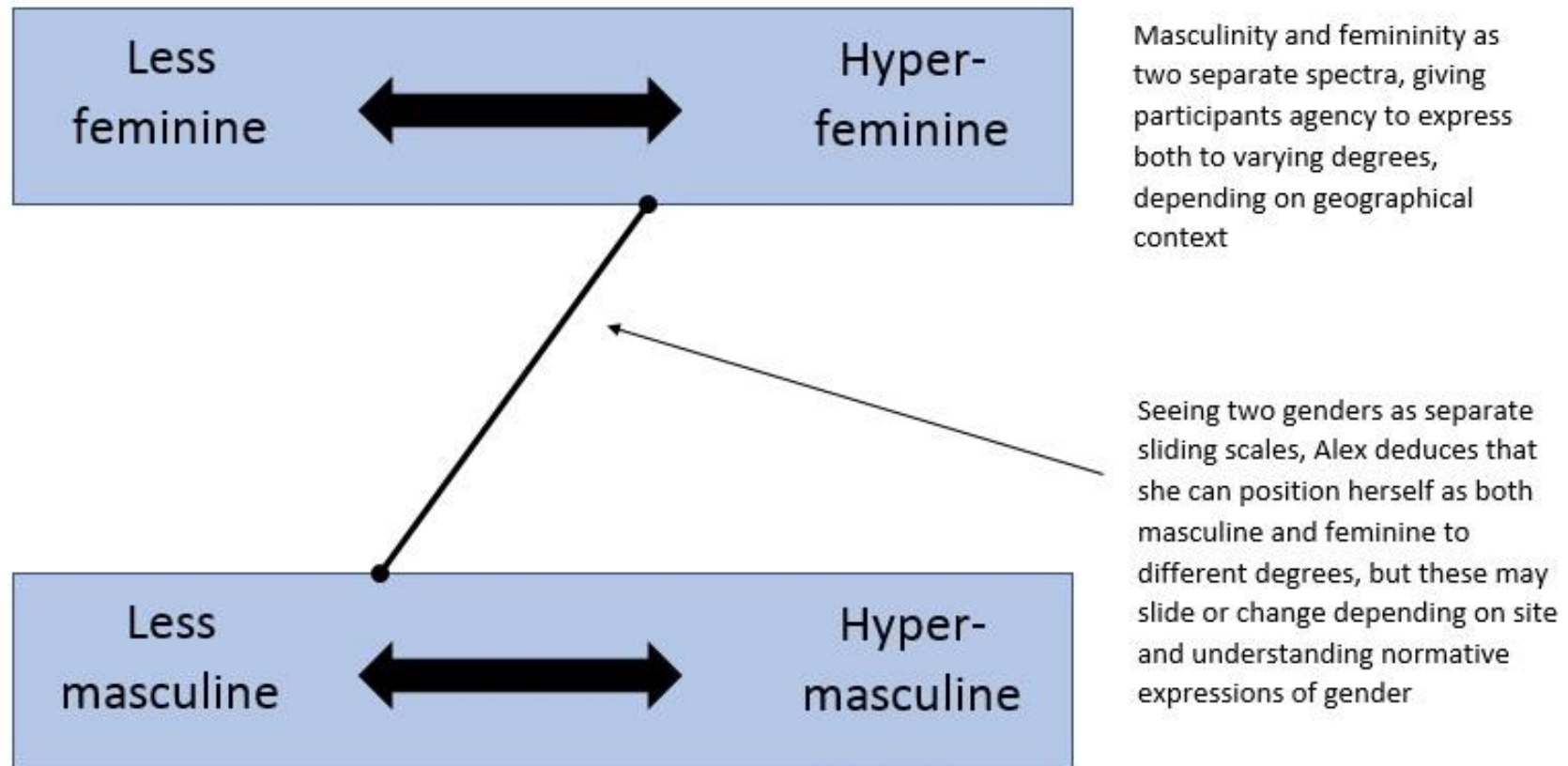


Figure 7.1: Visualising Alex's conceptualisation of gender b(l)ending, simultaneously embodying elements of masculinity and femininity, allowing each to fluctuate in and across different geographical contexts. (Author's own image)



## 7.3 Expressing gender geographies

### 7.3.1 Reacting to understandings of space and place

Expressions of masculinity and femininity have an undoubtedly spatial dimension, with participants constantly giving thought to how their gender expression will be interpreted in different spaces. The geographies of gender expression are an under-researched field within queer geography, one that should be developed further using empirical examples of how non-conforming participants understand localised gender hegemonies. Ivor talks at length about how gender is perceived by others in Dumfries and Glasgow:

When I'm in Glasgow I make people deal with it. But there was once I was back living near Dumfries and I had a massive moustache drawn on. I went a walk and my 90 year old neighbour was there and I was chatting to her and totally forgot that I had it drawn on. She didn't say anything and I had such a panic when I remembered. I had been nervous about it. If I had remembered, I would have been super embarrassed.

The places in which Ivor expresses their masculinity are often dependent on their perception of how it will affect others. Here, Ivor points to differences between Glasgow and Dumfries, perceiving Glasgow as more 'queer friendly', offering more scope for gender expressions sitting outside traditional boundaries of masculinity and femininity. While this urban/rural dichotomy has been critiqued by Myrdahl (2013: 281), who argues that it 'hinders our ability to understand and theorise the nuances of queer life in small cities', for Ivor the distinction persists and influences the multifarious ways in which they distort the gender binary in different places. Whether the urban/rural dichotomous understanding of space is based on Ivor's experience or preconceptions, it is enough to alter how they express masculinity. Ivor also unpicks the differences in their gender expression based on who is reading their gender. In spite of Ivor's gendered anxieties, appearing more masculine to a neighbour does not provoke the negative reaction for which they were prepared. While Ivor says that when encountering family and friends in rural places, they restrict the amount of masculinity that they embody for fear of gender questioning, their neighbour's (lack of) reaction offers as a useful reminder to avoid essentialist imaginings of rendering the city progressive while dismissing the rural as 'backward' and hostile (Gray, Johnson and Gilley, 2009).

Gray (2009: 1164) considers how queer lives are restricted, particularly in rural areas and when queer youth live with parents, meaning queer expressions can remain 'buried under the baggage of community norms and expectations of "having a family and settling down"'

in traditional heterosexual fashion.’<sup>102</sup> Ace, talking about expressing a transgressive masculinity in Edinburgh, declares that ‘I can disregard how strangers look at me. The only people that matter are friends and family.’ The sense of anonymity in certain places allows them more scope for exploring non-conforming expressions of gender. Chris adds that, ‘Cities can be big anonymous places, whereas when I’m at home [a village in the Scottish Borders], everyone would see me and know me.’ Manalansan (2003, 23) notes that a sense of liberation from traditional gender roles ‘is founded on a kind of individuation that is separate from familial and kin bonds and obligations’, making it easier for gender non-conformity to be expressed. Yet, in challenging the urban/rural dichotomy, Chris is keen to add that even in the city, they are wary of negotiating public space when expressing their gender in a manner that may not align with how they are likely read by onlookers:

If I feel like I am going to get unwanted attention because of what I’m wearing. I have to think about safety more. My wife always tells me not to walk around the darker streets at night when I’m in Edinburgh. It’s about taking that common sense and being aware of the issues that could come about if I don’t use it. I have to realise that I might get that attention if people think I look strange. That does impact what I wear.

As Chris moves through the city, they are aware of how their gender may be interpreted by others. The way they express their gender is affected by their perceptions of safety while also influencing how they navigate their way through the city, creating their own gender non-conforming geographies. Participants’ gender expressions are constantly being self-reassessed, so as to strike a balance between gender dysphoria and the comfort acquired from expressing gender in a manner that readily represents their internalised gender identity. Hartal (2018) reflects on the importance of ‘comfort’ through creating a sense of identity and by asking what it means to feel comfortable within certain spaces. Boulila (2015: 135 in Hartal, 2018: 4) claims that comfort can be ‘understood as a framework for agency.’ Understanding one’s own power, context and subjectivity and having the agency to embody that within certain locales, is a key tenet of comfort geographies.

### **7.3.2 Affective gender expressions**

While some participants draw attention to how their gender expression is spatially dependent, others note how other gendered bodies make them (re)consider their gender

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<sup>102</sup> A small body of work considers LGBT lives in rural environments (Bell and Valentine, 1995b), rural queer communities (Gorman-Murray, Waitt and Gibson, 2008), unequal access to gender and sexual support services in rural areas (Willging, Salvador and Kano, 2006) and queering the urban-as-progressive/rural-as-backward dichotomy (Gray, Johnson and Gilley, 2009).

expression. Moreover, how other people seemingly embody their gender can influence the ways in which gender is situatedly understood, allowing participants to (re)position themselves within a gender-social context. One participant who talked about this matter in depth was Joey, who finds that their gender expression often reflects, imitates or juxtaposes how others around them embody masculinity or femininity:

I feel more masculine if I'm with girls who are really feminine. I have a lot of friends who are really into makeup and fashion and then I feel masculine. That's when I realise that I'm not that at all and that makes me want to be more masc[uline]. Maybe if I see someone doing their gender really well and I like the aesthetic of it – that's the sort of the thing to aspire to be. So, if I am feeling masculine in a group of guys, then I'm more confident but, if I'm feminine with a group of girls, I feel like I try to copy them more.

Joey implies that their gender expression entrains their understanding of the gender of others – copying and reworking contextually understood expressions of masculinity and femininity through material conditions, cultural contexts and the affective nature of both human and non-human actors. Motivation to 'do gender well' seems to show a desire to be comfortable and confident in one's own gender, rather than a desire to be viewed as a queer or unintelligible body. The way that a participant's gender expression is pieced together is not simply developed through isolated introspection and self-discovery, but rather is an effort of participants to render themselves as legitimate and comfortable within specific social regimes (Davis, 2009).

In countering this claim, though, Kay talks more about how their gender expression is 'really different' when they are with other queer people at university:

The way I express gender makes me a bit anxious. There are some times when I would like to wear a dress, like to the [University of Glasgow] LGBT ceilidh but then I would worry about being judged for being an assigned female at birth, non-binary person who was wearing a dress. I think people might see it as a regression.

In Falkirk I'm a bit more aware of things than here. I'm fairly comfortable with my gender identity, but then my gender expression, I've always sort of reined it in a bit maybe in certain company. When I'm with a lot of cis-presenting people at work, I don't want to show any kind of female masculinity when I perceive a homophobic threat.

Kay's perceived threat of homophobia is based on their assumed female masculinity and the mismatch between assumed sex, gender expression and sexual orientation. Therefore, in places where they perceive the threat to be greater, they make material changes to limit the

amount of masculinity they perform. In spaces where they believe that certain ‘queer’ configurations are expected by others, however, they feel that they should exacerbate their masculinity to ‘prove’ their queerness to others. Their apprehension about ‘failing’ queerness interestingly points to how gender expression may be disciplined in material terms across certain queer spaces, standardising a gender non-conforming expression of queerness and problematically regulating how queerness is embodied and performed. The notion of a linear path towards a queer body (critiqued in Chapter 6) is disrupted by Kay as they ‘regress’ to expressing a normative form of femininity when at work or in their hometown of Falkirk. This ‘regression’, which could be cast as a ‘recloseting’ of queer expression, is driven *both* by how others (‘cis-presenting people’) embody traditional expectations of masculinity or femininity *and* also as a way of hiding queerness. This de-queering – attempting to conceal one’s non-conforming identity – is used as a technique to avoid perceived homophobic threats<sup>103</sup>, and is done by taking steps such as ‘wearing women’s clothes, raising my voice and smiling more’ (Kay), (re)closeting queerness and complying gender stereotypes that Kay believes others expect when they read them as female. In these cases, rather than having free agency over one’s gender expression, the representations of gender in difference spaces reflects both a reflexive and relational construction of gender in an attempt to legitimise their non-conforming identity.

### 7.3.3 Rejecting birth gender

Thirdly, then, participants also alluded to their gender histories that gave them particular impetus to change their gender expression. As noted by Kuper, Nussbaum and Mastanski, (2012), queer gender and sexual identities incorporate past and present gendered and sexual experiences into their sense of self. Indeed, 20 out of 27 interviewees discussed the impact of their birth gender on rejecting gendered assumptions made about them as children<sup>104</sup>, and

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<sup>103</sup> Wilchins (2002) talks widely about the relationship between (queer) gender and (queer) sexual orientation, considering the ways in which homophobia is the product of sexism and gender expressions. They argue that bodies and how individuals have sex is heavily gendered. Thinking about how people make themselves attractive, find others attractive and how they have sex are all gendered interventions. Wilchins (2002: 57) writes about the gendering of gay sex, saying, ‘Watch them in bed, one rising his butt, spreading his legs and moaning to arouse the other. It is only through such gendered behaviours that sexual orientation is consummated, that it makes any conceptual sense.’ The stereotypical associations with masculinity and femininity and how these are enacted through sex is key to understanding their interconnectivity.

<sup>104</sup> I am aware that in conversations about the rejecting of birth gender, I am disclosing the gender histories of participants. This was something purposefully not questioned during interviews and something that I have attempted to avoid as much as possible to prevent exacerbating feelings of gender dysphoria. Furthermore, I wanted to capture a snapshot of how participants understand their gender now. Information about birth-assigned gender was hence offered by participants of their own accord.

when of course they lacked the ability to challenge the gender that they were assigned at birth. Despite (insensitively) medicalising trans lives, Gottzen, (2017: 531) does acknowledge that gender queer lives and gender positions are often ‘characterised by revealing previous gender positions.’ For many, the gender that they were assigned at birth (AMAB/AFAB) was used as a basis for rejecting a gendered history, and indeed as a platform from which to express their gender in a different way. Rory took numerous steps to reject the femininity imposed upon them when they were growing up:

I was read as a girl and treated as a girl, so I stopped identifying with that. I’ve just always kind of known that I didn’t feel like a girl since high school. I just refuse to wear make-up and refuse to wear clothes that came from the ‘women’s’ section. Being non-binary was more of a case of rejecting being seen as female, because that’s what everyone assumed that I identified as. I avoid doing things that are too femme because I know that that means that other people will read me as female.

Not only does Rory consider a rejection of their birth gender to be the main reason why they reject femininity, they also believe it to be the basis for their non-binary identity. The themes of birth gender (20/27), parents (18/27) and how gender was enacted (and regulated) in the family home (9/27) were often used to describe how gender norms, stereotypes and assumptions were learned.

Within academic geography, a growing body of research has considered the relationship that queer young people have with the family home, focusing mainly on the family and ‘coming out’ narratives (Gorman-Murray, 2008), moving out of the family home (Gorman-Murray, 2009; Lewis, 2012) and the intergenerationality of gender and moral codes (Cavanagh, 2018; Slater, Jones and Procter, 2016). My participants often recall times when they challenged gender codes enacted in the home, attempting to carve out surreptitious ways of embodying gender differently even as children. Chris and Jess recall their gender transgressive behaviour when playing as children:

I remember playing as a child and ... it included things like handbags and things like that. [Chris laughs] I used to pretend to be a stone age woman as a young child and I used to wear a headband and make pots. Even after all these years I can still remember that. (Chris)

As a child, there was one incident when I was with a group, a friend and we pretended that I was a boy to these other kids and that was a lot of fun. I got away with it for most of the day. It was exciting for me and quite fun. That’s the only time I’ve actively tried to pass as a boy. (Jess)

While common narratives view familial spaces as regulatory, where non-conforming gender expressions are scolded and discouraged, Chris and Jess found fun in playing with gender norms, queering gender expressions through playing and dressing up. While much has been written about the epistemological importance of the closet (Brown, 2000), perhaps the literal closet, as a material mish-mash of clothes and accessories, can be used as a place to distort, to play with or to try-out gender (Breward, 2018). Breward (2018: 189) calls researchers to think of the closet in material terms, thinking about how its contents can ‘create a complex labyrinth for strictly gendered corporeal behaviour.’ Thinking about the closet beyond a Western-centric epistemological space of disclosing one’s identity, Betsky (1997: 17 in Breward, 2018) says that it is a place ‘where past and future mingle and become interchanged. It is where you can define yourself (or hide yourself) constructing an identity out of what you have collected, in a space that is free and boundless exactly because it hides in the dark recesses.’ While the gender expressions of some participants are created to balance an internalised sense of identity with external contexts, histories and geographies, others take an active and radical role in breaking down gendered assumptions, using their bodies as a way purposefully to ‘fail’ gender.

## 7.4 Queering the gender aesthetic

The way that gender identity is materially expressed is inherently political as participants negotiate to what extent they want to disrupt normative performances of gender. Just as participants position their gender identities outwith binarised conceptualisations of gender, how they choose to express their gender may be unplaceable: rendering them as out of place within hegemonic gender frameworks. While the gender expression of some participants was intimately affected by social contexts and by vigilantly balancing masculinity and femininity, other participants took a more radical approach, actively blending the gender binary. By exploiting the regulatory nature of ‘genderism’, they make material changes to their gender expression so as to render their bodies unintelligible, developing a ‘non-binary aesthetic’ (Kay). In the majority of cases, this move does not necessarily mean embodying a gender-neutral expression, but rather renders the participant as unplaceable at a glance, purposefully gender blending. While queer geographers (e.g. Nash, 2010) have discussed the complexities and contestations of ‘passing’ and the ways in which passing impacts trans lives, here I consider how participants actively choose *not* to pass, denouncing passing as a regulatory apparatus privileging a cisgender politics.

Embodying gender is both a politics and a geographical project. In talking broadly about

anti-normativity politics, Jagose (2015) calls for a deconstruction of hegemonic understanding, looking instead to positionality. This attention to positionality – taking into account gender histories, localised understandings of gender and the spaces in/through which these embodiments take place – allows theoretical and empirical gender expressions and materialities to be taken seriously. The way in which participants express gender is a complex process of testing borders, reflecting upon their understanding of gender, and ever alert to the way that it is represented in specific places and contexts. Gender expression is not only an attempt to legitimise an internalised sense of self but is also constructed through material and behavioural capacities. In constructing queer lives, positions and identities, Knopp (2004: 127-128) contends that queer lives are built and lived through a process of ‘incomplete and partial achievements brought about through networks of associations, capacities, and contestations that involve families, communities, language, technology, social institutions, resources of various kinds, and a wide range of discursive frameworks.’ With gender expression being scrutinised as unintelligible or out of place, it is important to consider the effect that gender-coded materials, behaviours and aesthetics have on those who are reading gender non-conformity. These everyday materialities reflect shifting spaces of identity and political formation and collectively, ones which are both relational and unsettling. The everyday and visceral effects of gender-blending are implicated within the notion of ‘coming out’, disclosing gender to (dis)align expression and identity, thus rendering individuals (un)intelligible within heteronormative and cisnormative discourses.

Some participants indeed reject the idea of passing as it is seen to uphold the gender binary in a manner seen and experienced as being oppressive. Being unable ‘successfully’ to achieve a binary gender is often rebuked by attempts to queer the gender binary. Sidonie reveals that, because they felt that they would never pass, they became motivated instead to embody a blended, unreadable aesthetic:

I was having physical dysphoria about my body. I thought that I could sort out the discomfort by becoming more masculine. I bought a binder<sup>105</sup> and I thought that that would make people stop reading me as female. But, seeing that I could only change my body in these small ways, doing that felt futile. It was better for me not to make the effort to pass. I’m never going to look like the skinny, androgynous thing that I was aspiring towards. That’s going to be impossible with my body. I’m just going with the ‘fuck this’ attitude of ‘I can be a mix of both and I don’t need to justify that to anyone’.

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<sup>105</sup> A chest binder is an undergarment used to bind the chest of transgender men and gender non-conforming individuals, which is often used to reduce gender dysphoria, ‘flattening the chest to create a more conventionally masculine silhouette.’ (Zulch, 2016)

Sidonie's acknowledgement that they were unable to 'achieve' a gender straightforwardly read as masculine by others encouraged them, in a sense, to abandon the gender binary and, in its place, to inhabit a gender-blended expression that would make them unreadable. However, one critical caveat is that this act was made easier when within queer spaces and with other gender non-conforming people. They say, 'I'm used to my bubble, my queer sphere and my friend group, where people don't make assumptions about stuff.' Despite taking steps actively to have a gender-blended body, Sidonie does mention that, when not in these spaces, they still feel pressure from the assumptions that others make about their body – a very intrusive policing of their gender.

Pops, in calling himself a 'gender terrorist' (bringing with it its own connotations of violently deconstructing gender), adds to this consideration by explaining how he radically distorts the gender binary:

I'm never going to look like a woman. I don't want to. But I used to love heels but never tuck or wear a wig. I really loved that response and it was more comfortable for me. Recently, though, I've gone back to wearing a wig. Recently I've been wearing body suits, with my hairy chest on show. I don't do it all the time. It depends what I'm going to be doing. It depends who I want to rub up the wrong way.

Pops' queering of gender undoubtedly marks him as being out of place, sitting problematically in a gender-blended zone that renders him unintelligible on standard 'maps' of gendered appearance. He does this through using material accoutrements, such as the body suit, that afford the possibility for gender b(l)ending, causing gender confusion and characterising through his messing of gender markers. Yet, here too, Pops thinks strategically about when and where he 'terrorises' gender. He suggests that this strategy is necessary because 'it takes a lot of time to get ready' and also because, despite radical intentions, Pops still reacts to perceived threats and awkwardness present in specific places. Sophie too says that their mixing of gender for political means has an interesting effect on those attempting to read their gender: 'I was experimenting – mixing things up: feminising when everyone read me as a man. It's strange that, as I found more comfort personally and politically, other people became more uncomfortable.' Interestingly, Pops, a cross-dresser, states that, because of increasing public awareness in Scotland of binary trans identities, such as transmen and transwomen, he believes that it is safer to switch from one binary position to the other, asserting that it is those who cause gender disruption, rather than those who embody a gender swap, who are most risk. He points out that, paradoxically, those who have 'trans'itioned 'from one pole to the other in a gender spectrum ... are actually safer than



those who have not strode as far.’ By using a notion of the gender spectrum, he suggests that those who have moved (‘trans’itioned or ‘trans’gressed’) a shorter distance from the gender pole (i.e cross-dressers and gender non-conformers) are actually under greater threat from gender-based violence as they challenge gender, blending to render their bodies as unintelligible with a binary gender context. The rendering of gender expression as something public and outward facing, allows participants to challenge gender norms in Scotland on an everyday basis, since they were aware of various public attempts to read them within a binary gender context.

Rory and Sharon, nonetheless, offer some scepticism here, arguing that, because the majority of individuals ontologically conceptualise gender as a binary system, any radical material attempts to dislocate from this are limited because they are still always read in binary terms:

I realise that telling you what I do to be more masculine or more feminine is damaging to my own point because it’s that idea that things you do or wear are either one or the other. (Rory)

I find myself questioning if I am agendered and how would I ever be able to express that as anything new. Everything is so coded, there’s no way to escape that. (Sharon)

Some participants do discuss what a non-binary aesthetic (Rory) might look like: a conglomeration of masculine and feminine gender markers. For Rory, this meant discarding clothes and accessories that are hegemonically understood to be feminine, but in doing this, they add one caveat. Indeed, they acknowledge that, in making this move, they are paradoxically upholding the power of the gender binary while attempting to establish a non-binary gender expression. For Rory and Sharon, this marks an ultimate impossibility of fully escaping a gender binary as they believe that, even in trying to construct a non-gendered aesthetic, they will always be marked as closer to one pole or the other because of the pervasiveness of the gender binary for those who are ‘reading’ their gender. Sophie argues against this non-binary aesthetic, saying:

... that just makes people that were born female look more masculine. It still fits in the same binary. There is a non-binary aesthetic and it’s okay that people want to do that as it creates a sense of belonging, but I don’t know how useful that is for critically dismantling gender discourse and the way we think gendered people should look.

This uncomfortable position is dependent upon the upholding of the gender binary in order to develop something new, and risking establishing in effect a new binary/non-binary gender

binary and creating an anti-normativity positioned against the cisnormative discourse (Jagose, 2015). However, it is important not to assert this binary as a constant rule which governs the life worlds of gender non-conforming participants. Rather than assuming that participants either subscribe to or work with the gender binary or attempt to reject it, this binary is – or should be – deeply queered/queer-y-ing, sometimes fitting in with more conservative embodiments of masculine or feminine, while fighting against it at other times: enacting the spatial and temporal fluidities of gender binaries, while at times and in some places fixing them. Of course, this is also a geographical endeavour as participants fluctuate across these two positions at different times, in different spaces and in places where they feel they can express their gender non-conformity.

## 7.5 Coming out and staying in: negotiating the closet

As mentioned previously, gender expression can leave participants vulnerable to being questioned and delegitimised, ‘failing’ masculinity or femininity, causing gender confusion, and facing challenges to their non-conforming gender identity. A few geographers have written about the closet (both as a physical and as an epistemological space) and about the process of ‘coming out’, but in this section I want to problematise the notion of ‘coming out’ for gender non-conforming people, instead looking at its partiality, nuance and ongoingness. Lewis (2012) discusses the multitudinous ways that coming out stories can be told, depending on personal subjectivities and contexts:

Coming out, then, is not just the fulfilment of short-term appetite for self-declaration, but rather an ongoing, dialectical journey in which someone comes to know themselves. (Lewis, 2012: 213)

While the notion of a ‘journey’ has been critiqued by myself and participants in Chapter 6, ‘coming to know oneself’ and ‘coming out’ were mentioned by 25/27 participants, even if understanding it as a non-linear and non-incremental process. In academic geography, a lack of attention has been given to the closet as a space experienced by trans and gender non-conforming individuals as well as by sexual dissidents, with work focusing mainly on the experiences of gay men. While Gray (2009: 1181) is right to argue that the closet is upheld by ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, it is also shaped by a compulsory cis-genderism: the privileging of cisgender ‘identity’<sup>106</sup> as culturally superior to those who do not fit into, reject

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<sup>106</sup> I am cautious to use the term ‘cisgender identity’ as a term because of the political implications of this. I could not find any examples of communities claiming ‘cisgender’ and instead it has become part of transgender lexicon as a reference point against which politically to establish trans identity discourse.

or transition across the gender binary. Considering nuanced readings of the closet, I will think critically about how participants take advantage of the doorway of the closet: a liminal space that allows participants to open the door, close it and catch a glimpse of the outside, creating a new geography of coming out.

Firstly, while many participants wish to avoid being seen as man or woman, wider social judgements are still made, based on their gender expression, because dominant cultural discourse still dictates that there are ‘two sexes that naturally correspond with and are manifested in two and only two genders’ (Davis, 2009: 111). This judgement limits how non-conforming genders can be communicated, either conversationally or through the affective nature of gender expression. This matter was thrown into sharp relief for Sidonie within familial spaces:

The worst scenario which I’ve had to endure was a big family wedding. Formal wear is incredibly gendered and it was a big group of people that I’m not out to. I was expected to wear a dress. It was terrible. I get people reading me as a cis which I hate. I feel like I fail and that makes people question me. I don’t want to be having to do the gender queer 101 to someone’s old Tory uncle. I’m very non-confrontational and the idea of having to debate someone about my own personal identity seems awful. I want to avoid places where I might be expected to educate people. It’s difficult not to get offended when you’re going to need to defend yourself constantly.

I also have a great discomfort with feeling like I’m lying. I went through a huge period of my life when I had no words to identify myself and I was treated like a liar the whole time. There’s the idea of being in the closet and the way of getting out of the closet is by saying ‘I am X’ but I didn’t have an end to that sentence. I didn’t have an ‘X’ to declare. There was nothing I could say that wasn’t a lie.

It is clear that Sidonie has a very complex relationship with coming out, going in and concealing their identity, with much of this variability being affected by the spaces in which they are disclosing their gender identity to others. By avoiding spaces in which they are expected to give the ‘gender 101’ – by which they mean explaining a non-binary gender ontology – Sidonie takes advantage of the closet as a way to avoid questioning of their gender. ‘Failing’ as a cis woman means that they still feel that they are in the closet because others cannot compartmentalise them within a gender-binary. While coming out could provide some comfort for Sidonie, so that they would not need to ‘lie’ about their gender identity, this act requires a huge amount of energy. This means that some participants find it easier to refrain from coming out, telling others that they identify within the gender binary, rather than ‘giving the whole spiel about non-binary to a straight person’ (Kay). Another

participant who talked about the difficulties of explaining their non-conforming gender identity was Sloane, whose gender expression led to questioning from their mother:

I'm quite masculine in the way that I dress now, which led my mum to asking me if I wanted to be a boy a couple of times. But I didn't. Not at all. It wasn't until April this year that I came out as non-binary. It was after speaking to someone else who had recently come out. In terms of friends, they've all been really accepting, and they've not really questioned it, but my family haven't been great. They just don't get it. I'm quite anxious, about telling them my new name or that I use they/them pronouns. I just don't talk about it with them now.

Given increased, if imperfect awareness of transgender issues within mainstream cultural discourse (Brisbane, 2015), but also the assumption that masculinity is explicitly linked to men, Sloane's family assumed that they wanted to become a man, simultaneously enforcing the gender binary and making an existence outwith the binary impossible. Coming out is not a case of simply declaring one's identity, but for gender non-conforming participants, it also 'means coming to terms with labels, health and negotiating a politics of identity (Johnston, 2018: 28). It is because of this scenario that Cromwell (1999) acknowledges being visibly read as binary trans is often less dangerous than being read as gender ambiguous. Sloane has attempted to educate their parents, but also must now navigate the places where they 'come out.' Davis (2009: 116) adds that 'perceptions about the level of discomfort or danger mediate individuals' public presentations of self', noting that this presentation may be different for different publics. A recloseting of gender non-conformity briefly – as discussed earlier – as a form of protection, and indeed as a way to avoid conflict, can encourage participants to negotiate coming out differently in different spaces.

### 7.5.1 Stepping out of the closet

For participants, coming out is never a single act of self-declaration and is a complex decision-making process dependent upon self-understanding and the participant's understanding of places and contexts in which one might reveal an internalised conceptualisation of gender to others. 'Coming out' was only made possible for participants once they began to re-conceptualise gender in non-binary terms. Elliott questions, 'How could I come out if I didn't have a word for what I am? Having a word for it is a starting pointing and then you sort of build on that and start to question what gender really means?'<sup>107</sup> The progression through different ontological understandings of gender has a clear

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<sup>107</sup> In a sense, this thesis follows this logic, positioning Chapter 6 as gender non-conforming geographical ground work before tackling more 'on the ground' geographical inquiry.

grounded, grounding, effect on coming out experiences. In many cases, coming out was for participants implicitly geographical in that ‘out’ places and ‘out’ sites were chosen as they sought validation and legitimisation for their non-conforming gender identity. Participants talk widely about their decision-making processes when coming out, questioning how to initiate conversations, anticipating responses and, crucially, choosing the language to deploy when explaining their gender: in essence, educating others (or electing not to educate others) on a non-binary existence. While for most, gender is something which is assumed at a glance in binary terms, non-conforming gender identity is something that needs to be disclosed (as in the case of sexual orientation) – something that is normally hidden and must be exposed as a private aspect of the self. Munt, Bassett and O’Riordan, (2002) note that this moment of exposure problematises all pre-existing assumptions and acts as a paradigmatic shift in one’s life that can provoke severe anxieties, symbolising an agonising step out of the closet.

Participants often made the decision to come out in spaces where they believed that other queer individuals would be present and open to talking about gender in non-binary terms (these spaces will be explored in more detail in Chapter 8). While the geographies of gay communities, lesbian communities and trans communities have been discussed and challenged widely within the discipline, it seems gender non-conforming participants still see these spaces as essential to being able to articulate, discuss and enable the possibility of queerness in a fashion that ‘facilitates transgender identity work and everyday survival’ (Cavalcante, 2016: 109). Aly and Sharon discuss how coming out in specific queer-friendly places made them feel safe enough to discuss their gender:

If I had gone to the queer group at uni, then I would have come out a lot sooner and I maybe would have understood things a lot quicker. I would have had more support when I was coming out. Socially, I guess I tend to cling on to those people and places where I am out now. (Aly)

I came out at Pride last year. I definitely come out to queer people and it’s mainly them that know about it. I don’t need to explain what agender means to them. Yeah, I very much have a group of friends that are queer<sup>108</sup> or they have varying identities. (Sharon)

Both Aly and Sharon identified places for coming out where they believed other people would be sympathetic to their non-conforming gender and coming out. The ability to

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<sup>108</sup> It is worth noting that participants used ‘queer’ rather than focusing on gay/ lesbian identities. This may indicate an alliance with networks of support established among those who position themselves against normativities more widely (rather than focusing on particular social markers) or may allude to various hierarchies and exclusions experienced in spaces thought of as commercial gay bars.

disclose ones' gender identity and to express that confidently, without fear of prejudice, shows that searching for a particular place to come out is important. Before coming out, both participants believed that these places would be sympathetic and empathetic to their gender non-conforming identities, showing that they regard others who use queer groups either to be gender non-conforming themselves or to be allies, and in both cases likely to provide support. This act of coming out to queer people offers a way to be 'out' enough to find contentedness in their own gender, but also allows them enough protection among people whose gender or sexuality may be considered non-normative.

While seeking out places of community in order to come out, the act of moving to a new place and away from family was the impetus for some participants to come out as gender non-conforming. The process of moving out, moving back in and going on 'scoping' trips that allow one to play with a sexual identity has been considered by Lewis (2012), who queers the notion that moving out and coming out are unidirectional journeys. He writes of queer migration in the USA:

Even queer migrations following traditional interior-to-coast, conservative to liberal binaries are not necessarily emancipatory and other subjectivities are likely to mediate one's welcome to the gay community. (Lewis, 2012: 219)

Although talking exclusively about the 'gay community', Lewis' narrative is also true of gender non-conforming migration. Brown (2000: 48) problematises the assumption that 'coming out' 'equates the subject's self-identification and truth-telling to physical movement of the body.' Critiques are offered by Wemark (2015), who articulates that these 'coming outs' must be queered and should look beyond the archetypical Anglo-American examples and include non-western or international lives. Gorman-Murray (2009) goes on to warn that the binary of feeling trapped versus feeling liberated should also be queered, since realities of 'being out' are not universally positive and risk the romanisation of a 'coming out place'. Interestingly, three participants in particular note that a move to Scotland from other countries in the EU played a vital role in the coming out:

When I moved to Scotland I changed my name. In my first few lectures my name wasn't changed on the University system. I had to go up to the lecturers and to the class and ask them not to use my old name and tell them what my new name is. That was it. I would never have done that in Lithuania. (Elliott)

I came to Scotland and I got my binder. I didn't wear it that much at home, but here I do more often. This was a new place and I didn't know anyone so I felt like I could present myself in any way that I wanted. It was like starting over

and that was really helpful. I'm not sure that I would have been at the stage I am now, if I stayed in the Netherlands. (Maud)

My parents and my friends from Romania don't know anything about my gender because I just can't share that with them, which is awful. They know that I've changed in many ways because of my appearance and, I guess, my values. They always say that Scotland changed me a lot. I completely agree with them that moving motivated me. I think that's a very positive thing. (Willow)

Emigrating to Scotland was seen as the primary motive behind participants coming out as gender non-conforming, although, a simple binary between a 'progressive' Scotland and an 'illiberal' home country does not fully account for this decision<sup>109</sup>. Wider access to GICs, mental health service provisions and legal securities are critically important for participants, but queer migration also plays an important role in the decision to come out. Being in a 'new place', being distanced from familial norms and from the binaries of masculinity and femininity deemed to be more rigid in some home countries, all mean that certain participants are now able to subvert these assumptions. The connection between migrating bodies and migrating identities is not unidirectional, but they are often mutually inclusive, intricately influencing the everyday lived experience of participants and shaping decisions to 'come out.'

### 7.5.2 Staying in and using the closet

While much of the last section focused on the geographies of coming out, it is also important to question the geographies of 'staying in': in which spaces do participants choose to keep their gender non-conformity hidden, rather than disclosing their gender to others? While 25/27 participants talked around notions of 'invalidation', expressing frustration at the lack of representation for non-conforming genders, the perceived benefits of staying in the closet were also discussed. This facet of teetering across the threshold of the closet means that participants may choose to keep their identity secretive in some spaces, while also allowing them to 'out' themselves in others (although this dichotomy is constantly in flux, depending on changes to perceived risk, representations of space and increased confidence in one's selected gender identity). Davis (2009: 107) contests that participants do not always have the privilege of being able to come out, a possibility persistently regulated by gender norms that involve constant negotiation. One of his participants states that, "If you want to fit into

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<sup>109</sup> In Maud's case, the Netherlands also scores highly in areas of legal situation, equality, non-discrimination on the grounds of gender identity and gender expression, according to Transgender Europe (2017).

society, you have to play some of those games” (in Davis, 2009: 107). The ‘game’ of playing gender refers to the self-policing of gender expression that is undertaken, to different extents in different places, as an attempt to avoid negative responses, ranging from awkwardness to violence.

One reason why some participants decided not to come out, was because of hegemonic binarised gender ontologies, and hence the awkwardness and invalidation experienced when they attempted to disrupt this hegemony. Moreover, 26/27 participants indicated that a lack of knowledge of non-binary gender positions by others was an issue for them. This invalidation was particularly present in specific places, being mainly associated with places not deemed ‘queer accessible’<sup>110</sup> (Chris). Elliott describes the process of creating their own geographies of ‘outness’, explaining why these geographies are developed as a self-preservation technique:

They [people who ‘won’t understand’] just won’t get it. It won’t make sense to them. That’s why I won’t come out in that space and I may not choose to go to that space because of that. When I have to give away things that are personal – I tend to avoid those spaces. It’s so exhausting having the whole conversation. I can’t. It’s too much. Sometimes I prefer to stay in the closet.

Elliott decides to stay in the closet – explicitly deploying this vocabulary – in spaces where they believe that a non-binary understanding of gender is not common-place, saying that having to justify their own gender can be overwhelming. Interestingly, Elliott later reveals that in some spaces, and to their family, they have come out as a ‘trans guy’, hiding their non-conformity through the guise of a binary trans identity. Again, this indicates that, while mainstream understandings of binary trans issues have benefitted from increased politicisation and representation, non-binary possibilities of gender remain excluded from popular public discourse. Jio adds to this narrative, saying that because, in certain contexts they ‘don’t like promoting their gender’, their ‘coming out’<sup>111</sup> is often restricted because ‘it might make things awkward in the future.’ It is clear from Jio’s testimony that coming out as a radical move to disrupt the gender binary is an energy-consuming process, one that may contribute to anxiety and mental health concerns (Aeryn). This realisation juxtaposes with research carried out with gay and lesbian communities, which often posits that coming out

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<sup>110</sup> Chris uses ‘queer accessible’ to describe places, institutions and services that are respectful of identities and bodies existing outwith hegemonic and binary understandings of gender, sexuality and sexual orientation.

<sup>111</sup> Rather than reading ‘coming out’ as a one-off event, it is important to note the work of geographers (e.g. Lewis, 2012) as an ongoing and complex set of negotiations which are made in different places when decided when to (not) disclose their gender identity or sexual orientation.



can benefit the mental health of those who are able to disclose their sexual identity (Corrigan and Matthews, 2003).

Experiences of work life and negotiating the closet in attempts to avoid awkwardness were also raised. While participants can find comfort in coming out with friends (19/27), mainly because of feelings of acceptance and validation, work spaces may be read as an opposing space: one in which retreating back into the closet is often basic form of self-protection. While research with lesbian and gay experiences at work has been well-documented (Day and Schoenrade, 1997), limited work on trans experiences in the workplace has been undertaken in academic geography (Hines, 2010), and even less looking how gender non-conforming identities interact with and exist within neoliberal working environments. Research carried out by the *Scottish Trans Alliance* (Valentine, 2016) suggests that 52% of non-binary people in the UK never feel comfortable about coming out at work because of worries about discrimination or impacts upon career progression, thus contributing to transgender unemployment rates in Scotland estimated to be 37% (Morton, 2008).

Some of the issues faced in employment are bureaucratic; for example, when being asked for names, titles and gender/sex (terms often used interchangeably). Ace states that, ‘When I applied for my job, I had to use my ‘deadname’<sup>112</sup> because that’s what’s on my ID. People are so obsessed with gender and titles on forms which is stupid and superfluous.’ Administrative formalities create structural barriers to participants being out within the workplace, forcing participants back into the closet to assist in getting a job and also not to come out once employed, ‘because it looks weird when you start using your new name with your boss’ (Sloane). Linda agrees: ‘When I worked at the uni in one of the offices, students would come and ask to change their name and pronouns and folk would say, ‘Can they just get over it?’, which is making things so much more difficult.’ Sloane tells of their experience of being introduced to colleagues at a new job:

On my first shift, she introduced me as my new name but then said that I used to be called Emma and that I was trying to change my name. I was mortified. She just didn’t get it. There’s no need for a backstory. That was quite off-putting within work. Within work I’m still female. That’s the way that people

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<sup>112</sup> Riedel (2017) uses the term ‘deadname’ to describe the name that trans and non-binary people were assigned at birth, which reflects their birth gender, rather than their present identity. They write, ‘Many trans people will go to great lengths to prevent people from finding out their deadname, destroying irreplaceable photos and documents in an effort to ensure that who they *really* are is the only identity most will remember’ (Riedel, 2017, n.p).

read me now. I don't know ... I'm quite scared ... anxious, about saying to them that I am non-binary and use they/them pronouns.

Sloane's experience again queers the binary between being out/being in. In their case, effectively being forced out of the closet in their work place left them in the precarious position of being somewhat outed against their will, without them having control over the disclosure of their gender identity or expression. While for some participants (e.g. Terry) exposing their backstory was an integral part of establishing their non-binary status, Sloane is more hesitant to do so, because this would involve disclosing the steps taken in coming to terms with their non-binary identity. These geographies of discomfort are created and muddled through because of an exposure of one's gender history, the possibility of being read as a binary gender, and a fear of hostility.

Gender dysphoric issues were also particularly pertinent for Seumas in the workplace:

I was in a weird position where I was out to a lot of my friends, but I had a job when I was working in an office full of male engineers and they were 'very male' and 'very straight' and I sort of felt very intensely uncomfortable the entire time. There were all these interactions and behaviours which confirmed that I didn't fit in and so I decided to not come out.

The specific ways in which masculinity was embodied in Seumas' workplace seemed to contrast the relationships experienced with their friends to such an extent that they tolerated intense discomfort, remaining in the closet to avoid clashes with masculinist ideals. Navigating closet spaces involves accepting a level of discomfort for the self, using the closet both as a safeguarding technique and as a way of reducing awkwardness for others by not challenging locally hegemonic understandings of man/masculinity and woman/femininity. While I have considered the ways in which coming out geographies are constantly negotiated by participants based on social contexts, the next section of this chapter will consider how gender-segregated spaces are structurally created in such a manner so as to force participants out of/back into the closet, making it impossible for them to navigate gender-determinate spaces as anything other than a series of 'false' gender performances.

## **7.6 Navigating gender-segregated spaces**

Gender segregated spaces have structurally bolstered the male-female binary, causing ideological clashes between identity-based and biology-based determinations of gender. With an emphasis upon the anatomical sex of a person being used as the marker of who is permitted or denied access to specific spaces, a 'gender panic' has been created: 'situations

where people react to disruptions to biology-based gender ideology by frantically reasserting the naturalness of a male–female binary’ (Westbrook and Schilt 2004: 34). This reassertion of the gender binary, together with the policing of it, leaves gender non-conforming individuals in spatial and identitarian limbo as they are forced to comply with the gender binary or be denied access to particular spaces. Key to this policing and regulating of gender expression is Browne’s notion of ‘genderism’ (2004: 332), which she defines as:

the hostile readings of, and reactions to, gender ambiguous bodies. Genderism is used here to articulate often unnamed instances of discrimination based on the discontinuities between the sex/gender with which an individual identifies, and how others, in a variety of spaces, read their sex/gender.

Gender-segregated spaces, such as bathrooms (Slater, Jones and Procter 2006; Bender-Baird, 2015), prisons (Rosenberg and Oswin, 2015) and religious spaces (Yip and Khalid, 2010), and how queer people negotiate these spaces have been considered in academic geography, but this section will focus on two spaces in particular – public bathrooms and changing rooms – giving insight into how gender non-conforming participants negotiate these spaces.

While queer theorists and geographers alike have interrogated both the physical and the epistemological significance of ‘the closet’, as already reviewed, I want to give some thought to the nuances of the gender non-conforming closet and what it might look like. Specifically, I look towards the ‘water closet’ or the toilet or bathroom as a grounded inflection on what a gender non-conforming closet may look like. Within human geography, ‘coming out of the closet’ experiences have primarily focused on the experiences of gay men, whose disclosure of their sexual orientation intimately affects the way that space is negotiated and understood (Gorman-Murray, 2009) and on the various ways in which the closet shows how ‘a variety of subjectivities are performed, resisted, disciplined and oppressed not through space but *in* space’ (Brown and Knopp, 2003: 284). Within trans scholarship, meanwhile, researchers have noted the importance of the visual – of gender expression – and how individuals may choose to remain ‘closeted’ or ‘come out’ in difference spaces:

Living stealth – remaining closeted about one’s transgender status – is less common than it used to be, [but] it is still rare and difficult for transgender people to choose to risk their lives and livelihoods by being visibly out. (Shapiro, 2004: 166)

Central to trans and gender non-conforming closet stories is the notion of stealth: remaining hidden; going ‘under the radar’; closeted. Whereas coming out for sexual minorities may be

based on an instance of vocally disclosing one's sexuality or defined by a sexual act, Shapiro notes the importance of 'being visibly out' or being outed based on gender expression and the interpretation of gender (mis)match by others. Given the political momentousness of the toilet (the 'water closet') for gender non-conforming individuals, what epistemological moves can be made to reread the toilet as a trans or gender non-conforming closet? The water closet, as a spatialised metaphor and as a physical space, is a site where the performative politics of 'passing' as a binary gender is perhaps most strictly regulated, forcing gender non-conforming people into binary compliance. Rather than seeing coming out as a liberating experience, 'coming out' (or 'appearing out') in the water closet is often repressive and a place fraught with fear of gender-based aggression. Brown (2000: 147) acknowledges that 'certain spaces *do* conceal, erase and deny the existence of marginalised groups, and they do so in quite simple and straightforward ways. People put themselves there or are forced there.' In the water closet, gender non-conforming individuals are both put there (through a biological need to relieve oneself) and they are forced there (because of the binarisation of toilet spaces), and yet, the water closet may also constitute a collective site of coming out. Because of the transnational politicisation of 'the bathroom problem' (Browne, 2004) the toilet has been used to create solidarity across time and space. The spatialities of the toilet as a (water) closet 'helps impel the heroic struggles that take place with it, the comfort and security many of us have found there, and the liberal democratic principles of privacy and respect and self-determination that underpin so many of our politics' (Brown, 2000: 148).

### **7.6.1 Policing peeing: negotiating public bathrooms**

Public bathrooms have become a flash point for trans and gender non-conforming people, reinforcing the rigidity of gender and becoming synonymous with the scrupulous policing of gender. In an Anglo-American context, the politicisation of peeing has been incorporated into mainstream media narratives, creating a gender panic which forefronts safety within public bathrooms as a public health concern (Thorn, 2016). This infringement upon the lives of transgender and gender non-conforming people has been highly political, especially the USA, as President Donald Trump made moves to revoke Obama-era 'bathroom protections' for transgender people in February 2018 (figure 7.2).

Problematically positioning gender non-conforming people as the embodied manifestation of this threat has provoked transphobic retaliation, which is now experienced by participants

## The Trump administration's latest anti-transgender action, explained

Despite Trump's promises, his administration's anti-LGBTQ record just keeps growing and growing.

By German Lopez | @germanrlopez | german.lopez@vox.com | Oct 22, 2018, 11:40am EDT

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**Figure 7.2: Reporting of the Trump administration's attack on LGBT rights in the USA. (Vox News, 2018)**

both online and when using public bathrooms.<sup>113</sup> Cavanagh (2018: 173-174) believes that toilet training, 'learning to pee and poop in the right time, way and place', is often about the 'reproduction of normative gender binaries and heterosexuality.' Differences in how men and women are 'supposed' to use bathrooms reinforces strict gender behaviours and biopolitically upholds strict delimitations between them. In my interviews, 18/27 participants discussed toilets at length, sharing their tactics for navigating bathroom geographies, and revealing that the architectural design of dualistically categorised bathrooms means that there was no toilet for them at all. Participants are either forced back into the closet (both the physical gender-segregated (water)closet and a metaphorical 'identitarian closet') or have to make a judgement on which bathroom would be safer, while others avoided public

<sup>113</sup> While prejudice may be faced when participants use public toilets, contentious bathroom politics have also been discussed within online forums. An article written by transgender activist, Paris Lees (2016), in *The Guardian*, received comments such as, 'Gender-neutral toilets are an expensive waste of money to solve a virtually non-existent problem' (MarkB35) and 'Keeping toilets segregated is focusing on attackers, many of whom would take advantage of the situation were they gender-neutral' (JoePomegranate).

bathrooms altogether, by ensuring they do not need to use the bathroom before venturing into unfamiliar territory.

While protectionist narratives surrounding the safety of children have protruded through media networks in response to these debates (Peters, Becker and Davis, 2017), gender non-conforming participants also base much of their movement through public bathrooms on the grounds of safety for themselves: constantly attempting to avoid transphobic violence and microaggressions<sup>114</sup>. Many of these decisions are made based on how they believe others ‘read’ their gender, accepting that a personal feeling of being out-of-place must be nullified to ensure that others do not regard them as being out-of-place. Ace states that, when there are no gender-neutral toilets available, they are forced to think about themselves within the context of the gender binary, assessing how their gender expression will affect others who are using those spaces:

I use the women’s bathrooms because most of the time people read me as female, regardless of what I’m wearing, although I have been kicked out of the toilets in [Glasgow] Central Station before. So that happens. The woman read me as male and she didn’t feel comfortable or safe.

Ace’s experience of being ‘kicked out’ of public toilets because of their gender expression is a common one. The policing of public toilets through genderism results in access to a place being restricted because of the perceived disconnect between gender expression and ‘appropriate’ uses of a space. For geographers and across other social sciences, the bathroom has become a prominent flashpoint in trans politics, restricting the everyday geographies of trans and gender non-conforming individuals. Anxieties about genitalia, morality and the momentary removal of clothing (Cavanagh, 2018), (homo)sexualised anxieties about the misuse of public bathroom space (Brown, 2008), toilets as places of strictly regulated gendered and sexual norms (Anderson, 2018), anxieties associated with the assumed dirtiness or disgust felt in public toilets (Barcan, 2005) and the increased surveillance that trans and disabled bodies face in accessing such spaces (Molotch and Noren, 2010), have all rendered public toilets as the political and ideological battle ground within contemporary trans and queer politics. It is important, though, to ground these debates and consider how

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<sup>114</sup> Nadal, Rivera and Corpus (2010) discuss the implications of sexual orientation and transgender microaggressions, describing them as the unconscious forms of prejudice and discrimination towards LGBT people. They note that, ‘transphobia and genderism may be similar to micro-insults or micro-invalidations in that they present the types of internal feelings that individuals may have, which may then manifest in discriminatory behaviours towards transgender persons [in ways which] individuals may even be completely unaware of their prejudices and biases and therefore may even be completely oblivious to their discriminatory actions’ (p.224).

they impact the lives of gender non-conforming individuals, as in Ace's case. Elliot also recalls being thrown out of toilets, saying, 'I left when they were shouting, but by that point I was afraid that it would get violent.' Rory says that their gender expression – their short hair and their use of a binder – was the trigger for 'a gang of girls telling me to get out'. Participants identify toilets as being risky spaces. They are hyper-aware, always anticipating the reaction of those who claim such spaces belong to a certain presentation of masculinity or femininity ultimately connected to anatomy and genitals.

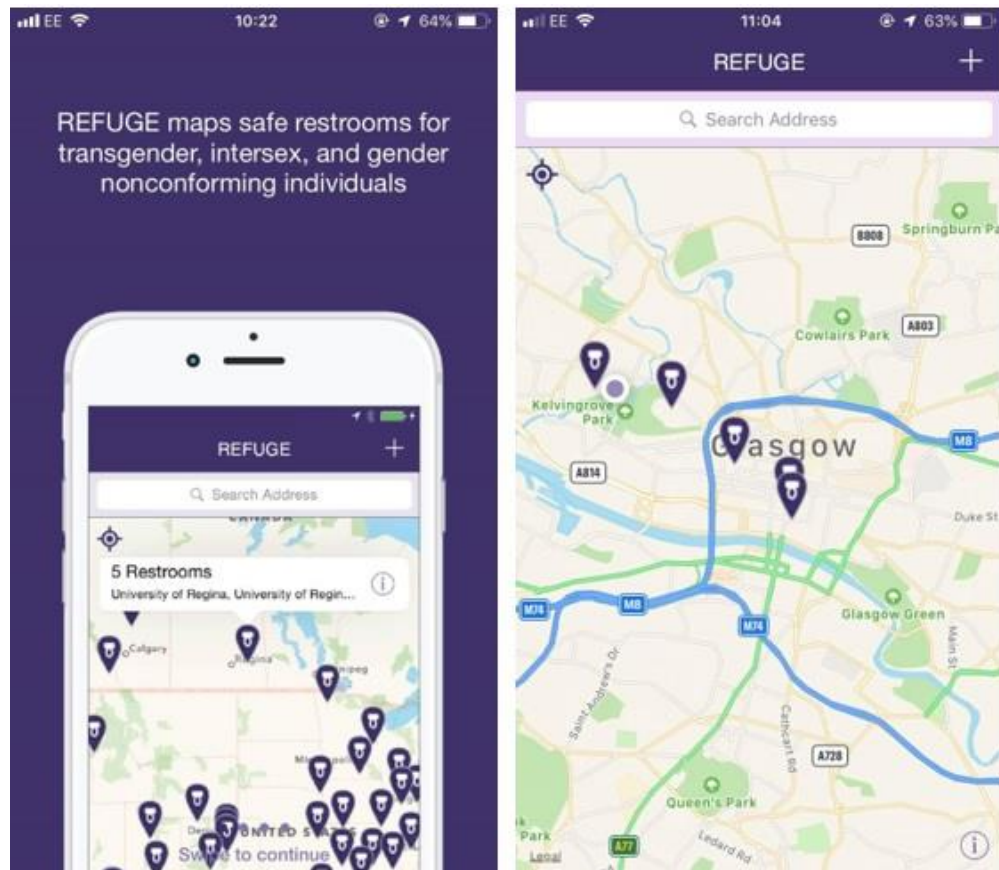
Participants also recall microaggressions experienced in bathrooms. Binary toilet signs, urinals, toilet stalls, condom machines, sanitary bins and bodies that occupy such spaces are normally dualistically gendered, affecting how bathroom spaces are understood, policed and regulated. Nordmarken, (2014: 130) contends that these microaggressions infiltrate the everyday lives of trans and gender non-conforming people through processes of 'scrutiny, exoticisation, sexualisation and fetishization.' These dehumanising processes are represented in media, film and everyday experience, which contribute to a narrative of inauthenticity and inferiority for trans and non-conforming individuals (Serano, 2007). These microaggressions, such as hostile stares and gestures, are indeed all too commonplace for participants in public bathrooms:

Once, one girl turned away from the door when I was drying my hands. I think she thought it was a male bathroom because I was there. Usually people stare at me because they can't place me. That kind of thing just makes me feel like I shouldn't be there. (Jio)

The stares, awkward shuffling and turning away are very visceral responses enacted by those who cannot make sense of space, consciously affecting how gender non-conforming participants react to and navigate public toilets. Dualistically separated public toilets force participants back into the closet, forcing them to comply and to occupy space structurally designed to uphold and privilege a binary gender system.

In response to anxieties associated with using public toilets, some participants choose to avoid bi-gendered spaces. Ace says that they 'don't go to the bathroom in public unless I can find one which isn't gendered. Unless you learn where those are ... it can be difficult.' Ace effectively creates their own map of Glasgow city centre where specific bars and coffee shops have gender neutral toilets and uses this map as a means to avoid clashing with the rigidity of bi-gendered spaces. These gender non-conforming geographies are layered to create a map of spaces in which Ace does not feel threatened by the cissexist regulation that

permeates through public space. Technology has also been used to co-create public gender non-conforming knowledges. Using GPS and drawing on the user-generated database 'Safe2Pee', this has been done through the mobile app 'Refuge' (Figure 7.3) to show where gender neutral toilets are located, allowing gender non-conforming maps to be visualised, recorded and shared ([www.refugerestrooms.org](http://www.refugerestrooms.org)).



**Figure 7.3: Screenshots from the mobile app 'Refuge'. (Author's own material)**

A final way in which participants navigate the 'bathroom problem' (Browne, 2004: 331) is by using disabled bathrooms, which have always been considered gender-neutral spaces. While 'refusing people toilet access remains a remarkably effective form of social exclusion ..., further marginalising social untouchables', disabled toilets are one of the few gender-neutral spaces found in public places (Gershenson and Penner, 2009: 9)<sup>115</sup>. Rory talks about their experiences of using disabled toilets in public:

I will always tend to use the disabled one if there is one available and there aren't people waiting for it. I use them because they're gender neutral. It's great for someone like me who usually gets major dysphoria about using public toilets. It still doesn't feel right though. I'm not physically disabled in any way.

<sup>115</sup> This indeed, a problematic coding of disabled people as somehow not having a gender or sexuality.



I don't feel like I should be in there. I feel like I'm taking up someone else's space.

Rory navigates public bathrooms by searching out gender-neutral spaces, but this awkwardly positions them at odds with their own politics of access to space and ownership of space, stating that disabled toilets should be used exclusively by people with physical disabilities. In attempting to reduce their own anxieties about bi-gendered space, Rory uses disabled toilets as a compromise to avoid gender-segregated spaces, which nonetheless then contributes to further feelings of delegitimisation and erasure<sup>116</sup>.

### 7.6.2 Changing under surveillance

Changing rooms as gender-segregated spaces were recurrently mentioned by participants (13/27). Fraught with anxieties surrounding nudity, bodies and the 'misuse' of public spaces, changing rooms in shops and gym locker rooms are often dichotomously gendered in an attempt to preserve 'decency'. Indeed, geographical work has been undertaken to highlight the experiences of out-of-place 'sized bodies' bodies and the use of shop changing rooms as sites of bodily anxiety (Colls, 2006: 538). Yet, while transgender inclusivity has been given increased attention in public discourse, there has been a lack of ambition for gender-neutral or gender non-conforming spaces to be made available (Beemyn *et. al.* 2005). As with public toilets, instances of gender non-conforming individuals being harassed in changing rooms range from 'weird looks' (Elliot) to being removed or denied access (Aeryn), as other individuals seek to police and enforce the gender binary under the veil of 'protecting' the public against bodies judged to be out of place.

Cal points out that shopping for clothes is also a flashpoint of gender dysphoria, as they are forced to navigate space which has been built to sustain the social superiority of a binary gender ontology: 'There's always a massive divide between the men's and women's clothes – different sections, different floors. I buy both, so where do I go to try them on?' The segregated nature of the built environment of changing rooms increases feelings of gender and gender dysphoria. Chris articulates that, 'You can be getting along fine and having a good day. But then you're faced with having to make that decision and it just knocks you back and makes you feel like you shouldn't be there.' Chris talks at length about how they

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<sup>116</sup> A small body of work also intellectually works to thread transgender and Crip theory, ensuring that physical disability and gender non-conformity are not mutually exclusive categories (e.g. Mog & Swarr, 2008).

navigate this dysphoria as they move through space, embodying their gender non-conformity in order to push at the boundaries of masculinity and femininity:

I don't mind shopping and holding clothes against me. I'm more assertive because I'm getting used to it. Those zones are very marked out and I think that that is part of the awkwardness I am feeling – it's the demarcation between male and female and it's totally unnecessary. They separate them out in such harsh, sharp-edged and hard zones.

I've bought women's tops before. I went to try it on in the women's section and they [shop workers] had an issue with me using the women's changing room. I told them that they were women's things, but they made me go upstairs to try it on in the men's, then I had to come back down to pay in the women's section. I made a big deal about it and left it for them to sort out.

Chris is caught between trying to assert themselves as being non-binary while also being aware of the how this demarcation between male and female changing rooms elicits a feeling of gender awkwardness. The battle politically to position themselves fully into bi-gender space is an impossibility, and so Chris alters the way that they enact their gender non-conformity. They cause confusion, queering the boundary between 'men's' and 'women's' space, as they are forced to try on women's clothes in the men's changing area, because they are read as being a man. This queering of places puts Chris in direct conflict with the built environment, meaning that they can put pressure on the gendering of the space, while avoiding other more disruptive outcomes such as being removed from the shop.

Reflecting on more positive experiences, Aeryn and Pops consider some of the ways wherein they have begun to develop their own geographies, utilising spaces in which the gender binary is not imposed to such an extent, thus giving gender non-conforming people more freedom to inhabit public space and contributing to a feeling of gender legitimisation essential for reducing gender dysphoria:

You know where's really good? Charity shops! A lot of my friends who are cross-dressers love going in there because they don't prioritise big profit and they just let you buy what you want. Also, a lot of people go in looking for fancy dress costumes, so they can always hide under that guise. (Pops)

I really like Primark. A couple of years ago, they told all of their staff not to question people's use of the fitting rooms. They were told just to treat trans or non-conforming customers like anyone else and they were to assume that the customer knew where they were. They are also big open spaces and don't have many staff on the shop floor, so you're basically left to do what you want, which is great. (Aeryn)

Both Pops and Aeryn draw attention to how self-determination over gender identity can be enacted through practice in public spaces. Both places mentioned here are beneficial to gender non-conforming individuals because of the lack of staff who are present to police and to regulate gender based on the material gendering of clothes and the ‘appropriate’ use of changing rooms. While Aeryn’s note that trusting an individual to know what changing room they are using, and why, may seem an uncomplicated and simplistic way to be more inclusive, this shop policy gives participants agency over how they can use and move through public space.

## **7.7 Gender expression and creating non-conforming gender geographies**

The binarisation and gendering of public space poses numerous problems for gender non-conforming participants. Through using ‘genderism’ to discuss both the experiences of gender non-conforming people and the policing of cisnormative expectations, assuming the alignment of the trinary of gender identity, gender expression and biological sex, the material covered in this chapter underscores that gender expression across public space is fiercely contentious. Masculinity and femininity, and the material ways in which they are represented through clothing, provide both potentials and pitfalls for participants. While the kilt has historically (and also presently) been used as a way of distorting how masculinity and femininity are understood, the material importance of clothing has been referenced numerous times throughout this chapter as a way of embodying gender non-conforming identity. While attention has been paid in Chapters 5 and 8 to the importance of performance in creating and representing gender non-conformity, throughout this chapter I have given evidence of some of the everyday material ways in which gender non-conformity is performed. This everyday, offstage performance of gender is more than theatrical and such ‘performance exposes [gender] aesthetics’ social work as embodied, processual, rhetorical and political and especially as daily, as routine, a practice of everyday life’ (Hamera, 2006: 46). By using, working with or rejecting the masculine-feminine binary, they are able to carve out new gender positions, negotiating social worlds that still hold aloft the sanctity of man and woman as the only existing gender categories. Queering these categories has been the ambition of some participants, who seek to find ways to provoke gender confusion, blending gender in ways that render them unreadable within bi-gender narratives, and geography plays an intimate role in such a constant reworking of gender expression. As many participants seek comfort from a disclosure of one’s gender identity, this disclosure is

also constantly being balanced against the anxiety of delegitimisation and erasure of a non-binary existence.

By providing a nuanced reading of how participants closet, decloset and recloset as variable means of negotiating difference spaces and social contexts, I have discussed how the closet can be used as a way of emancipating one's self from a closeted life or can be taken advantage of as a vantage-point to avoid gender-based conflict. To further this, I have started to make epistemological moves to reframe the 'bathroom problem' as a site of 'the closet' for gender non-conforming individuals. (Re)reading the bathroom as a site where the visibility of gender is enough to disclose one's gender identity, the (water) closet is a site where being out or 'appearing out' queers the binary of being out/in and complicates the geographies of those gender non-conforming bodies when and where they negotiate bathroom spaces.

Finally, while political attempts are being made to allow gender non-conforming individuals to occupy a third gender space through the creation of a third gender category, most built environments are still constructed to privilege the gender binary and to inhibit possibilities that might deviate from that binary. While participants are often forced to negotiate the gender binary on a personal, identitarian level, they must also find ways to grapple with the various ways in which public space materially erases the possibility of a contributing life beyond the binary. Expanding upon these debates, in the next chapter I will explore the various ways in which built environments are being adapted, both socially and structurally, to make an existence beyond the binary possible, creating gender non-conforming geographies and providing social and political space to disrupt the gender binary in Scotland and elsewhere.

## **Chapter 8 Creating gender queer worlds and resisting the gender binary**

### **8.1 Queers, queer space, queer worlds**

Queer geographers have engaged with the production of queer space since the emergence of space and sexuality studies in the 1980s. Critical analysis of gaybourhoods (Bain, Payne and Isen, 2015), community spaces (Misgav, 2016) and sex spaces (Brown, 2008) have allowed theoretical sensibilities to be informed by empirically-driven research undertaken across diverse geographical scales and locales. Across the social sciences, moreover, a more intersectional approach to queer research has been necessary, following the justifiable critique that research has neglected those who exist beyond the white, middle-class, cisgender, metrocentric ideal. Following arguments detailing the spatial barriers that gender non-conforming participants encounter every day (Chapter 7), in this chapter I will consider how queer spaces are created socially, politically and geographically to resist the gender binary, creating both ontological space, making gender queer worlds possible, and physical space, allowing gender non-conforming bodies to feel safe, acknowledged and accepted.

Firstly, I will consider how LGBT community groups are adapting to the shifting (non-conforming) gender ontologies. It is acknowledged by many participants that university groups across Scotland position themselves at the forefront of progressive gender and sexual politics. Safe space policies are key in allowing gender non-conforming individuals to occupy a space that enables gender non-conformity to be discussed and embodied. It is important, however, to look beyond the academy to consider the steps taken by a broader mesh of community and support groups in Scotland that, in attempting to extend inclusion, have begun to address a host of concerns arising as more of their users begin to identify as gender non-conforming. While much of their work focuses on providing services for those who are not heterosexual, what is being done to widen conversations beyond sexual orientation? What steps are being taken to incorporate various gender identities and how can this be done in an intersectional and inclusive way? It is critical to address concerns raised by trans scholars such as Doan (2010) who question to what extent radical queer intentions are experienced by those who use queer spaces, while also considering those who remain peripheral in such debates. Using participant testimony, I will problematise the ways in which socially 'inclusive' agendas are adopted by groups, and how new geographies of exclusion can still develop even within these spaces.

Participants also discussed their experiences of events that are encouraging of a queer understanding of gender. For many, the political and practical steps taken to create these spaces have been of pivotal importance for those who feel like they ‘don’t quite fit into gay bars’ (Luke). By focusing in on Queer Theory, a monthly queer cabaret event in Glasgow, I will consider the tactics being enacted to ensure that places put inclusivity into practice. The performance of gender transgression here builds on discussion presented through the consideration of pantomime in Chapter 5, thinking about the spatialities of gender non-conformity and the role that these performances can have in creating gender non-conforming geographies. Creating spaces that allow for the existence of gender non-conforming bodies and identities is crucial, with Aly saying that, ‘Those places where I can be me really saved me. It made me feel like I could exist. I would not be able to be the person I am without them’. How spaces are created, negotiated and inhabited provides intricate and empirical evidence of growing non-conforming gender geographies in Scotland.

Even so, the increased political attention given to gender non-conforming identities in Scotland has faced resistance. Some participants report a solidifying of the gender binary as certain groups and organisations seek to uphold cissexist narratives, re-essentialising gender binary discourse. I will reflect upon this rebuttal against diversifying gender ontologies as organisations simultaneously respond to increasingly gender-deterministic attitudes fuelled by media narratives about the ‘invasion’ of women’s-only spaces by trans and gender non-conforming people (Goldberg, 2014), thus excluding those who do not wish to compartmentalise their gender into the binary.

## **8.2 Situating gender non-conformity in LGBT/queer communities**

Spatial histories challenge queer geographers to reconsider some of their own historical narratives about the emergence of ‘gay and lesbian’ spaces in terms of ‘who’ was present, how they understood themselves (as gendered, sexualized, racialized and embodied) and who has arguably been erased by these accounts. This raises important questions about the power relations inherent in the production of knowledges about spaces and about how our theoretical or conceptual frameworks (and our political and activist leanings) are implicated in how we, as scholars, tell particular tales that might fail to ‘see’ the others in the spaces we study. (Nash, 2010: 588)

Much has been written about the commonalities, anxieties and conflicts arising between transgender people and their position in/out of LGBT spaces. Nash’s insightful work considers the intersection between gender expression, transgender identities, sexual

orientation and LGBT space and presents an empirically rich platform from which I will develop this chapter. Regarding LGBT spaces, Nash calls on geographers to re-envision exactly what is 'queer space', asserting that researchers have been complicit in the erasure of those who do not uphold desired configurations of masculinity or femininity. By listening to those voices from beyond the gender binary, scholarship is able to capture minoritarian knowledges, raising questions about what gender non-conforming space might look like. By incorporating the knowledges of those who sit on the epistemological fringes – informing how space is produced, understood and negotiated – gender non-conforming geographies can develop a new way of conceptualising space (hooks, 1989). Working through Nash's critique, this chapter will write gender non-conforming stories into the social and activist geographies of LGBT communities, working towards a queer politics that both takes gender identity and expression seriously and looks beyond the importance of sexual orientation as a primary marker of difference within these spaces.

### **8.2.1. Rereading queerness: the role of university LGBT groups**

University societies are frequently used by gender non-conforming participants in this research (14/27) and were widely considered welcoming of gender non-conformity. In Chapter 6, I discussed how university groups provided space for participants to talk openly about gender and indeed to 'learn gender': to engage critically with gender possibilities that contest hegemonic understandings of man/woman, masculinity/femininity. However, as understandings of rigid binaries soften, how have practices within these spaces changed to encapsulate these views? Luke, who was involved in organising the Aberdeen University LGBT+ group<sup>117</sup>, notes some of the changes made in attempting to create a more inclusive environment for gender non-conforming people:

Usually, there is no other option but to be misgendered, but that's something I wanted to change. At events we tried to get people into the habit of asking what pronouns people use. On a personal level, that was important too. Giving someone the option to identify how they want and be addressed as they want was a way of making them feel like they belonged at those events.

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<sup>117</sup> While I am drawing on the testimony of those who use academic spaces, it is important to note the distinction between academic spaces and academic theory. While many participants were interested in changing queer narratives, there was a rejection of the deep and ongoing theorisation of gender by scholars. Jio discusses this saying, 'Thank you for asking about what I do every day – as if I'm a normal person. So many dissertations want to find out how trans people fit into big academic ideas.' While academic theories have been invaluable in framing research questions and informing methodologies, using trans individuals as queer tropes that inform high theory has been criticised by participants. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to heed and act upon Jio's warning, placing queer theory within everyday empirical space.

Introducing pronoun policies in queer spaces was beneficial for participants in two ways. Firstly, as Jio states, ‘if someone asks you your pronouns, it lets you know that they’re open to talking about gender.’ This is echoed by Sharon, who says, ‘I liked the LGBT society when people made the effort to use ‘they/them’ pronouns for me. I was very thankful for that.’ Just as participants desired agency to change their name and gender identity both in social and legal contexts, 20/27 participants also regarded the pronoun that they used as an important aspect of identity construction and legitimisation<sup>118</sup>. Secondly, Luke believes that trying to habitualise the practice of asking for a member’s pronouns was an important step in making people feel like they ‘belonged.’ These new practices are designed to entrench a ‘sense of belonging and sociocultural affirmation’ (Bailey, 2014: 502) within these spaces, creating a space that allows for the construction of alternative socio-cultures. Moore (2006) discusses the affective nature of queer community-making, asserting that shifts in behaviour effectively spread and create new behavioural norms. These standards become enshrined as commonly understood ways of behaving within specific spaces.

It was common for university groups to hold regular social events for its members. Events could have been social – attempting to create community extending beyond gender and sexual categories – or reflecting a heightened awareness or even activist focus – aiming to educate members about gender and sexual identities or to facilitate discussion between different LGBT groups. One way in which the University of Glasgow LGBTQ+ society increased visibility for gender non-conforming members was to ‘assign a ‘non-binary’ officer’ (Kay). As a political move, the group created this office to improve representation, placing it in equal standing with the men’s officer and the women’s officer. While this categorising of identities may be critiqued as a distinctly unqueer move that ghettoises groups based on their ability to position themselves within hegemonic gender categories, Kay goes on to justify it:

We have trans and non-binary coffee events every week, which is really important for people. It means you can come along and no one makes any assumptions about you. I only really started to think about my own gender when I met other non-binary people. I asked them about being non-binary and

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<sup>118</sup> Using alternative pronouns to ‘he’/‘him’ and ‘she’/‘her’ has been documented in mainstream media. Non-binary pronouns, including, for example, ‘they’/‘their’, have become more widely used within queer spaces. A diverse list of pronouns such as ‘zie’/‘zir’ and ‘ey’/‘eir’, have been developed by an increasing number of American universities (Chak, 2015). However, this list of pronouns does not seem to translate to participants in Scotland. Instead, all participants chose to use ‘he’/‘him’, ‘she’/‘her’, ‘they’/‘their’, rather than any diverse alternatives.



... I think it helps a lot of people. For some, it's their only way to meet other non-binary people. It's their lifeline.

These new strategies and practices constitute a way of queer-world making and have multiple political and spatial dimensions. On the one hand, the gender-queer programme creates 'places for those who operate outside of essentialised gay and lesbian identity politics' (Nash, 2011: 195), fostering a space *for* non-binary genders and resisting the dominance of polar gender positions. It is also important to recognise that 'trans and non-binary coffee' takes place in a coffee shop away from the university campus. This breaking out from university space also plays an important role, on the other hand, establishing gender queer geographies immersed in and surrounded by assumingly heteronormative publics. While Nash (ibid.) rightly points out that this construction of queer space should not be conceived in idealised terms, Tattleman describes this queer world-making:

[Queering space] involves the construction of a parallel world, one filled with possibility and pleasure, while functioning simultaneously as an intervention in the world of the dominant culture ... In this space of opportunity, we are free to construct ourselves in flexible, unspecified and unpredictable ways.  
(Tattleman, 2000: 224)

This embodying of queerness within public space may be an attempt to claim public space for those who resist hegemonic understandings of gender, although Kay's testimony treats this radicality with scepticism. They say that, 'I don't think that 'safety in numbers' is true. If someone was to look over at us, looking all queer, we'd all be outing each other just by the way we look. You've still to look over your shoulder.' Thus, a geography of discomfort is also experienced by participants even through these attempts at queer-world making.

During fieldwork in Aberdeen, I attended a social event run by non-binary and gender non-conforming members of the group. The group facilitated a discussion about gender and was an open forum to ask questions. The space aimed to give gender non-conforming people a voice, while other members of the LGBT group were encouraged to ask questions and to join the discussion. The gender non-conforming members of the group were given the opportunity to develop their own space within the LGBT group, meaning that they could share queer knowledges with their peers and reflect upon gender non-conforming epistemologies:

The group had made badges for themselves that they wore at the event. They were colourful and had the person's pronouns or a political slogan about the gender binary written on them [Figure 8.1]. This openness and very visible way

of showing how they preferred to be identified provided a micro-political way of educating people and making them aware of non-binary identities. Luke made me a badge to take away with me. (Field diary: 9<sup>th</sup> November 2016)



**Figure 8.1: Badge made at the gender non-conforming awareness event. (Author's own image)**

This event was specifically designed by organisers to construct a space facilitating a non-binary understanding of gender. Badge-making here, is used as a way of reconstructing the everyday micropolitics of queer world building. The physicality of making the badges and wearing them as a visible indicator of queerness is a material representation of identity. Chen (2012: 5), when discussing affect and queer materiality, notes that queer objects inform spatial production through ‘a combination of intuitive phenomenologically acquired abstractions and socially acquired histories of knowledges’, rendering the body and the spaces in which these bodies exist as queer. While questions may be asked about why participants need or should ‘educate’ cisgender peers, Jio says, ‘I like being able to go and just talk openly about my gender and gender politics with people who are more likely to understand.’ This event demonstrates how micro-political moves such as holding discussions and badge-making are capable of queering space as ‘new politics and practices are fundamentally altering how these spaces are understood’, recognising and adapting to social realities (Doan, 2010: 193).

Researchers have warned against the romanticisation of progressive, queer or safe spaces, however, with grounded experiences often being troubled by the (re)emergence of hierarchies and social norms that work to regulate, control or erase gender non-conformity. While university groups may be read as micro-publics – founded upon prosaic encounter and negotiation within a bound space (Amin, 2002) – Valentine (2008) encourages researchers not to naively assume that encounter with difference translates to respect for

such difference.<sup>119</sup> Within these queer spaces, participants also encountered instances of misgendering and erasure, including the sorts of micro-aggressions written about by Nash and Bain (2007) when considering masculinity in women's bathhouses in Toronto. The proposition made by Luke to encourage people to ask the pronouns of another member was often spatially limited to the events themselves, rarely translated into a wider gender queer politics or geographies. Jio reflects on their frustration at being mislabelled 'regular' at university LGBT events:

In the LGBT spaces, I try to correct people as much as I can because I can be out to anyone there. Some gay guys that go don't get it and they presume I'm a lesbian or something. They don't get that I'm mainly there because of my gender identity and not because of my sexuality. They're surrounded by different kinds of people and they know about sexualities, but they don't know about gendered stuff at all. I'm glad that it's there [the university group], but people still make the same shitty assumptions.

Despite attempting to provide space for gender non-conformity, Jio's experience suggests that those using 'queer' university groups continue to prioritise sexual orientation, rather than gender identity/expression, as a defining intersection of difference, (re)rendering queer spaces as gay or lesbian space. Interestingly, Jio indicates a clear demarcation between their gender identity and sexual orientation when discussing the nuanced ways that they inform the production of gender non-conforming spaces. Sloane concurs with this interpretation, saying that their experience at Stirling University LGBT+ Society, was tainted by a feeling of erasure. They state, 'There has been a bit of work with binary trans people, but beyond that – nothing. It's actually been quite transphobic<sup>120</sup>. LGBT+ should be an all-inclusive. The '+' doesn't happen. It's mainly LGB. Well maybe just G.' This issue is commonly reported within LGBT spaces, with Johnston (2018: 34) noting:

In general, LGBTIQ places and spaces provide opportunities for the expression and performance of gender variance. Yet, in contrast, some participants also discussed which LGBTQI spaces and places they avoid due to feelings of displacement.

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<sup>119</sup> Wilson's (2017: 452) review of geographical engagements with encounter(s) works to draw sustained and critical attention to the phenomena of encounter. Taking seriously the cautions set out by researchers such as Valentine (2008), her piece traces how 'encounter' has been deployed and understood within geography while looking for ways to 'scrutinise how encounter is theorised as a distinctive event of relation [placing] encounter firmly within the remit of difference, rupture and surprise.'

<sup>120</sup> Transphobia and genderism within gay and lesbian spaces has been considered both through academic (Misgav and Johnston, 2014) and non-academic lenses (Clayton, 2016). The privileging of masculinity and misogynistic discourses within gay communities means that those who subvert such standards are often subject to gender regulation and exclusion.

It appears that inclusivity within these spaces has been paradoxically spatially and socially uneven, with cissexist hierarchies of power still establishing themselves within these 'progressive' spaces. Podmore (2003) writes about these conflicting gender and sexual politics, arguing that creating space for the gay/queer self can involve gender discrimination, marginalising those who do not comply with bi-gendered contexts. Terry negotiates this marginality by creating, 'my own queer sphere, where all of us who might be non-conforming come together and hang out.' Rather than looking for a non-conforming gender politics that perforates through queer groups, perhaps it is more appropriate to imagine the politics of growing nano-publics *within* these spaces and within these micro-publics. These nano-publics, congregating as a sub-group to LGBT/queer micro-publics, embody and represent gender non-conformity in queer spaces. While participants offered a unique account of how these nano-publics come into fruition, in avoiding a non-conforming geography dependent upon an educational attainment level or a specific age, it is important now to consider how other organisations are attempting to become increasingly inclusive of those who position themselves beyond the gender binary.

### 8.2.2 LGBT/queer community groups

I needed community. It's the most basic human thing – to find comfort in someone that knows what you're going through – people that understand your experiences. Find people that understand what you're going through and that's going to be a big support network. (Rory)

The role of 'community' has intruded through queer geographical research since the latter's inception. The way that community spaces are governed, understood and negotiated has been written about in increasingly nuanced and intersectional directions across sexual, gendered, racial and political axes to give an enriched portfolio of empirically diverse accounts. Formby (2017: 61) articulates that community-making 'was seen as a way of avoiding risk and ensuring safety, as well as offering the opportunity for political activism and potential social change.' Given changing attitudes towards the rigidity of Scottish understandings of masculinity and femininity within certain LGBT groups, what steps have now been taken to ensure inclusiveness for gender non-conforming individuals? The importance of community was mentioned by 23/27 participants, who viewed community groups as 'a support network' (Rory), as 'essential in my coming-out process' (Kay) or 'as a way of feeling like you belonged' (Terry), among many other positive remarks.

National community groups such as The Equality Network, LGBT Health and Wellbeing, and The Scottish Trans Alliance have a history spanning two decades of striving 'to be

inclusive and open in our work, to challenge discrimination and to consult, involve and inform the individuals and the communities we serve' (Equality Network, 2018a). With this 'inclusive' agenda in mind, participants reflect on some of the changes made to accommodate the existence of gender non-conforming identities, creating social, political and activist spaces for those who identify beyond the gender binary. Chris describes the importance of LGBT Health and Wellbeing events in Edinburgh, ones providing them with the space to learn about non-binary identities:

I started to learn more about my identity through LGBT Health and Wellbeing centre in Edinburgh. They have a trans workshop. They gave me a one-to-one meeting with a member of staff as a way of getting to know what they do. I've made new contacts through them and met a lot of non-binary and trans people. They have a community space where we just hang out and drink tea and eat biscuits for a few hours every week. It doesn't sound like much, but it's really helped.

T Time, run by LGBT Health and Wellbeing, was originally set up as a monthly social group for transgender people in Scotland, but has adapted to include non-binary individuals, with the event now offering a space for 'all trans and non-binary people, their friends, families and supporters' (Transgender Support, 2018). The merging together of binary trans, non-binary trans and gender non-conforming politics is a technique adopted by numerous community groups in Scotland, but such a merger is not done unproblematically.<sup>121</sup> Iantaffi (2017: 285) critiques the ever-growing span of the 'trans umbrella'. Luke believes that non-binary people can struggle when gaining access to community spaces because 'there are always other people who decide if you're trans enough or not trans enough.' This disjuncture between queer and trans politics is often felt most acutely by those who do not conform to standardised expectations of (trans)masculinity and (trans)femininity within specific places (Iantaffi and Bockting, 2011). The structural regulations of the binary gender system are therefore, perhaps surprisingly, also reproduced within trans community spaces, indicating that even spaces which consider themselves 'inclusive' or 'queer' are often subject to 'the same hierarchies and standards which exist anywhere else' (Terry).

Community groups are nonetheless changing their practices to address these discontents. Linda and Chris both agree that changes have been made at LGBT Health and Wellbeing,

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<sup>121</sup> Interestingly, 'transgender' and 'non-binary' are framed separately to one another by service providers such as Transgender Support. I discuss this move as a 'merger' but not as a 'merging' as in many contexts, transgender and non-binary identities remain distinguishable in the way that they are framed. Here, a defining question of this thesis plays out, as I seek to consider the nuanced geographies of those who are non-binary or non-conforming, rather than considering binary transgender lives.

making access to support services easier, a matter also addressed on the website:

LGBT Health and Wellbeing offers support to the trans, including non-binary communities, through our Transgender Support Programmes (TSP) in both Edinburgh and Glasgow.

We welcome trans female/feminine, trans male/masculine, genderqueer, non-binary<sup>122</sup> identities as well as intersex people, people who cross dress and those who are exploring their gender identity. Anyone who lives in and outwith Edinburgh and Glasgow can access the programmes although all events are delivered in Edinburgh and Glasgow (LGBT Health and Wellbeing, n.d)

In attempting to make community spaces more inclusive, LGBT Health and Wellbeing have changed their policy on access to gender-determined spaces. Listing non-normative gender identities provides individuals with affirmation that they are able to access this space, creating representation and visibility for these identities within national organisations<sup>123</sup>. Reflecting increased awareness of non-conforming genders and their mainstreaming through popular cultural discourses in Scotland, LGBT Health and Wellbeing adopted practices to reflect this shift, including hosting a ‘Non-Binary Night!’ (LGBT Community Project Glasgow, 2018). This space is set up as ‘an inclusive social space for non-binary and genderqueer people’, and yet is not held in a space typically considered as queer space. Taking place in a book shop in Glasgow City Centre, LGBT Health and Wellbeing has also attempted to construct queer-friendly safe space which is not a ‘space of separation for distinct identity groups [that] controls unpredictable influences on the participants in the space’ (Hartal, 2017: 2), but rather one placed purposefully *within* heteronormative and cisnormative public space.

Irregular distribution of these spaces, though, is something that bears heavily upon the non-conforming gender geographies of Scotland and upon the everyday experiences of those who do/do not have access to them<sup>124</sup>. As previously mentioned, many of the services and

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<sup>122</sup> Within service provider contexts, ‘non-binary’ is used as a catch-all term to address the issues of those who do not identify as a binary gender (i.e. man, woman, transman or transwoman), rather than as a specific gender identity.

<sup>123</sup> The Equality Network is a ‘strategic intermediary for the Scottish Government Equality Unit and receives the majority of its funding from national government. The group plays an important role in informing government and aims to influence decision makers, policy and politics at the national scale (Equality Network, 2018b).

<sup>124</sup> In a recent report, 58% of young LGBT people over 18 in rural areas in Scotland do not think that there enough places to socialise (Lough-Dennell, Anderson and McDonnell, 2018). It is hence clear that these events are unevenly distributed, meaning that these spaces remain metro-centric, queer scenes developed mainly in the urban centres of Glasgow and Edinburgh. When only including trans young people only, 73% of respondents said that there were not enough places to

community groups are centred in the Central Belt of Scotland, particularly centred in Glasgow and Edinburgh. This clustering, to a large extent, creates a metro-centric geography that fails to extend far beyond these two cities which already have established LGBT communities, with their own queer geographies and histories (Meek, 2015). As community spaces become entrenched as places thought to be representative of a progressive non-conforming gender politics, it is important, once again, to avoid uncritically romanticising their role in gender non-conforming geographies. Massey (2005: 356) warns against this romanticisation:

Romanticisation [can] train both exclusivities and resistance to change, and through the distinction it can engender between space (abstract, meaningless) and place (meaningful) which can all too easily play to a political localism or local centredness.

In the context of 'progressive' spaces, it is important to consider the fluid and active role of queer gender politics, rather than settling upon specific acts and practices seen to be inclusive, either linguistically through explicit reference to a greater number of identity categories or politically. While organisations and community groups have adapted to changing attitudes towards gender in Scotland, this outcome should not be viewed as static. Queering space should be an active and ongoing practice that reflects shifting and fluid gender ontologies, something essential to ensuring queer futures.

### 8.3 Creating non-conforming geographies

Creating spaces that actively employ a queer politics has been central to the creation of non-conforming geographies through resisting bi-gendered ontologies. Seeking out these spaces has meant that participants have been able to engage in community-making through social, political and activist means, feeling part of a queer collective while also combatting feelings of social and bodily dysphoria on an individual scale. By discussing events, places and community organising that occurs in Glasgow,<sup>125</sup> I will consider the value of these spaces, looking at the potentials and contestations arising within spaces both socially and structurally constituted to allow for the existence of non-conforming bodies. While queer spaces have

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socialise in rural areas (although there were only 15 respondents in this sample) (Lough-Dennell, Anderson and McDonnell, 2018).

<sup>125</sup> I have chosen to focus on Glasgow as a site of interest for this section. Because of the uneven distribution of queer spaces, many of the examples given by participants are centred in Glasgow or Edinburgh (even those who lived in more rural areas, such as Ivor (Dumfries) and Sparrowhawk (Shetland) travelled to Glasgow to take advantage of queer communities). In focusing on Glasgow, I hope to give a more enriched geographical account of shifting queer urban geographies.

usually been read through a sexual lens, considering how sexual identities engage with and negotiate queer spaces, far less has been done when considering various gendered positions.

Participants such as Sophie and Terry, calling for a new queer urban scene in Glasgow, challenge the uncritical encompassment of queers and voice frustration at the mainstreaming and commercialisation of queer spaces in the city. As Binnie and Skeggs (2004) stipulate, the incorporation of certain queer (gay) bodies, deemed as legible, resets the boundaries of acceptability, rendering those otherwise gendered and sexual bodies deemed as unreadable as outside, stoking genderism and creating essentialist, un-queer understandings of gender and sexuality. Alternative queer ‘scenes’ that Terry believe to be ‘more political, more inclusive’ contribute to a shifting urban queer geography. That said, adopting a politics seen to be more inclusive of gender non-conformity is also to expose those spaces that have either chosen to ignore shifting attitudes towards gender or have become increasingly gender-deterministic.

### **8.3.1 Queer performance, queer activism and disrupting gender norms in urban spaces**

Queer urban geographies are in a state of constant flux: reflecting localised and national politics; shifts in social attitudes; and the interconnectivity of queer knowledges across space. Thus, they allow scholars to question inclusions and exclusions, and to ask how such openings or closings influence how space is negotiated as a set of possibilities and contestations. As Browne (2006a: 888) notes, queer radical geographies ‘entail radical (re)thinkings, (re)drawings, (re)conceptualisation, (re)mappings that [can] (re)make bodies, spaces and geographies.’ Accounting for these ever-changing queer emergings and dispersions is never a completed business, but is indeed intimately intertwined with the grounded lives of participants. Here, I will focus on Queer Theory, a particular queer performance event in Glasgow (Nice N Sleazy, 2017), to discuss how queerness is embraced, extending beyond the more acceptable and represented image of the white, homosexual, cisgender male.

During fieldwork, I began to attend monthly Queer Theory events held in ‘Nice N Sleazy’, a bar in Glasgow city centre (Figure 8.2 and 8.3). ‘Sleazy’s’, as it is colloquially known, is a busy, grungy bar which has traditionally played no mentionable role in Glasgow’s gay history, instead focusing more on its role as a music and clubbing venue. Queer Theory, a ‘queer cabaret show combining comedy, live music, drag and performance art [where] all



queers are created equal,' was mentioned by five participants as a place-forming part of a queer scene in Glasgow (Nice N Sleazy, 2017). I was introduced to Queer Theory by Sophie:



Figure 8.2: Event poster for 'Queer Theory's Birthday Bash' held on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2017. (Queer Theory, 2017)



Figure 8.3: Event poster for 'Queer Theory: Gender Trouble' held on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2017. (Skiddle, 2017)

I have started looking for places which might be considered more genderqueer or non-binary spaces. It's not even that, though. It's just spaces where no one seems to care<sup>126</sup>. I have performed a couple of times at Queer Theory and I'm still in touch with them. There's such a variety of things – of performances, of people, of ideas, of politics and it's one of the few places where I feel like people can just be who they want to be.

Sophie's search for spaces inclusive of genderqueer and non-binary individuals, acknowledging the difficulties of finding such spaces even in urban environments, is something reflected across many participant accounts. Aeryn discusses what it means for them, saying that inclusive space is 'somewhere where you can talk about gender in non-binary terms but also somewhere that it's not a big deal. You're free to be non-binary, but that's not the only thing that's important.' While this feeling of freedom cannot be universalised across all participants who attended Queer Theory, rather than creating 'new' space that actively embraces a gender non-conforming politics, gender non-conformity can instead be used to call for a de-cisgendering of existing space. Within Queer Theory,

being genderqueer is not a binary opposite to cisgender, but rather, in genderqueer spaces, one finds both cisgender normal *yet also* resistance/subversion of these norms. Genderqueer space, then, is not a binary opposition to cisgender space. The space contains and resists gender normativities. (Johnston, 2018: 92)

Queer Theory seems to be built upon the principals of a decentring and an expansion of gender understandings: one which advocates for a critique and a questioning of norms, rather than a destructive opposition to normalcy. This slackening of regulation and policing of gender by event organisers, venue staff and between patrons of Queer Theory contributes to a feeling that 'no one ... cares' (Sophie). In this context, 'no one ... cares' is used as a way to show that those who also frequent Queer Theory do not see gender non-conformity as a point of contention, in that they are not perturbed by non-conforming embodiments of gender.

Gender non-conformity and transgression – political, sexual or otherwise – is a key part of Queer Theory performances that resist and play with gender and sexual normalities. In my

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<sup>126</sup> Sophie's stipulation that 'No one cares' presents an interesting counter-point to socially conservative media narratives and the image of the 'special snowflake'. The term has been used disparagingly against those whose individuality 'infers a sense of entitlement, an untamed narcissism, or a form of identity politics that is resistant to free speech' (Nicholson, 2016, n.p). Sophie articulates that, rather than focusing on individuality, they infer that their gender identity was not 'something which rendered them 'special'', or something to be interfered with by others.

field notes, I note some of the visual cues that shed light on how gender is queered by those around me:

I heard a scream of 'YAS QUEEN' from behind me and looked round. I noticed that there were a lot of people who (at the very least) were clearly playing with gender: queering it reminding me that gender non-conformity can be but doesn't have to be centred around identity as such. Guys wearing makeup, women with short hair holding hands. There was no angst about being there and looking, however you wanted to look. There was an androgynous looking drag performer, two guys erotically dancing, wearing women's underwear and clingfilm around their chests like a binder. One of them was so feminine, wearing makeup and a long wig, but at the same time it was possible to see the contours of his cock through the laced panties. The masculine homoeroticism of the performance with the femininity of their bodies, hair and underwear was obviously supposed to be transgressive, confusing and sexual. (Field notes, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017)

Non-conforming, queer bodies transgress masculinity and femininity and work with these constructs to antagonise gender. The shifting presentation of individuals, and the negotiation of doing this performance within spatial and temporal contexts, renders bodies as illegible to others and reminds geographers to 'grapple with more flexible and unstable realities and slippery, unstable knowledges' (Nash, 2010: 587). As in Chapter 5 and 7, this slip-sliding is done materially, using clothes as a way to challenge and perform non-conformity, thereby blurring the distinctions between differently gendered bodies. As noted in Chapter 5, the spatialities of these gender non-conforming practices are key. However, while the pantomime highlighted a sharp distinction between an onstage permissiveness of gender transgression and an offstage erasure of it, in the case of Queer Theory the performance space seems to be much more fluid and dialectical. Both the audience and the performers express gender in non-conforming ways, permeating the boundary between theatrical performance and everyday performance of gender non-conformity. Browne (2005: 241) notes:

Blurring the boundaries between man/woman offstage may contest the man/woman dichotomy through which normative everyday spaces are (re)produced as well as empowering individuals to move beyond the proscribed sexed boundaries on or off stage. In other words, taking account of the spatial illustrates the complexity of reading sexed embodiments and identities, further contesting the dichotomisation of man/woman.

Although it is unclear whether audience members and performers identify with or express a non-conforming gender identity outwith the space of Nice N Sleazy, Queer Theory still works to provide space, beyond the stage itself, for non-conformity to exist. The active mis-

performance of gender is central to Queer Theory as a momentary counterpublic. Applying Muñoz's (1999: 147) theories on counterpublics, Queer Theory resists cisgender discourse since all majoritarian public discourses are here 'challenged by performances of counterpublicity that defy ... discriminatory ideology. Counterpublicity is disseminated through acts that are representational *and* political interventions.' Mapping performances that resist local (and more universal) gender ontologies unveils hegemonies and empowers non-conforming genders through the act of politically disentangling and challenging those hegemonies.

Sophie's quote also refers to the 'variety' of bodies that attend Queer Theory, addressing the intersectional intentions of the event. Scholars have critiqued queer communities for their implicit erasure of queer people of colour (Rosenberg, 2016), Crip queerness (Sandahl, 2003) and gender non-conforming individuals (Bell *et. al.* 1994<sup>127</sup>), advocating instead for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to queer investigation. These frustrations are also felt within communities in Glasgow. Dean, an organiser of Queer Theory, reflects upon some of the ways in which the event attempts to decentre itself from commercial and more exclusive spaces in Glasgow:

Most commercial gay spaces in Glasgow (and elsewhere) are focused on cis gay white men and increasingly on straight 'allies'. I am a cis, gay, white, man myself, but I feel more comfortable in spaces where all queer people from across the LGBTI+ spectrum come together. My aims in starting Queer Theory two years ago were to provide an opportunity for myself and my queer friends to perform regularly and to create a queer night that deals in challenging political content. I want to book people who are doing something experimental and have something interesting to say. And my focus is always on queer performers. Nice N Sleazy was a good venue for Queer Theory because I think the dark basement vibe really suits the night. The venue has a lot of grit and attitude which is what I'm going for. The staff are very supportive and have been happy to put up gender neutral toilet signs [Figure 8.4] and a safe space policy for us. (Dean, *Queer Theory*, 3rd April 2018)

Dean's quote indicates that his frustration with the mainstreaming of sanitised, depoliticised forms of queer politics was the primary impetus for establishing Queer Theory. Rather than

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<sup>127</sup> Placing emphasis on the expression of gender, Bell *et. al.* (1995) also discuss how drag performances can be used to parody the seriousness of heterosexuality (I would also add the naturalness of cisgender). They posit that 'The excessive performance of masculinity and femininity within homosexual frames exposes not only the fabricated nature of heterosexuality but also its claim to authenticity. The 'macho' man and the 'femme' woman are not tautologies but work to disrupt conventional assumptions surrounding the straight mapping of man/masculine and woman/feminine within heterosexual and homosexual constructs' (p.33). Queering the presumed interdependence between gender identity, gender expression and sexuality is central to this paper, and is something overlooked within many gay and queer geographies.

using a space conventionally classed as part of the gay ‘scene’ in Glasgow, Dean has sought to create queer space away from this established strip. His objective has been achieved by queering space socially by reaching people from across the ‘LGBTI+ spectrum’ (ibid.), but also within the built environment, working with Nice N Sleazy to ensure a common safe space policy and ensuring that toilets were gender neutral and accessible. Additionally, key for Dean has been ensuring that Queer Theory is not only a place of social safe space for gender non-conforming people, but also one that critically engages with and challenges politics. The blurring of these boundaries between social space and political space is essential in ensuring that Queer Theory responds to and engenders an inclusive agenda.

This politicisation of queer space is vitally important. Queer Theory, and those who use the space subvert the heteropatriarchal uses of urban space, within a venue with little queer history or real queer representation, to fashion a new queer space for those neglected by commercial gay spaces. Performances at Queer Theory then, may offer a valuable intervention in the heteropatriarchy of majoritarian public space. Contesting this space for political change means that Queer Theory is able to (re)work hetero/homonormativities but is also able to produce minoritarian spaces (Muñoz, 1999). Baydar (2012: 700) writes that the production of space at any given moment ‘is a continuous production process which involves a complex interweaving of actors and material components.’



**Figure 8.4: Gender neutral toilet signs used at Queer Theory. (author's own material)**

While much can be said about the importance of ‘actors’ and performers of gender non-conformity within these spaces, the (de)/(cross)gendering<sup>128</sup> of the ‘material components’, and how these components are materially embodied, is also critical. Ahmed (2006), when considering queer phenomenology, encourages researchers to consider the relationships between bodies and objects and the importance of their meeting in the creation of queer space. Scottish understandings of gender histories and norms, agency over one’s own identity and expression, and place-based queerings, are here intimately interwoven into/through queer space creation. Cowan, reflecting on their experience of queer world-making through cabaret, discuss the importance of these queerings:

Together with the other folks in this scene (and like so many queer, trans-, feminist and other minoritised artists past, present and future), we were creating shows in the image of the world we wanted to live in, bringing into existence a reality that we didn’t see elsewhere, designing shows to attract the people we wanted to be together with. We were hacking together our own existences.

Creating and projected an image of more liveable worlds is key within world-building practices but this can never be done smoothly or effortlessly. It involves a ‘hacking’ of space through queer existences to create queer alliances. Within spaces usually considered heteronormative, primarily being occupied by a heterosexual, cisgender clientele at other events, means that Queer Theory plays a disruptive role in challenging these geographies. It is the more routine heteropatriarchal regulation of gender and sexual norms within this space that allows Queer Theory to have such radical and resistive politics, creating inclusive space for non-conforming individuals. The repetition of gender transgressions at Queer Theory allows queer worlds to exist: existing as sites of empowerment and creating queer realities developed through diverse encounters (Andersson *et. al.* 2011) with other gender non-conformers. In repeating the behaviours, presentations and queerings of others, distortion becomes normalised, making ‘new futures possible’, while also allowing individuals to ‘[go] astray, get lost or even become queer’ (Ahmed, 2006: 554).

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<sup>128</sup> Cross-dressing often refers to the act of crossing from one gender to another, in most cases using clothes and makeup to dress as or to embody womanhood. The term also has a unique queer history which is covered in depth by Bullough and Bullough (1993). I have tentatively suggested the use of ‘de-gendering’ for two reasons. Firstly, I use it ontologically to step away from the pervasiveness of the gender binary, just as performers are not seeking to move across a gendered binary from one pole to another. I also use it to consider how gendered assumptions (about behaviours, sex, expression, identity etc.) can be de-assumed. How can gendering be confused, disrupted, taken apart or played with? This goes beyond the act of dressing and considers the ways that gender can be disrupted more broadly (see also the span of arguments made in my two historical chapters).

At times, Scottishness played an important role in the performances at Queer Theory. Furthering discussion on how Scottishness can be conceived through a particular form of non-conforming and/or nationalist Scottish politics – one that resists and challenges Conservative politics in Westminster – similar conceptualisations of what a resistive Scottish politics might look like were played with at Queer Theory. I write in my field diary that, ‘one of my favourite performers of the night read their own poetry in broad, Robert Burns-esque Scots, cleverly discussing issues like bad dates they had on Tinder, a ride home on a bus and also the effects of austerity’ (Field diary, 3rd April 2018). Importantly, Wood (2012) discusses at length how notions of Scottishness can be explored and (re)produced through performance (in a similar way to those embodiments of gender non-conformity and performance explored in Chapter 5). At Queer Theory this form of Scottish identity was built through performances which critiqued Westminster austerity politics, queerly challenging the normativities of political discourse while also allowing gender non-conforming participants to take part in these community-based discussions. This paradoxical assemblage, which binds nationalism and Scottishness as ways of being non-conforming, allows Scottishness and gender non-conformity to be co-constitutive within the Queer Theory event, exposing additional ways in which non-conformity can be read through gendered performance, queerness, identity and space.

To what extent, however, is Queer Theory capable of radically queering Glasgow’s urban environment? Given that Queer Theory is a monthly event that uses Nice N Sleazy as a place to break from conventional understandings of gender, it is important to question Queer Theory’s wider importance in creating a liberatory gender non-conforming geography. When looking beyond the everyday to consider ‘special events’, Browne (2007: 66) uses Pride events in Brighton and Dublin to consider the temporality of queer events. Queer Theory offers participants the opportunity to ‘resist hegemonic, normative heterosexuality through playful deconstructive spatial tactics,’ but it is crucial not to understand this space as entirely free of hegemonic structuring. Critiquing cisnormativity and gender politics at Queer Theory may provide a ‘safe space’ for participants such as Sophie, but I question to what extent this non-conforming gender politics is enacted and played with beyond the event itself. When discussing the Scottish Queer International Film Festival (SQIFF)<sup>129</sup>, Willow discusses the radicality of queer spaces:

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<sup>129</sup> SQIFF is a not-for-profit film festival takes place in Glasgow with the aim of promoting and screening queer cinema and to ‘create inspiring and informative events alongside challenging inequality and barriers to accessing the arts’ (SQIFF, 2017).

That was just amazing, in terms of the atmosphere ... everyone there was just a person: not a gender or sexual orientation. I was there for three days and I saw a bunch of stuff. I was so happy to be there ... I mean it's amazing that SQIFF exists but it's quite ... it's the exception I guess. These things are great, but they're always limited. That feeling of being in a utopia never lasts long. I want to feel that free and open about stuff all the time, regardless of where I am.

For Willow, the restrictions of this queer 'utopia' fail to become a queer non-conforming reality or to deconstruct everyday gender hegemonies. These limitations mean that radical approaches to queer politics are often temporally and socially bound. Despite this restriction, Jones (2013: 3) frames these queer utopias as 'not necessarily allow[ing] for complete emancipation or even happiness but are (still) suggestive of the potentiality for the future: they give hope.' Thinking of queer utopias as 'simply an autonomous space in which to breath' (ibid.) allows participants, at least momentarily, to create preferable queer lives in places where identity self-determination and inclusivity are fundamental. These spaces offer a possible insight into queer futures as desired by participants, offering a gender non-conforming inclusion rarely found in many places with what I dare to term a more 'conventional' queer history.

### **8.3.2 Changing (gender) queer urban geographies**

Frustration at commercialised gay spaces in Scottish cities, spurring a desire for a 'scene' more reflective and inclusive of gender (and sexual) non-conforming identities, is shaping contemporary queer geographies in Scotland. As with queer urban research undertaken by Andersson (2009: 56) in East London, participants develop certain countercultures and queer counter-spaces away from the 'more sanitised gay culture' present in more established and highly marketed sites. A diversification of gender identities, and the desire to feel safe and included irrespective of gender expression, has meant that some participants disassociated with gay bars in Scotland's cities (see Brown, 2014). Jio argues that gay bars are 'just not keeping up. Things are changing. It's not enough just to sell cheap drinks to gay men anymore.' The creation of non-conforming gender geographies coincides with the decentring of queer geographies as participants shape their own scenes that look beyond the categorisation of gender and sexuality. Instead, they create spaces where the regulation over gender is loosened, making it easier for participants to negotiate social spaces and to reduce spatially-determined feelings of gender dysphoria. Alex talks about the importance of finding 'new places to hang out in Edinburgh':

It's sometimes strange where you find queerness. I don't like gay bars any more. They're too same-y and I never felt as if I belong in them. They're all the



same. Me and my queer friends find them kind of dated. I think the problem is they are too sexualised. Basically, they're places for pretty, masculine guys to hook up. If you don't act or look a certain way, they've got little time for you.

Alex's concerns about her erasure from gay bars is what drives her desire to find queerness in other places. Whereas much geographical research has focused on the sexualisation of gay and lesbian spaces, producing 'sexy' research, this has often been to the detriment of understanding queer geographies through a gendered lens. Alex says that an emphasis on gay male sexuality<sup>130</sup> in queer spaces has left her feeling detached from any particular community or scene. In challenging any emergence of a gay/queer dichotomy, Nash (2011: 194) notes changes to queer politics in attempting to become more inclusive:

Traditional gay and lesbian spaces have often (but not always) provided safe harbour for myriad other sexual and gendered minorities, behaviours and practices. Gay and lesbian social and political organisations have changed their names to some formulation of 'LGBTQ' to be more inclusive of those operating outside of or beyond normative sex(uality)/gender binaries.

Participants note that this move, from gay bars to queer bars, does not always translate in practical terms. A failure to recognise gender non-conforming identities raises important questions about 'who' is represented within 'communities' across gendered, sexualised, racialised and embodied spectra. While this erasure politically reflects the power relations and knowledges produced and circulated within queer spaces (Nash, 2010), a rejection of such marginalisation demonstrates the agency and community-creating capabilities of those who transgress and resist hegemonic configurations of gender and sexuality.

This social erasure of participants is responsible for a political shift in queer urban politics. A move away from commercialised gay bars has been largely fuelled by a perception that 'gay bars are only after your money. They don't care about community or giving back' (Terry). Dean, the organiser of Queer Theory, voices some of his frustrations at the gay scene in Glasgow:

I do think it's a problem that so many gay bars (Polo, Riding Room, Dels, Club X, Underground, Speakeasy) are owned by the same company<sup>131</sup>. And I think it goes without saying that [their] primary focus is not on supporting the queer community but raking in the pink pound. If a queer person was to move to

<sup>130</sup> Although hegemonic representations of male masculinity and its complicated relationship with same-sex relations in gay bars has been written about by queer scholars (e.g. Johnson, 2008).

<sup>131</sup> The G1 Group is a bar and hospitality company which owns over 50 venues in Glasgow, Edinburgh, St. Andrews and Aberdeen. Dean notes that six of Glasgow's gay bars are owned by G1.

Glasgow and ask me where is good to go, I would not recommend any of the 'gay bars.'

The monopolisation of Glasgow's 'gay bars' has left some gender non-conforming participants believing that G1 group has become complacent, moving away from an inclusive community-based politics to pursue instead a commercialised ambition which 'rakes in the pink pound'. Concerned with the apoliticisation and commercialisation of homonormativity, geographers (e.g. Bell, 1995) have long engaged critically with the pink pound (and pink currencies more widely: e.g. Oswin 2005)) and the marketisation of LGBT identities and the assumed 'extensive disposable incomes of LGBT people: allowing them to afford an abundant range of luxuries'<sup>132</sup> (Matthews and Besemer, 2015:95). Hubbard (2001: 62) adds that this marketisation and public visibility depends on compromise: 'lesbians and gay men must (paradoxically) continue to mark off their bodies as different from the heterosexual 'norm', leading to a public 'acceptance' of certain queer bodies but an ongoing suspicion of all who do not comply with such moves. This lack of support for 'the queer community' is identified as occurring in both Edinburgh (Alex) and Glasgow (Terry, Willow), showing the desire for inclusive spaces that contribute to the feeling of a localised queer community. Terry adds to this frustration:

Take Polo for example. I think it's the biggest gay bar in Scotland. You go in and it's a load of men and that's pretty much it. They don't have gender neutral toilets. All their posters are young guys in jock straps. There's no representation for anyone else. They have 'Queer Fridays' which is frankly insulting. It means nothing. Instead, me and my friends look for somewhere more inclusive: more political and more radical. At the very least I want to be able to pee without hassle.

A lack of willingness to engage with a diversifying plethora of gender non-conforming identities, and a lack of acknowledgement and representation of non-conforming gender identities, has hence led to an abandonment of gay bars in Glasgow by some, decentring from traditional gay spaces, as new, queer spaces such as Queer Theory are carved out through social and political means. However, Traies (2015 in Formby, 2017: 29) argues that it is exactly this erasure that catalyses community closeness. Formby writes that 'community 'closeness', to an extent, relies on people being 'outsiders' and the more 'outside' people are, the more the need each other.' This was vocalised by one performer at Queer Theory, who articulated that the event represented those who did not fit into existing queer

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<sup>132</sup> Matthews and Besemer (2015: 95-96) nonetheless note that the myth of gay wealth in Scotland is perpetuated by a greater media interest in 'wealthy and famous people who identify as gay, in combination with a long-standing association between gay men and high-end fashion.'

urbanisms: “You are supporting the community that doesn’t fit into anything!” I note in my field notes: ‘I found this a powerful sentiment, both in terms of the event allowing for alternative expressions of gender and sexuality, but also as an active step away from the rejection they felt in mainstream gay spaces’ (Field notes, 15<sup>th</sup> March 2017). Rather than facing a lack of representation passively, the degree to which participants are erased is itself the impetus for carving out new queer spaces to exploit the gaps – both socially and ontologically – left by commercialised gay scenes.

While most places understood to embrace gender non-conformity – socially, politically and structurally – were in Glasgow (e.g. Art School, The Poetry Club (Elliott), Stereo (Dean)) and Edinburgh (e.g. Sneaky Pete’s (Alex)), it is worth noting that the search for gender non-conforming spaces also took place in other cities. DIVE in Dundee (Aly), Sloane’s Castle pub and Brewdog in Aberdeen (Rory) are examples of venues that have enabled gender non-conforming participants to carve out queer worlds in spaces not otherwise marketed, advertised or represented as gay scenes or without notable histories associated with queer activism and socialisation. As non-binary ontological understandings of gender gain political and social traction at national and individual scales, the way in which these understandings are embraced or neglected by gay spaces – or by the owners/operators of such spaces – will influence queer urban futures across Scotland. Yet, while gender positions beyond the binary do become more widely understood and commented upon by media in Scotland, this issue has also led to a rebuttal of such gender identities, contributing to a restructuring and solidifying of gender politics within specific spaces.

## **8.4 Resisting change: heightened genderism and non-binary erasure**

As more light is shone on non-binary gender ontologies in Scotland (Brooks, 2017) and as these ontologies become part of political discourse, some participants report that ‘people are being more open towards conversations around gender’ (Jess). Decentring the relationship between masculinity and femininity, querying their assumed correlation with men and women respectively, has been central to how gender is expressed in different contexts. Breaking down these deeply engrained assumptions is an ongoing process, bringing with it exciting political potential and the ability to readdress gendered inequalities across communities, but this excitement has been met with resistance. As a more dynamic queer politics and practice comes into focus, heightened anxieties rise and spaces giving agency to gender queer lives have now come under increased scrutiny. A diluting of gender

essentialisms has occasionally been faced with increased regulation over access to spaces, communities and events.

Much debate surrounding the policing of non-conforming gender expression and identity stems from anxieties expressed within what have become known as trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) narratives (Jones, 2016). Spearheaded by Janice Raymond's book *The Transsexual Empire* in 1979, TERF discourse concerns itself with the enforcement of the gender binary and the essentialisation of womanhood – reserved only for cisgender women, straight or lesbian. Through asserting that 'she-males' seek to invade women's spaces, sexualities and gender with the aim of patriarchally taking control of women's lives, Raymond states:

All transsexuals [sic] rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artefact, appropriating this body for themselves. The transsexually constructed lesbian-feminist often is able to gain entrance and a dominant position in women's spaces. (Raymond, 1979: 104)

While Raymond's language may be outdated, the essentialising of gender and access to space is obviously key to her argument<sup>133</sup>. Access to femininity (and masculinity) and controlling how it is expressed is a key which allows or denies access to specific spaces. Restriction to 'pure women-only spaces' (Valentine, 2002:149) has been written about across queer scholarship, focusing particularly on women's sex spaces such as bathhouses (Nash and Bain, 2007; Hammers, 2009) and contributing to what Nash (2010: 589) calls a 'no-penis policy': medicalising and anatomising who has the 'right' to access or belong to specific spaces. This anatomising of gender non-conformity extends beyond urban sexscapes. This literature provides clear examples of a 'return' to Raymond's violent, essentialist embodiments of gender difference within queer spaces, arguably closely aligned to standard heteronormative, conservative discourses. Spatially, Raymond also alludes to an invasion of women's spaces by 'transsexuals': a narrative which has been adopted by anti-trans media outlets and TERF activist groups (see Green, 2018).

Jess talks at length about their discomfort when embodying femininity and the response that

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<sup>133</sup> Before reflecting upon the experiences of participants who have been denied access to spaces because of an assumed disconnect between their gender identity, gender expression and their anatomical sex, it is important to note that I do not wish to create a false dichotomy between right-leaning, social conservatism and left-leaning, gender-liberal positions. On the contrary, the exclusion of trans and gender non-conforming individuals can be found across this spectrum, including within radical 'progressive' movements.

it provokes within women-only<sup>134</sup> spaces. While acknowledging that they are ‘read as a woman’, by expressing elements of masculinity, they found that their access to women only spaces was restricted by other queer women. Jess reflects upon their experiences within SheBoom Drums, ‘reputedly Europe’s largest women’s drumming ensemble’ (SheBoom Drums, 2018):

I think there are too many people there who are refusing to change. I’ve had some friends that I feel quite alienated from because of their rigidity and their refusal to acknowledge change. It’s so essentialist. It’s really hostile for trans folk. I was hanging about with SheBoom and they were all sort of essentialists. The whole TERF thing is an issue. They refuse to learn anything or think about things in that different way, all the people that I used to hang around with. Nobody is saying that they can’t be women. I don’t understand how being non-binary, wanting to exist and be heard is a problem. A lot of people just find it easier to conform, but I never have. I’ve found it impossible to conform.

As Jess began to ‘understand’ their own gender, they found themselves increasingly disconnected and rejected from women-only spaces: losing friends and being faced with increasing frustration at a rigid upholding of the gender binary. A heightened sense of genderism hence influences how Jess now negotiates women-only spaces, since femininity is policed by other members of the group. Fighting for the right to exist as a non-binary person made it impossible for Jess as they failed to conform to a hegemonic form of femininity and a standardised interpretation of womanhood. These debates – both in (re)conceptualising what womanhood might look like, and in terms of regulating who has access to spaces – have real geographical implications for those who do not conform to binary gender narratives. At the juncture of these debates, feminisms, transfeminisms, non-conformity and geography are so pointedly marked, and questions can be asked of how these ideological TERF wars are translated into materially grounded turf wars as access is fervently policed. Stryker (2006) notes the often strained relationship between trans activism and scholarship due, in part, to some feminists’ attitudes towards trans-identified people with Hines, (2017: 10) adding that ‘long inscribed feminist treatises of bodily autonomy are forsaken as feminists query other women’s genitals and rebuff their hormonal and chromosomal make-up in the policing of feminist space.’ Queer exclusionary politics within these feminist spaces reinforces the hegemonic gender binary and limits the possibility for bodies, identities and subjectivities to change, bend, blend or reconceptualise gender through practices of exclusion.

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<sup>134</sup> No participant offered experiences in men-only spaces.

In a different register, being involved in trade union movements while coming out as gender non-conforming left Aeryn in a precarious position. By beginning to identify as non-binary, Aeryn also found that they had to reconsider their own positioning within political and union movement structures, where their gender was often treated with scepticism or resistance. Aeryn says that being the ‘trans rep’ for Scottish trade unions meant that they felt that they were under pressure to identify as a transwoman, calling into question who is ‘trans enough’ and effectively reinstating the gender binary, so as only to allow the existence of binary trans people within these spaces. Contestations over the embodiment of ‘trans’ and the boundaries which call into question whether one can claim trans or gender non-conforming politics has been considered by Halberstam (1998), articulating that subjects who are butch-identified women may or may not have access to transgender-identification when exploring masculine identities and practices. Aeryn faced a double oppression. Not only did they not fit into a man/woman gender binary, but they also encountered erasure from trans narratives as they also did not identify as a transman/transwoman, instead occupying a gender position that exists beyond the gender binary. This self-positioning was particularly problematic within women’s spaces which were ostensibly badged as ‘trans-inclusive .... As they said they also accepted trans women into their events’ (Aeryn). Aeryn found their experiences in these spaces difficult to negotiate because their understanding of their own gender was coming under increasing scrutiny as gender restrictions were imposed:

Even though they say they’re inclusive, I find women-only spaces quite transphobic. They have a very specific way of understanding what it means to be a woman and that even goes down to the way that I look: that sort of cissexist language and questions. People see your gender expression and that is how you’re read. They shouldn’t make assumptions about my body. It kind of weirds me out that what is going on under my clothes influences what I’m allowed to take part in. I’ve started hormones now, so that’ll confuse them even more!

As gender non-conforming bodies are regarded as problematic within gender-specific spaces, the desire to categorise them into the gender binary seeks to purify how gender is understood. In the process of this purification, those who do not fit in find themselves – their gender identity, gender expression and their bodies – all called into question. Faced with the possibility of a gender that exists beyond a binary ontology, some women’s spaces attempt to ‘clean up’ those messy in-between lives, anatomising their politics, bolstering how gender is policed and effectively reinstating specific standards of binary bodies. The upshot is a re-essentialising of women’s experiences and a rigidising of how difference is expressed as a method of restricting access to events. Aeryn notes that much of this gender policing is based

on assumptions made about their identity and their body, and they also muse that this evaluation will be problematised further through their use of hormones, meaning that their body will change further: queered by medical means. At root, the dislocation and queering of gender identities, gender expressions and bodies may now face gender-deterministic politics that seek either to erase or ‘fix’ non-conforming participants.

## **8.5 Reflecting upon the dynamisms of gender non-conforming geographies**

Gender non-conformity and gender transgression have long played an integral part of queer world-making in Scotland, as explained in Chapters 4 and 5. The spaces in which gender has been played with, performed, deconstructed and politicised have given rise to gender non-conforming geographies that are never static but rather, are constantly negotiated across a variety of scales. Responding to hegemonic Scottish understandings of the gender binary and localised attitudes towards gender non-conformity has both opened up and closed down queer geographical potentials as participants seek spaces of legitimisation and validation: a fight to exist between the ontological cracks in binary understandings.

In this chapter, I have reflected upon how queer communities respond to diversifying ways of understanding gender in both social and practical ways. Historical Scottish gay or LGBT geographies, created since the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1980s, are undergoing exciting structural changes. By recognising gender and sexual identities that seek an existence outside the standard categorisations of LGBT, community groups have aimed to be more inclusive in their approach to queer politics, deregulating who has the right to claim identities, access and participation. As organisations legitimise identities that exist beyond the gender binary, they show a determination to be at the forefront of queer politics, making numerous valuable contributions to the lives of gender non-conforming individuals in Scotland. I hope to have built upon Oswin’s (2008: 100) call for the necessity of queer spaces for non-heterosexuals by adding that queer space is also a necessity for non-cisgender identities. She says, ‘There is certainly a need for ... geographical readings of queer spaces that help us understand queer cultural politics as contested sites in which racialisations, genderings and classed processes take place’. I have echoed this call by discussing Queer Theory as a site where these contestations in Scotland can be readily viewed, reflecting upon some of the everyday practices, supported by organisational policies, that aim to be inclusive of those gender non-conforming identities. Unlike the pantomime, Queer Theory is a space where gender non-conformity can be viewed and embodied on and off stage, blurring the

boundary between theatrical performance and everyday performance of non-conformity. By accepting the challenge of being critical, queerness events such as Queer Theory have provided space for the formation of non-conforming gender geographies in Scotland, allowing them to become more visible, more accessible and more representative of the plethora of queer identities that can proliferate and even flourish in such spaces. Changing queer urbanisms have contributed greatly to the lives of gender non-conforming participants, since they ‘make you feel like you belong somewhere. I don’t think many people understand how difficult it is to not belong and not to be represented’ (Rory).

In closing, however, it would be uncritical to suggest that the journey towards inclusion is unidirectional or universal. Indeed, responses to debates around non-conforming gender in Scotland have resulted in the increased regulation of gender identity and expression in certain gender-deterministic spaces. Anxieties over access to space and the disintegration of manhood and womanhood have meant that certain groups have begun restricting access by in effect re-essentialising gender to ensure that gender identity, gender expression and anatomical sex adhere to cissexist normativities. This battleground between shifting gender ontologies in Scotland – often fought by those who do not regard themselves as gender non-conforming – will have important implications for the grounded realities of gender non-conforming participants and will ultimately shape gender queer futures in Scotland, for good or ill.



## Chapter 9 Reflecting upon gender non-conforming geographies

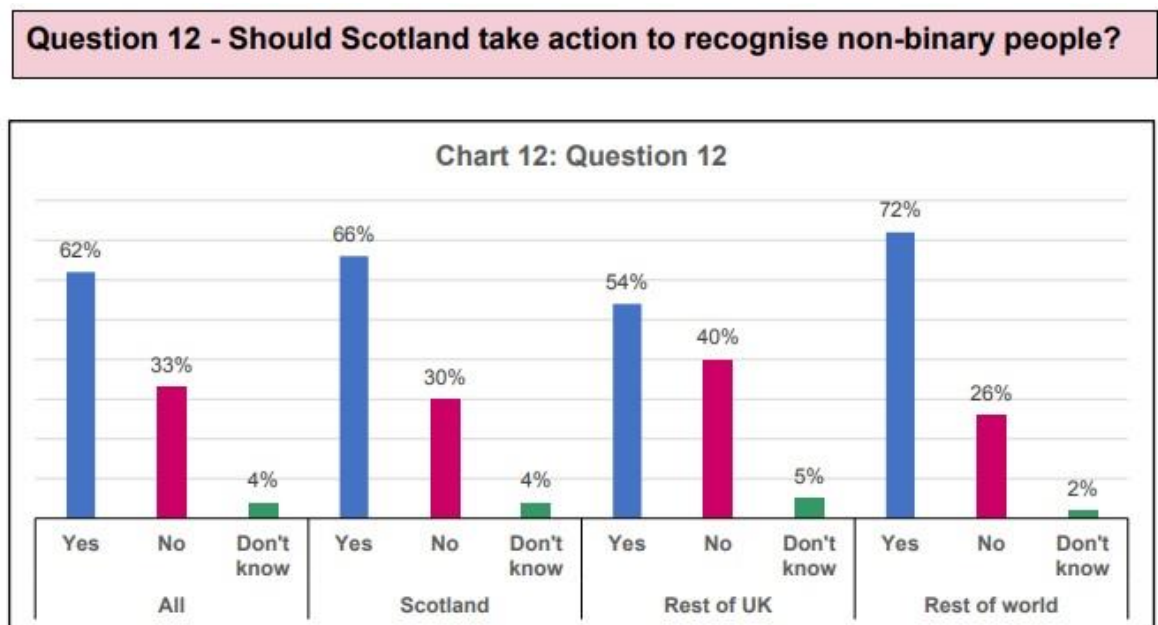
I've started, in a way, coming out. I don't do it in a way which feels unusual and, in many ways, it feels natural. Being gender non-conforming does transgress from that personal to the political in lots of ways. Taking that politics into your everyday life and making people aware of these issues might make others able to be inclusive and reach out to more people who have gender issues. We can go beyond being a slightly freakish thing that is rarely discussed and that is kept at arm's length and seen as an oddity – we move from that to begin to be more understood. (Chris)

### 9.1 Insights into gender non-conformity

Spatialising gender non-conforming lives offers a number of insights into everyday interactions that, for most, may seem mundane and uneventful. However, when positioned outwith the gender binary, living a life that is commonly thought to be beyond the realms of binary understanding forces these insignificant experiences to become significant as participants seek to negotiate normative and binary understandings of gender – socially, politically and spatially. The writing of this thesis has led to no end-point. Rather, I write this last chapter as a way of reflecting upon what has been achieved and what value can be attributed to this research before noting what limitations and caveats remain. In this, I go to lengths to avoid heteropatriarchal and extractive research narratives, instead aiming to queer any unqueer closure through instead, ending with various openings, rather than conclusive closings. I then reiterate the contributions that this thesis makes: firstly, to the fields of queer geography; and, secondly, beyond the academy. In doing this, I seek to place the stories of gender non-conforming participants at the heart of knowledge generation, creating epistemological space for those who search for a gendered life beyond the binary.

Although this chapter offers a 'coming to an end', I am reluctant to draw any overriding or conclusive observations. While the life of this project as an active research endeavour may have ceased, this finishing was partially due to the restrictions of conducting research within an academic context, sticking to orthodox academic practices, bringing with it its own methodological and ethical complexities (di Felicianantonio and Gadelha, 2016). This ending should not render this research in any way as complete or exhausted, but instead offers a queer snapshot into the lives of gender non-conforming participants whose testimonies have formed the backbone of my thesis. This fact, indeed, makes the act of 'concluding' a difficult and frustrating process as shifting, queer geographies play out across a variety of scales. Firstly, this thesis is written at a time of great political shift in Scotland, as the relationship

between the state and those who identify, to some degree, as gender non-conforming is reassessed. As the public consultation on whether or how to reform the Gender Recognition Act (2004) in Scotland comes to an end, trans and gender non-conforming individuals await to see whether this consultation's outcomes will substantially influence how state institutions may in future provide support, protections and legal recognition for gender non-conforming individuals. Already, there is clear indication that many in Scotland believe that it is time for a legally recognised third gender option to be discussed, with 66% of respondents to the public consultation agreeing that a move should be made to recognise non-binary people (figure 9.1).



**Figure 9.1: Analysis of the public consultation on the review of the Gender Recognition Act (2004), showing the percentage of respondents who indicated that 'non-binary' should be legally recognised. (Scottish Government, 2018b: 81)**

My research also offers evidence that the gender landscape in Scotland has long been a shifting one, as gender knowledges have constantly become subjugated and exposed, hidden and unearthed, and suggests that, in creating a longitudinal account of gender non-conformity, this history can be used to show the socio-economic complexities that gender has always caused. Secondly, this thesis offers a geographical shifting, this time of the contemporary, yet constantly changing, spaces, practices and politics associated with gender-queer landscapes. This queer politics is in constant flux, reacting to challenges and (rightly) reluctant to be settled or become complacent at a time when the rights of queer individuals are being challenged both at home, by trans exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) erasure of transgender and non-conforming individuals (Hines, 2017), and abroad, by for

example, threats made to the rights of transgender individuals and communities in the USA<sup>135</sup> (Green, Benner and Pear, 2018). Thirdly, I am reluctant to ‘conclude’ because the stasis of this thesis should not be mistaken for a stasis in the gender lives of participants. Gender identities, expressions and personal politics continue to mutate in relation to space, the self and other, feelings of ‘similarity [or] difference, genuineness [or] artifice, authority [or] delegitimacy’ (Bocholtz and Hall, 2005: 585), and this thesis does not seek to offer a wholesale account of the gendered lives of those participants. Rather, I offer a glimpse into the lives of participants at the time of writing, as lives are forever fluctuating and always spatially undetermined.

## 9.2 A look back through gender non-conforming geographies

This thesis has sought to create a picture of these shifting gender landscapes through mapping out a longitudinal geographical account of gender non-conformity in Scotland. In doing this, it destabilises hegemonic and cisnormative discourses that prioritise a binary gender model, creating space for understandings of gender that stretch beyond the binary to queer gender identity, expression, politics and space. In **Chapter 4** and **Chapter 5**, this is done by deconstructively reconsidering the kilt, as a gender ambiguous garment, and the Scottish pantomime, as the ‘national theatre of Scotland’ (MacKenney and Tiffany, 2002). In so doing, I unsettle gender knowledges in Scotland, using the kilt and the pantomime as tools for unearthing transgressive gender knowledges that have long been all but erased. Taking these two ‘historical’ examples, I rethink how gender has been challenged in Scotland, taking seriously the political and material importance of the kilt and pantomime as vehicles for exposing transgressive expressions of gender. In tracing the political pertinence, the shifting socio-cultural geographies and the motivations behind gender transgression and non-conformity over time, kilt and pantomime can be used to challenge hegemonic Scottish norms of masculinity and femininity, blurring the boundaries between these norms and allowing individuals to bend, blend and contort gender normalcy. This cultural queering provides an integral base for the thesis, and in doing so it gives more than just context for other chapters. Indeed, I use kilt and pantomime as evidence that gender is (and has always been) multifarious and messy in nature and that these minoritarian or subjugated knowledges (around kilt and pantomime) have long been buried or masked by hegemonic disciplinary (and academic) knowledges (Halberstam, 2011). The intentions and

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<sup>135</sup> The National Center for Transgender Equality offers a record of the Trump administrations actions against transgender and LGBT people ([transequality.org](http://transequality.org), 2018).

political motivations behind gender non-conformity are embodied and performed in different ways within different spatial and temporal contexts, but, by holistically looking at how the boundaries of gender have been challenged through time, I give insight into how this challenge contributes to – or at least could contribute more to – contemporary gender geographies within Scotland.

Drawing on threads sewn through Chapters 4 and 5, I then move on to investigate issues of gender identity, gender expression and queer-space making within contemporary Scotland. Firstly, **Chapter 6** looks at the importance of agency over gender identity and the ways in which gender non-conforming realities are spatialised and contested within and against a diversifying gender discourse in Scotland. In this respect, participants challenge the hegemony of a binary gender ontology so as to position themselves in a precarious position often conceived by them as suspect or non-existent, acknowledging that they often have to confront those who seek to delegitimise ‘their languages, practises, theoretical analysis and ultimately, their very existences’ (Knopp, 2004: 122). This chapter is concerned with the travelling, translating and learning of non-conforming gender knowledges, and asking too, how these knowledges are embodied by participants. While agency over identity is seen as a marker of progressive and inclusive politics in Scotland, Oswin (2008) notes the importance of considering queer politics beyond the scale of the individual – to develop collective queer knowledges and to deploy them against structural oppressions such as sexism, homophobia and transphobia. By using Spivak’s (1985) concept of ‘strategic essentialism’, I discuss how some participants seek to create a coalescing politics. These strategic alliances and the building of a gender non-conforming politics are all essential as the gender landscape in Scotland becomes increasingly politicised, and as the relationship between gender and the state is progressively (or regressively) reformed.

Moving away from gender identity towards gender expression, **Chapter 7** addresses how participants negotiate the gender binary across various spatial contexts. Through using the notion of ‘genderism’ (Browne, 2004) to discuss the experiences of gender non-conforming people and how gender is policed across various contexts, I discuss how participants work with or reject the gender binary through altering their gender expression in different spaces. Masculinity and femininity, and the material ways in which they are both represented, provide both potentials and pitfalls for participants as they negotiate social worlds that still privilege a binarised, even polarised male masculinity and female femininity. As also discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the manner in which gender is embodied and expressed has significant political consequences, and seeking a gender non-conforming existence to satisfy

an internal sense of self is often balanced against the anxiety of external delegitimisation and stigmatisation. In this chapter I also provide a new and nuanced understanding of ‘the closet’, using the informative work of Brown (2000) as a basis for questioning how gender non-conforming lives are negotiated – both spatially and epistemologically. I tie this move together with the highly politicised ‘bathroom problem’ (Browne, 2004), reframing the bathroom as a (water) closet – a site where being out or ‘appearing out’ queers the binary of being out/in and complicates the geographies of those gender non-conforming bodies as they negotiate bathroom spaces.

Drawing together issues of gender identity and gender expression – both in an historical and a contemporary sense – **Chapter 8** works to consider how gender non-conforming geographies are forged ‘on-the-ground’, responding, as they do, to both hegemonic Scottish understandings of the gender binary and localised attitudes towards gender non-conformity. Taking seriously the gender non-conforming knowledges discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I reflect on the practical ways whereby queer communities respond to diversifying means of understanding gender. In relinquishing the categories of LGBT politics as solidifying modes of difference, I consider how community groups have aimed to be more inclusive of those who exist outwith these categorisations, striving to create a more inclusive and non-conforming politics. I explore Queer Theory, a monthly queer cabaret evening in Glasgow, as a site where queer contestations in Scotland can be readily viewed, and I reflect upon some of the everyday practices at this evening that aim to be inclusive of gender non-conforming identities. This chapter notes how these changing queer politics and changing queer urbanisms impact the lives of gender non-conforming individuals, but, in closing, this chapter also considers the potential contestations and conflicts emerging from this diversification of gender. Anxieties over access to space and challenges to conventional expressions of masculinity and femininity have even led to a re-essentialisation of gender within certain spaces. Regulated by a trans exclusionary discourse, trans and gender non-conforming individuals find themselves on the battleground between shifting gender ontologies in Scotland. Thus, contemporary debates around gender issues have implicitly geographical impacts on the grounded realities of gender non-conforming people in Scotland, ultimately influencing Scotland’s ever-shifting gender landscape.

### 9.3 Intentions, Reflections, Limitations

Looking back through my experience of researching gender non-conformity in Scotland, it is apparent that, while broad initial research aims were set out, these were then influenced

by participants as they shaped and added nuance to what my project was addressing. In truth, these aims remained amorphous for much of the research, allowing participants agency to (re)direct these aims in ways relevant and appropriate to their own multiple concerns. In this section, I will return to the research aims set out in Chapter 1, reflecting upon the degree to which these were satisfied, while also thinking critically about the potential limitations of my research.

Firstly, this thesis aimed to demonstrate the deep-rooted cultural and social importance of Scotland's non-conforming gender history, attempting to decolonise hegemonic gender knowledges and allowing geographers to examine the spatialities and politics behind Scotland's gender non-conforming pasts. In Chapter 4 I used the kilt as a vehicle to queer the gender binary, questioning the stability of masculinity and femininity in Scotland, and seeking to identify a non-conforming politics in Scotland stretching from the kilt's 16<sup>th</sup>-century origins to its contemporary uses. Tracing the history of the kilt in and of itself does not fully capture its potentials for being read as a gender-queer garment, however, and so I also used the kilt to show the intensely political implications of clothes and materiality, something discussed widely in Chapter 7. These material politicisations affected/affect the everyday geographies of those who transgress gender and cultural norms. Wearing a kilt often had potentially severe consequences for those who wore it under the Dress Act (1746), just as wearing clothing of the 'opposite' gender today may elicit hostile reactions due to genderism and transphobic abuse. Furthermore, the kilt also contributes to notions of identity, belonging and a collective politics of otherness. As Chapters 4, 6 and 8, note the politicisation of gender identity has the potential to be deployed beyond the individual, articulated through struggles against state institutions in both historical and contemporary contexts. Throughout Chapter 5, Scottish pantomime was used to show how gender transgression and non-conformity are understood and embodied within certain spaces, additionally noting the importance of performance as a medium through which to distort gender normativities, alluding to the spaces that allow for, or may indeed encourage, challenges to the gender binary. These threads also informed much of Chapter 8, which shows the present and ongoing ways that performance is used to critique binary gender ontologies, using the event night Queer Theory as a space in which this critique is practically undertaken.

Of course, more examples of how gender is b(l)ended, contorted and challenged could have been given. I could also have focused on more explicitly queer aspects of Scotland's gender

non-conforming history, such as those written about by Meek (2015)<sup>136</sup>. This would have given a more recognisable example of the various ways in which gender has been queered in Scotland, but it would not have allowed me to provide an alternative way of thinking about gender geographies in Scotland, instead focusing primarily on cross-dressing narratives and gender transgression undertaken by queer men. In discussing kilt and pantomime, I propose that gender non-conformity in Scotland has a much deeper history than many recognise. I argue that this move offers an under-acknowledged example of how gender knowledges become colonised through forms of oppression, erasure and subjectification. Critical anti-colonial scholarship, for example, that which has been undertaken with Two-Spirit communities in Canada to value indigenous queer knowledges (Hunt and Holmes, 2015), has been instrumental in critiquing colonist gender discourse. Doing something approximately similar in a Scottish context does not offer insights into non-binary gender identities *per se*, nor does it seek to render the colonisation of gender knowledges as comparable to those of Canada (as doing so would risk erasing Scotland's own role in colonisation: Fry, 2002). Nonetheless, I hope to offer a more nuanced look at how gender has been queered by those non-normative bodies challenging gender normalcy, past and present, sometimes with an element of a 'colonial' periphery refusing to bow down to the prescriptions of an alien foreign power.

The relationship between Scotland, Scottishness and gender non-conformity is indeed a complex and at times perplexing relationship which is played out differently across different spaces and at a variety of scales and temporalities. However, in what ways are Scottishness and non-conformity interrelated and co-constitutive? Firstly, I have detailed how non-conformity can be used to create a unique form of Scottishness and Scottish identity. At times, Scottishness exists as a form of identity in opposition to Englishness or Britishness, materially and politically gendered to create a form of resistance, as demonstrated in Chapters 4, 6 and 8. At other times, Scottishness is created in relation to or alongside Englishness, blurring national boundaries and queering the distinctions made between these. As noted in Chapter 5, gender in Scottish pantomime is in many ways similar to the long traditions found elsewhere in Britain (but also includes many Scottish particularities) so as to create a form of Scottishness in relation to or alongside Englishness. Through Chapters 6 and 8, again, the Scottishness of gender non-conformity is created against Conservative and

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<sup>136</sup> I am aware that in searching for alternative ways in which the gender binary has been queered, I may be guilty of projecting queerness upon those who challenge gender and political hegemonies. This is not to read those individuals or communities as queer in an identitarian fashion, but rather to recognise their power to challenge the ordinary and the normal.

Westminster rule, crystallising a set of distinctions made through public performances of nationalist and/or inclusive discourse. As highlighted in the introduction, non-conformity and Scottishness can be read as ‘things’ that are both queer, shifting, fluid, relational and spatial, positioned at different distances from idealised and hegemonic conformity at different times and in different spaces: together, apart from, in opposition to or against Englishness. Furthermore, Scotland’s non-conforming politics also enables opportunities for non-conformity to be lived through moments of distinctive Scottishness. As detailed in Chapters 6 and 8, a nationalist politics in Scotland by the SNP has made vocal calls for inclusivity for gender non-conforming people, with this impetus now culminating in the reformation of the Gender Recognition Act (2004). This political or civic creation of a distinctive form of Scottishness which is inclusive and progressive (Leith, 2008) is created socially, but also in opposition to Conservative rule in Westminster. Rather than reading Scottishness as a singular identity per se, it can still be acknowledged that this development has led to a coalescence around a particular form of seemingly non-conforming Scottish politics, in opposition (or in response) to Conservative rule, which aims to be more inclusive of gender non-conformity in Scotland. Finally, reading Scottishness and non-conformity as being co-constitutive, I have sought to queer Anglo-American gender and political hegemonies within queer geographies, framing a post/de-colonial form of Scottishness as a rejoinder to Anglo-American thinking and provoking conversations about decolonising gender knowledges.

Secondly, this thesis sought to provide a snapshot of the contemporary gender queer landscape in Scotland, questioning how identity can be understood through queer politics, queer contestations and queer assemblages. Through Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I used the testimony of gender non-conforming participants to consider the plethora of ways that gender can be queered and how this is understood in a Scottish context. Participants discussed, in depth, their conceptualisations of their own gender identities, giving individualised framings of how they position their gender in relation to the prevalence of the gender binary. These highly personal and deeply qualitative accounts are instrumental in showing how gender ontologies are being queered, and how alternative gender knowledges are being accrued and understood by individuals. However, as noted above, these individual accounts, rather than contributing to a common sense of the ‘other’, also highlight many contestations that exist *within* gender non-conforming communities. In spite of this fracturing, this thesis also works to bridge the gap between the individual and the collective, avoiding or at least sidestepping the divisive critiques of identity politics (Sothorn, 2006), yet not seeking to abandoning them completely, risking the erasure of gender nuance



(Clifford, 2000). Instead, I search for a middle-ground – between individual and collective – by using ‘strategic essentialism’ (Spivak, 1985), which encourages individuals to create potentially provisional and temporal assemblages around specific political aims.

Reflecting upon this research aim, it is clear that the variety of gender identities presented through this research does imply that forging commonality in spite of difference may be a difficult and arduous task. However, in Chapter 8 I hope to have used Queer Theory, the event space, as a way of demonstrating how a politics of self-determination and individuality can be used to create new spaces that provide room for these queer contestations to exist, while also allowing queer assemblages to form. It is also worth noting the potential shortcomings in fulfilling this aim. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 3, my participant cohort was all white and, while some offered reflections on experiences from other EU countries, the experiences of gender non-conforming individuals of colour are not represented through this thesis. This is regrettable, of course, posing a potential limitation to my intention to create an intersectional research framework<sup>137</sup>. That said, as noted in Chapter 3, because my methodology prioritised an open opt-in and self-declaring approach to recruitment, I felt that undermining that ethos would risk assuming the gender identity of potential participants, and so I did not feel comfortable in searching for specific voices or experiences that might fill, as it were, ‘gaps’ in my intersectional grid.

While identity was one of the primary concerns of this research, another central aim was to account for how participants navigate and negotiate the gender binary across different spatial contexts, focusing on the everyday ways in which participants materially explore and express their gender to create more comfortable lives. Historically and contemporarily, in Chapters 4, 5, 7 and 8, I took seriously the political impetus that materials, such as clothes, make-up, and jewellery, carry in gender non-conforming lives. In Chapters 7 and 8, I examined how participants negotiate the gender binary. Balancing a search for self and a way of expressing internalised notions of gender with the regulatory regimes that police gender performance, participants exist in a constant state of negotiation: getting away with what they could, so as to live gender-queer lives while taking steps to safeguard against the perceived threats of genderism and transphobia. I discussed how participants push at the boundaries of localised

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<sup>137</sup> Despite politically queer intentions, my thesis also does not focus upon other, often neglected points of intersection such as noting the specific geographies of older gender non-conforming bodies, fat queer geographies, Crip queer geographies and queer-class geographies. Other geographers have tackled some of these issues (such as undertaken by McGlynn (2018) on the geographies of sexuality and fatness in gay and bisexual spaces). Rather than necessarily being a self-critique, this acknowledgment of course offers up further directions for investigation.

configurations of gender normativity, disclosing the material, behavioural and social techniques that they adopt to negotiate these norms across various spatial contexts. In this regard, Chapters 6, 7 and 8 discussed how participants seek to create more comfortable lives for themselves, through a process of expanding gender understandings and world-making practices.

There is clearly a vast range of motivations explaining why, and to what extent, participants seek to queer normative expressions of gender. While some participants are more radical in their intentions to rubbish stereotypical expressions of gender, purposefully adopting garb that renders them as illegible within binary understandings of gender, others more subtly look to create their own space within gender social worlds. Thinking about the ways that I do this, depending on where I am and the social context in which I find myself, proved, to some degree, a useful way of thinking about how gender expression changes over space for participants. Chapter 7, specifically, flagged up situations that provoke particularly difficult negotiations faced by gender non-conforming participants. Here, I built upon work undertaken by Brown (2000) on the epistemology of ‘the closet’, to consider what a gender non-conforming closet might look like, using the space of the ‘water closet’. This dual conceptual and empirical move uses the bathroom as a specific point of contention across trans and gender non-conforming geographies, (re)imagining how gender non-conforming individuals negotiate spaces which are physically and epistemologically built to erase the possibility of a life beyond the binary. They are places/sites of gender confrontation, where ‘the cultural phenomena of gender is literally built into places and spaces’ (Johnston, 2018: 60) While this thesis focuses on toilets and single-sex spaces as flash-points for gender regulation and genderism, perhaps there is more potential to consider other examples of these flashpoints in more depth.

The final aim of this thesis was to consider the practical and performative ways through which a gender non-conforming politics can be adopted, creating spaces that allow for (or perhaps encourage) an existence for gendered lives beyond the binary. Here, Chapters 5 and 8 in particular worked to show how performance in Scotland has been deployed as a technique to queer gender normality: creating gender transgressive characters and exposing audiences to gender puzzlement and mismatch in both a historical and contemporary sense. Stages<sup>138</sup> across Scotland have provided space for gender non-conformity to exist but, in

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<sup>138</sup> I purposefully use the term ‘stages’ to note the importance of the stage as a site that has allowed gender non-conformity to exist, either as performance or as an everyday practice. The

historical terms, also keep it hidden in plain sight of audiences. Chapter 8 thinks critically about how performance and practical steps towards inclusion shape gender non-conforming geographies. They serve to inform, create and produce queer spaces that, physically and epistemologically, make gender non-conforming lives possible while simultaneously taking on a political role in queering and resisting the gender binary.

## **9.4 Contributing to gender non-conforming lives: in the academy and beyond**

This thesis seeks to make several key contributions both within human geography and beyond the academy. In doing so, I have contributed to the exciting and burgeoning fields of queer and feminist geographies and ‘sexuality and space’ geographies that have fanned in many directions, seeking to create cutting-edge research that ultimately aims to challenge inequalities faced by gender and sexual minorities across space and place. While my interventions contribute to these theoretically and politically active debates, I also want to pose the potential benefits of this research beyond the academy. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted, conceptually and methodologically, to place gender non-conforming participants at the centre of knowledge-building, reflecting on their on-the-ground experiences. In keeping with this intention, I would like to offer potential contributions that could be adopted from this thesis and that would, I believe, benefit gender non-conforming participants as they seek to form and legitimise gender non-conforming geographies.

### **9.4.1 Contributions to academic knowledges**

Firstly, this thesis advocates for the deployment of gender non-conforming geographies as an ontological, epistemological and methodological tool. I wish to open up the geographical potentials for gender non-conformity, contributing to the ways in which queer geographical research is undertaken, to analyse physical space and to create epistemological space for those queer individuals who position themselves outwith conventional categories of gender and sexuality. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, I deploy non-conformity for a variety of reasons. I use it as a way to capture the experiences of individuals in a fashion that stretches beyond individualised identity politics, bridging the gap between the personal and the collective to challenge cissexist and heteronormative discourse – valuing difference, but

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‘stage’ here has double meaning: firstly, as a space of performance (as noted in Chapters 5 and 8); and secondly it is used in a wider sense to describe where gender non-conformity challenges performative and normative expressions of masculinity and femininity.

constantly looking for threads of commonality (and difference) to challenge normativities. I also use it to look beyond gender identity categories, to question how gender identity and expression can be understood as separate parts of participant lives, disrupting the cissexist assumption of a matching between internalised notions of gender and the way that it is performed. Instead, I look for the spatialised nuances based on everyday decision-making processes that influence how gender is expressed differently within different spatial contexts. Finally, I use it to (re)read gender across political, historical and geographical contexts, understanding that gender non-conformity resonates in different ways in different places, and that queerness can be articulated and mobilised in different ways across temporal and geographical scales. Introducing gender non-conformity to queer geographical thought, provokes a number of questions: To what extent does the lack of research in this area signal the relative absence of resources, confidence and access to institutions for gender non-conforming individuals? How does this marginalisation along class, gender, racial and sexual axes materialise because of this under-theorisation? How does exclusion spark solidarities? These potential future lines of inquiry show non-conformity's malleability, allowing it to be shaped and appropriated across research.

Secondly, within 'sexuality and space' research, this thesis aims to shift the intellectual balance to position gender queerness as a way of interrogating inequality, place and power so as to create a more-than-sexual geography. This move was made both conceptually and reflecting upon participant testimony to acknowledge that, while questions about sexual identities, practices, preferences and performances are important (and indeed very gendered), there is still an imperative to dislodge or decentre issues of sexuality yet remaining deeply within the thread of queer geographical thought. Although singling out gender as a point of difference, it is clear that participants often have an intersectional understanding of their gender and how it can be understood through educational, class and sexual lenses. This thesis hence builds upon the work set out by Browne (2004; 2006b) and Nash and Bain (2007) to consider critically how gender expression and identity is embodied, policed and regulated across different spaces. Through this focus, I also call for a loosening of hegemonic and binary epistemes of gender within academic geography in order to take seriously the innumerable ways in which gender is understood and embodied beyond the categories of man/masculinity and woman/femininity.

Thirdly, this thesis encourages geographical inquiry to explore the interconnectivity between affect, materiality, behaviours, histories and contexts that are intimately gendered and geographical in nature. The ways in which certain masculine and feminine performativities

are used, rejected, read and understood across different spaces reveals how gender non-conforming ontologies are inexorably geographical. Thinking critically about how these material geographies challenge the stability of locally (re)produced masculinities and femininities also exposes the numerous ways in which gender is regulated, always in relation to conforming and normative gendered bodies. Here, I use Browne's (2004) influential work on 'genderism', in some senses building upon this foundation, to consider how gender non-conformity – from the subtle shifts away from hegemonic configurations of masculinity and femininity to the radical queering of gender mixing, bending and blending – is regulated, embodied and policed across a variety of spatial contexts and social worlds. My thesis contributes to these debates: firstly, by providing deeply empirical accounts of how gender non-conforming participants negotiate this gender policing; and, secondly, by considering how these policings are resisted across different spaces in order to create gender non-conforming geographies.

Finally, this thesis provides a longitudinal study of gender non-conformity in Scotland. I contribute here to the very narrow field of queer geographical research in Scotland, looking at the multifarious ways in which gender has been queered and distorted over time, at how gender transgressive pasts inform and influence hegemonic masculinities and femininities, and at how these pasts, in turn, become part of contemporary gender non-conforming geographies. While much queer geographical research has consulted with the spatialities of individuals and communities in sites boasting a more well-established and celebrated queer history, this research positions Scotland as an alternative site for inquiry. Through this reorientation, I have accounted for the experience of gender non-conforming people across different environments in Scotland, gathering testimony from both urban and rural environments and challenging the ongoing metro-centricism of queer research. I also account for Scotland's unique gender history through queer readings of kilt and pantomime, to provide a flavour of the multiple ways in which gender has been queered, spatialised and politicised in Scotland's past. I have taken these threads to inform how I have approached present-day gender non-conforming geographies, drawing them through this thesis to illustrate how gender histories and geographies contribute to the non-conforming geographies of today.

#### **9.4.1 Contributions beyond the academy**

This thesis also seeks to make potential contributions to gender non-conforming lives beyond the academy, reflecting upon ongoing debates and the shifting everyday lived

geographies of gender non-conforming and queer individuals. Firstly, as detailed in Chapters 1 and 6, the relationship between gender and the state in Scotland is changing, invoking debate which is often highly divisive and sometimes transphobic in nature. This politicisation of (non-conforming) gender citizenship is culminating in the reformation of the Gender Recognition Act (2004), which may greatly impact how gender non-conforming individuals interact with state processes at all levels: particularly if a third, legally recognised gender is introduced, meaning that government policies must be updated to offer protections that incorporate the protection of non-binary people on legal grounds. Reflecting on how this shift may be implemented, I contribute to these political debates (especially in Chapter 6) through revealing how gender non-conforming participants (who hold a variety of gender identities) envisage this legal change taking place and how it would be most beneficial to them.

Also, within the context of the reformation of the Gender Recognition Act (2004), this thesis is also positioned to advocate for a politics of self-declaration on the grounds of gender, following the political ambitions of the Equal Recognition Campaign, as set out by the Scottish Trans Alliance and the Equality Network. Participant testimony in this study highlights the highly social and personal ways in which gender is understood, as they reflect upon the fluctuating and increasingly relational means by which gender is comprehended. Thus, this thesis could be used to argue against the arduous and often highly traumatic current process of changing legal gender. As gender politics in Scotland shifts, opening up the possibility for a third, legally recognised gender, it is clear that the process of requiring a psychiatric diagnosis for gender dysphoria is inappropriate. This intrusive requirement – essentially ‘diagnosing’ gender identity – places psychiatrists in the inappropriate role of gatekeepers for legal rights and protections and so, in keeping with policies recently devised in Ireland (Giambrone, 2017), this thesis can be used as evidence of how trans individuals may be assisted through a process of self-declaration – not requiring medical-psychiatric sanction – allowing them to access spaces and more easily be granted legal protection.

Thirdly, using the testimony of gender non-conforming participants, I have mentioned some of the organisations and community groups heralded by participants as being inclusive of diversifying gender politics. This thesis details how these organisations take practical steps to create safe spaces for those who are perhaps more precariously situated within most queer spaces. Through interrogating how gender non-conforming geographies are generated, socially and politically, this thesis offers examples of best practice for organisations who wish to become more inclusive of gender non-conforming individuals. Chapter 8 sets out the

tactics undertaken, either by national groups such as LGBT Health and Wellbeing or through self-organised student or local groups, to be more inclusive of diverse gender (and sexual) identities, allowing new non-conforming gender spaces to emerge.

Finally, this thesis offers a deep insight into the everyday lives of gender non-conforming people in Scotland. I have attempted, as much as possible, to place their experiences and understandings of gender in Scotland at the heart of this investigation. This work, ultimately, has aimed to shed light on the ongoing and complex spatialities of those who identify beyond the gender binary. I do not wish to continue with the contrived and problematic notion of ‘giving voice to’ minority subjects (see Bryne, 2017), as this thesis shows that gender non-conforming individuals have always had a voice and a place within Scotland’s pasts. Instead, I hope that I have managed, using my own privileged position working as a university researcher, to have opened a space in which these voices can be heard. This valuable testimony is from those who currently find themselves positioned precariously at a legal and social crossroads, awaiting to see which direction a future gender politics in Scotland might take.

## **9.5 Contemplating gender non-conformity**

Researching gender non-conformity in Scotland has dramatically impacted how I personally think about gender, sexuality, identity and politics, both in terms of how I pose as a social geographer but also in giving me numerous points upon which I continue to reflect beyond the ‘writing up’ stage of this thesis. In Chapter 3, I talk at length about the importance of adopting queer methodologies and the critical and ongoing questioning of positionality through queer research. These are not things that I wish to repeat here, and instead I will simply offer some final and personal thoughts on my experiences when researching gender non-conformity, thinking in particular about how issues of gender, sexuality, identity, expression and politics play out across a variety of scales and geographical contexts.

Firstly, I have great admiration for my participants and how they challenge normative understandings of gender, complete with the innumerable ways in which they embody such non-conformities. Although this thesis has attempted to capture some of the material, behavioural and social ways whereby participants live their gender non-conforming lives, it would be impossible adequately to capture the intricate and complex ways that individuals do this living. While some participants took more overt and confident steps to oppose or juxtapose the gender binary, using masculinity and femininity to distort the cisnormative

alignment of gender identity, gender expression and sex, others undertook more subtle or covert resistances, such as changing their pronouns with their friends or by making more subtle alterations such as wearing painted nails in places where they felt safe to do so. Others, however, made no outward-facing changes at all, regarding their non-conformity as something internalised and contained within the self. Of course, these experiences form three points on a spectrum along which participants may position themselves differently in different places. While initially attempting to find potential trends, coping methods and adaptations associated with gender non-conformity, I soon noted that non-conformity should be seen as something highly heterogenic. While I have looked beyond the individuality of gender identity, to see how these idiosyncrasies can contribute to a collective politics, these political constructions are limited in capturing the individual ways in which gender can be challenged through the minutiae of quotidian life and encounter. Perhaps frustratingly, an attempt to capture experiences and formulate these into a thesis structure did not seem entirely useful, as asking questions of gendered understandings inevitably cast up still further questions and potential lines of inquiry.

Secondly, the situations through which gender non-conformity is thrown into sharp focus also surprised me during this research. As someone who is primarily masculine-identifying and who embodies some stereotypical characteristics of masculinity, my own experience was always going to be limited as I (would imagine) that I rarely provoke gender confusion in others. It is because of this self-positionality that participant testimony was not only valuable to this thesis, but also to myself, my understanding of gender barriers and oppressions, and my knowledge of issues that gender non-conforming people face on an everyday basis. Talking to participants about their methods and techniques of negotiating the gender binary illuminated particular issues and circumstances that I would never have considered as being problematic for people who do not conform to either man or woman. While much, often contentious, notability has been given, across academic and non-academic spheres, to issues such as access to toilets, other issues such as those experienced when buying clothes, getting a haircut or applying for passports or driving licenses gave me further insight into the structural ways whereby gender non-conformity is erased and excluded from public life. Bearing witness to the highly personal and thought-provoking testimonies of participants' experiences, when they tried to negotiate these problematic interactions, afforded me a privileged glance into these social worlds in ways that affected me beyond the role of the voyeuristic researcher, making me increasingly empathetic and politically conscious of such issues. Noting how participants sought to alleviate the discomforts and awkwardnesses of such situations, it seems that, for the majority of



participants, much of their motivation for negotiating binary interpretations of gender comes from the desire to search for more comfortable or more liveable lives – it is not always overtly ‘political’; it is about everyday getting by.

Thirdly, the effect of participant stories on me has been, at times, intense, but also highly rewarding in a personal capacity. In Chapter 3, I reflect upon how others may or do read my gender, and how I express my gender differently in different places, realising that my assumed stability of my own gender was flawed. Furthermore, I discuss the effect that this realisation has upon my own gender anxieties, as participant stories resonate with my own unease with ‘not quite fitting in’. While I do not wish to claim or assume commonality with my participants, their stories continuously allow me to question how I perform my own gender differently in different places, challenging the universality of masculinity or femininity and questioning who is able to embody these comfortably and confidently. When discussing affect and identity, Curti *et. al.* (2011) note that, within everyday lived, affectual geographies, identity is being constantly produced – reworked and influenced by human and non-human interactions, the sharing of knowledges and stories, and the places in which gender is embodied. In Chapter 6, I discuss how participants access, learn, take part in and live with and through gender non-conforming knowledge, but it would be naïve of me to assume that I was immune to or detached from these discussions. The transferring and travelling of gender non-conforming knowledge was also happening to me through carrying out this research. Through questioning how gender non-conformity was conceptualised and spatialised, I was indeed witnessing, embodying and engaging with gender non-conforming knowledge.

Fourthly, I wish to reflect upon this research within wider contemporary queer politics. In creating a longitudinal study of gender non-conformity in Scotland, it is clear that non-normative embodiments of gender have long been a part of Scotland’s social and cultural landscape. While there is now a plethora of articles, human interest stories and awareness videos available on social media and news outlets drawing attention to the existence of non-binary and gender-queer lives (e.g. Brooks, 2017), this representation and exposure should not be understood as a unidirectional path towards a gendered landscape built upon full-acceptance and self-identification. Geopolitically, a worrying and growing rebuttal of gender diversity can be seen within and beyond Scotland. Chapter 8 discusses the fraught and highly contested TERF politics that has attracted notable attention, particularly in response to the possible reformation of the Gender Recognition Act (2004) and around issues such as access to single-sex spaces. Yet, this exclusionary politics extends further. Worrying trends point

to increasing intolerance towards queer individuals across many countries with the election of right-wing governments, populist leaders and a move towards illiberal democracy. Particularly notable and recent examples include President Donald Trump's rolling back of transgender protections in the USA (Steinmetz, 2017), and the presidential election of Jair Bolsonaro, a self-declared proud homophobe in Brazil (Phillips, 2018) – each of these countries having its own deeply engrained and long gender non-conforming history (Bolich, 2009). Positioning the concerns of my research in these debates, it seems essential that gender and sexual minorities do not take perceived 'advances' on rights and protections as constant, recognising that these landscapes are always vulnerable to change or, indeed, regression. It is also clear that the everyday queerings of gender become enlivened by gender geopolitics, however, and I am hugely inspired by the community-building organisations and institutions that work endlessly to form political alliances designed to challenge oppressions such as sexism, homophobia and transphobia, creating spaces where these oppressions can be resisted and constructing an environment for the betterment of gender non-conforming lives.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Recruitment poster



## Beyond the binary: the everyday experiences of non-conforming gender in Scotland

My name is Grant Anderson and I am doing a PhD at the University of Glasgow which works with people who do not identify with or express traditional gender boundaries, such as **non-binary, genderqueer, intergender, agender, genderfluid, third gender, or many more.**

I am looking to find out more about your interpretation of gender, how the gender binary restricts your gender identity or expression and the different ways that you express and gender and negotiate and reject the gender binary.

If you are over 18 and identify in any way with a non-conforming gender, your voice and your experience is important! You are the experts and I would love to hear your experiences and perspectives of what life is like for a gender non-conforming person in Scotland. Participant information will remain confidential and will be used exclusively in this thesis.

If you are interested in taking part and helping with my research, and would like more information, please contact me on [g.anderson.2@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:g.anderson.2@research.gla.ac.uk) or 07896728917 to find out more.

## Appendix 2: Information sheet



### The Geographies of Gender Non-Conformity in Scotland: beyond the binary

My name is Grant Anderson and I am a PhD student in the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences at the University of Glasgow. I am currently working on a research project which explores the geographies of those people who do not identify as male or female, but instead, go beyond, or transgress the gender binary to include identities such as non-binary, genderqueer, transvestite, cross-dresser, intergender, non-gender, genderfluid, third gender, or many more.

I would like to invite you to take part in the research project, which is part of my PhD at the University of Glasgow. If you would be willing to take part, please take a few minutes to read the following information. Please feel free to ask any more questions you may have about my research. My contact details can be found below.

Participation in the research will involve taking part in a semi-structured, informal 'interview' with myself which will last up to 1 hour. These conversations are carried out to gather in-depth information on your experiences of being out with the gender binary, how you negotiate this and what issues have arisen from it. Questions in the interview will be used to gather your thoughts on how the gender binary limits gender expression and the different ways in which gender can be challenged and deconstructed.

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. Should you decide to take part in the research, please be aware that you hold the right to withdraw at any time. I acknowledge that exploring some of the themes of the research may be triggering and therefore, you can decide to pause, end or reschedule the interview at any time. Should you decide to withdraw, all research data will be destroyed and will not, at any time, be used in the analysis or writing up of the research. Information which is gathered in the interviews will only be used as part of my PhD. Quotes and analysis will be used during the write up process.

If you give your consent, the interview will be recorded using a dictophone. Should you decide you do not wish to be recorded, I will take notes, which you will be able to read over after the interview. You will remain anonymous at all times during the research process and will be identified using a pseudonym chosen by you.

My project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee of my College and is designed in accordance with Economic and Social Research Council ethical framework. If you would like to contact my academic supervisor about any concerns, please email Professor Chris Philo at [christopher.philo@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:christopher.philo@glasgow.ac.uk)

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Mobile number: 07896728917

Email address: [g.anderson.2@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:g.anderson.2@research.gla.ac.uk)

## Appendix 3: Consent form



Name of Researcher: Grant Anderson

Name of Funder: Economic and Social Research Council

Please read the statement below and check the boxes if you agree to give consent to the statements. This form will be kept in a secure location and accessed only by the researcher.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. I have read and understood the information sheet provided by the researcher.   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I have been briefed on the content of the research and have been given the opportunity to ask any additional questions.                                      | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that participation in the research is completely voluntary and that I hold the right to withdraw input at any time.                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I have been made aware that information which I provide will be kept anonymous and that I hold the right to be identified in a way which I deem appropriate. | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I agree for the interview to be recorded.  | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I understand that the information provided, may be used in the writing up of the research.   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I agree to take part in this survey.   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

Signature of participant: .....

Signature of researcher: .....

Date: .....

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School of Geographical and Earth Science, University of Glasgow, G12 8QQ, Glasgow, UK

Mobile number: 07896728917

Email address: g.anderson.2@research.gla.ac.uk

## Appendix 4: Personal details sheet



### Personal details sheet:

Please complete the form below to best describe yourself:

Name :

.....

Age:

.....

Gender Identity:

.....

Gender Expression:

.....

Sexual orientation:

.....

Preferred Pronouns:

.....

Location of interview:

.....

Name to be used in project:

.....

Highest level of educational attainment:

.....

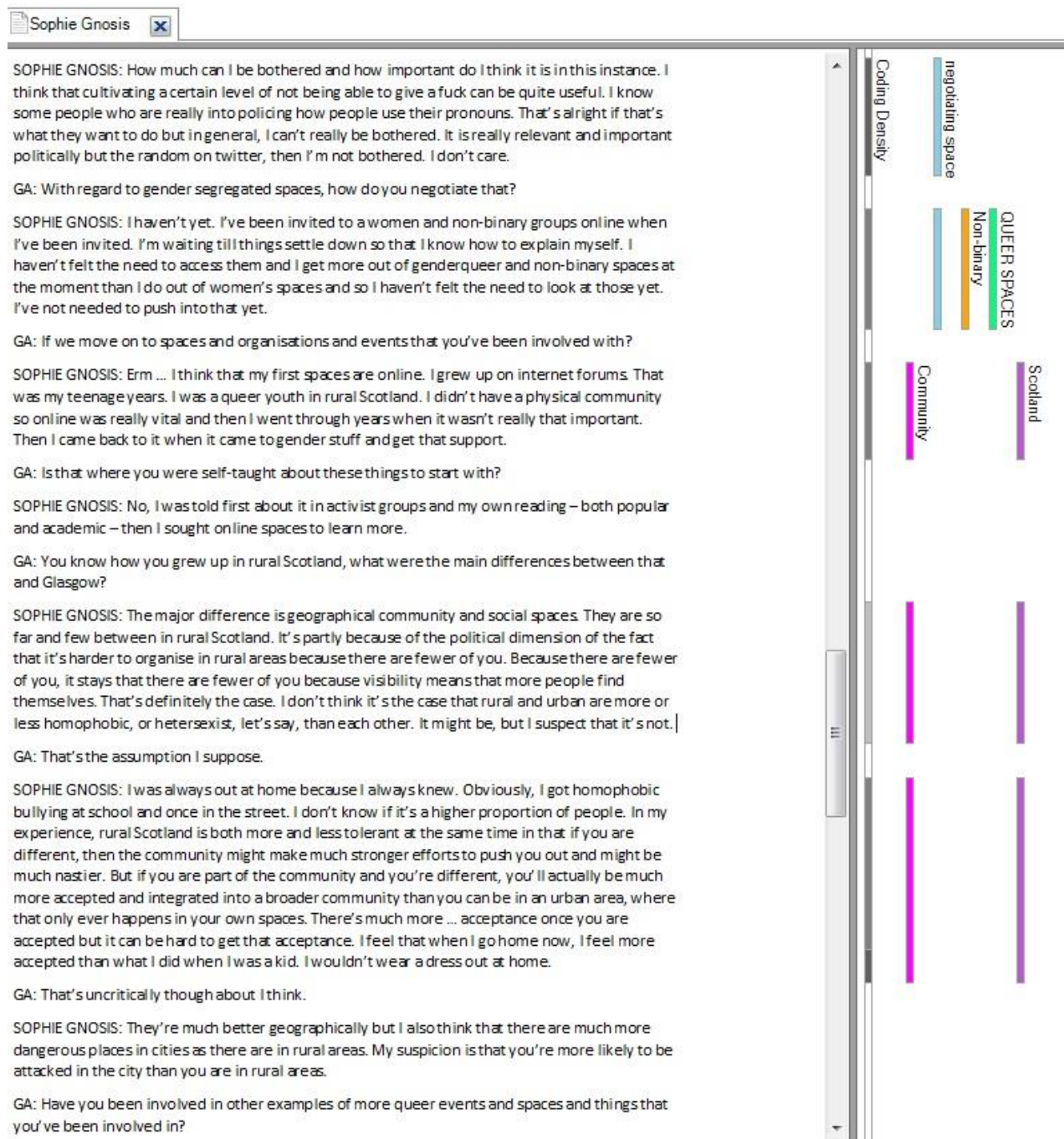
## Appendix 5: Interview questions

Interview questions :

- 1) The participants interpretation of their own gender:
  - a. Why are certain labels chosen and why? Do these change and if so, what determines this change? Location? Company? Threats?
  - b. Participants conceptualisation of their own gender – what they identify as and what they do not identify as? New categories? What makes sense to them?
  - c. Becoming visible/ invisible as part of their gender identity and gender expression.
  - d. How are masculinity and/or femininity expressed? Queer ways of merging these?
  
- 2) How does the traditional Scottish gender binary limit gender expression and gender identity?
  - a. With regard to safety? Genderism (the policing of genderism) – how is one's gender regulated? Where and by who?
  - b. Places which are avoided? Why? Geographies of (un)safety?
  - c. How to avoid (mis)gendering by others? How do subtle forms of genderism impact on the lives of gender transgressive people? Is this deflected or embraced?
  
- 3) Spaces – both physical and political – as a way of expressing/ negotiating gender identity or expression?
  - a. Queer ways that the binary is rejected? Events? Visibility? Are spaces limited and if so, to where?
  - b. Thoughts on community building – is this important or not? How does this work when gender is sometimes seen as so fluid?
  - c. What would expand social inclusion? What does the participant see as the issues here? Why do you think increasing numbers of young people are identifying as gender non-conforming?
  - d. Queer ways in which the gender binary is rejected? Intersections with sexuality/ sexual orientation? How does performance differ from performativity?



## Appendix 6: Screen grabbed example of coded transcript



## Glossary

Definitions are taken from the gender blog ‘It’s Pronounced Metrosexual’ (2018) and also include some notes taken from participants as they describe their own understandings of what gender identities mean to them. These labels are not unproblematic and are fluid, with each participant using them in a nuanced way.

Agender	A label used to express no or little connection to any gender identity.
Androgynous	A gender expression which includes both elements of masculinity and femininity: to be indecipherably gendered.
Asexual	Used to describe a person who ‘experiences little of no sexual attraction to others’ and has a lack of interest in sexual relationships.
Assigned male at birth (AMAB)	A term often used by transgender and non-binary people whose gender at birth, was legally registered as male (although legally, the sex and gender of a child are conflated)
Assigned female at birth (AFAB)	A term often used by transgender and non-binary people whose gender at birth, was legally registered as female (although legally, the sex and gender of a child are conflated).
Binary Trans	A bracket term for those individuals who may have a transgender history, but identify in a way that indicates a move from one gender pole to another (from man to woman, or vice versa) rather than identifying within some kind of gender middle ground.
Cissexism/Cissexist	A system of social hierarchisation which privileges those who identify as cisgender (those who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) to the detriment of those who identify as transgender individuals.
Cross-dress	Used to describe a person who wears clothes of ‘another gender/sex’. This can be used as an identity label, as a practice, or to describe the physical act of dressing in in the clothes which are not thought to be designed for one’s gender.
Drag King	Someone who performs an exaggerated form of masculinity as a performance

Drag Queen	Someone who performs an exaggerated form of femininity as a performance
Dysphoria	<p>I have used this in two ways:</p> <p>Gender/body dysphoria: the feeling of disconnect between one's own body and their internalised sense of gender. Participants may 'do things to [their] body such as wear different clothes, take hormones' or seek medical interventions to change their body to ease feelings of gender dysphoria. (Terry)</p> <p>Social dysphoria: the feeling of being misrepresented by assumptions made about gender based on gender expression. Ace says, 'social dysphoria means things like using my real name or pronouns.'</p> <p>Dysphoria is affected by geography as gender expression is always positioned against localised framings of masculinity and/or femininity. Often, the distance from which one transgresses from these hegemonic expressions influences to what extent dysphoria is experienced.</p>
Gender expression (gender presentation)	Expression focuses more on the way that one embodies and presents their gender identity – how this is communicated to others through coded gender behaviours, clothes (materiality). Most gender expressions incorporate elements on a scale of masculinity and femininity to create a gender expression which reflects themselves.
Gender identity	This is the internal sense of one's own gender and the position that it occupies in relation of social structures and hierarchies. It is 'how [one] labels themselves' in relation to gender options.
Gender non-conforming	An umbrella term for anyone who does not conform to the socio-cultural expectations of their birth gender.
Genderfluid	This is used as an identity which 'describes a dynamic mix of boy and girl'. The fluidity of this label often means that people feel internally different about their gender from day-to-day.
Genderqueer	<p>This is a gender identity which people may use as a queer way of rejecting the assumed stability of gender binary. It is often used as a loose term to that someone may use to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combine aspects of male (man) and female (woman)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe not having a gender that they identify with.</li> <li>• The internalised feeling of moving on a gender spectrum which changes depending on space and social context.</li> </ul>
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender
Non-binary	<p>Non-binary trans people do not identify with the male-female binary and position themselves distinct from or between these two poles. Non-binary can also be used as an umbrella term for anyone who does not identify with gender binary options. There are two understanding of what non-binary means:</p> <p>‘For me, it is about embracing both [masculinity and femininity]’ (Alex)</p> <p>‘Some people see it as a rejection of male and female.’ (Terry)</p>
Pansexual	A description of a person who ‘experiences sexual, romantic, physical and/or spiritual attraction’ to a person regardless of their gender identity or expression.
Sex	The biological signifier that a person is assigned at birth. The bodies are assigned ‘male’ or ‘female’ but this binary system erases intersex individuals.
Sexual orientation	Used to describe those who a person finds sexually attractive.
Sexuality	The way that a person expresses their sexual orientation. This includes sexual behaviours and practices which a person engages in for sexual enjoyment.
Transgender	<p>An umbrella term for someone who does not identify with the gender that they were assigned at birth. This can be split into two categories:</p> <p>Binary trans: those who want to transition from one polar gender to the other.</p> <p>Non-binary trans: those who seek to change from their birth gender but do not wish to transition to the opposite gender.</p>
Transvestite	Similar to a cross-dresser but a slightly out-dated term for someone who dresses as the opposite gender/sex for ‘relaxation, fun and sexual gratification’

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