

Making Space

**Disorientating bodies in trans and
queer spaces of support**

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As subjects, people have the right to define their reality, establish their own identities, name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject [...] Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story. (hooks, 1989: 42-3)

Abstract

This thesis explores young people's transgenderings through negotiations of language, bodies and experiences of different peer and community-based support spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand. It critically examines what 'support' means for young people in relation to developing subjectivities and embodiments shaped by being both young and transgender/ gender non-conforming. While these perspectives are varied, I argue that the production of community and peer-based support for those who are both young and transgender or gender non-conforming has been undergoing a period of significant change, reflecting queer and postmodern shifts which have worked to re-conceptualise the ways queer and transgender communities and peers are imagined, incorporating a greater inclusive focus on diversity. Utilising Sara Ahmed's concept of queer phenomenology and post-structuralist theory, the thesis thinks beyond binary approaches to gender and support, to consider support and gender non-conformity through the process of 'disorientation'. Throughout this project both 'gender' and 'support' are positioned as being subjective, embodied and discursive knowledges and actions, represented in multiple and contradictory ideas, identities and expressions of the different participants. The study utilises in-depth qualitative interviews with participants who are young people (aged 16-30 years) and support providers and developers of transgender/queer based support in Aotearoa New Zealand. Working with young people and support providers, this research provides an analysis of support development for transgender and gender non-conforming young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, arguing that all participants in support (both providers and recipients) are shaping its provision.

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Chapter One

The Context of 'Trans Youth' Support

The experiences and support needs of transgender and gender non-conforming (t & gnc) young people have gained growing attention over the last decade in New Zealand. This has been informed by the development of *queer* community based youth support, local transgender activism and human rights work to promote 'trans' peoples inclusion and wellbeing. The changing social landscape of queer and trans communities in New Zealand, and the peer-based support individuals and groups from these local communities provide, can be seen as a space where local practices and knowledges intersect with legislative changes and shifting global discourses about gender and sexuality, human rights and identity.

Changes in this area of support since the mid-1990s have been informed by the negotiation of queer understandings of sexuality and gender (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 1998; Jagose, 1996) which challenge an identity-based 'gay and lesbian' community model of organisation of support provision. Central to this queer challenge has been a critique of a heterosexual/homosexual binary in which a gay and lesbian 'other' is reproduced as an 'alternative' sexuality to its heterosexual 'norm', rather than challenging the dominance and normalcy of hetero-sexuality itself (Brown, 2007; Humphrey, 1999). Claims of exclusion have come from groups of people with diverse sexuality and gender experiences which fall outside of a 'gay and lesbian' homosexual alternative (particularly bisexual, asexual, transgendered and intersex people) who have not experienced the same level of increased social acceptance of their experiences and identities (Humphrey, 1999). *Queer* models offer an alternative, challenging the reproduction of a heterosexuality/homosexuality binary and dualistic and essentialist understandings of sex – gender, emphasising the diversity of sexuality and gender experiences. A queer approach is used to strategically bring together gender and sexuality non-conforming people and experiences and through education, support and activism, focus on addressing the underlying inequalities reproduced by normative discourses (Brown, 2007). A significant focus in a queer approach is providing a critical perspective to challenge the maintenance of heterosexuality and gender 'norms', especially in combating the widespread queer and trans based prejudices which work to maintain these (Brown, 2007; Talburt and Rasmussen, 2010).

Queer transformation of previously ‘gay and lesbian’ support organisations, or progressions towards greater representation of queer groups through acronyms such as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) have occurred increasingly within New Zealand communities over the past fifteen to twenty years. In the area of community based youth support, *queer* has been strategically employed to provide a supportive environment for both gender and sexuality diverse young people. This has focussed on actively representing queer support as being open to a wider range of sexual and gendered identities and expressions (rather than just lesbian and gay identities) and challenging negative or limiting stereotypes of gay, lesbian, transgendered and other gender and sexuality diverse young people. *Queer* is both used as a collective, or ‘umbrella’, term to organise around, and to create *queer* spaces where diverse people are able to individually define and represent themselves but still come together around common goals/needs as relates to their experiences. An example of its use in a New Zealand context is demonstrated by Nathan Brown:

Queer is a reclaimed word that represents sexuality and gender diversity. We use it to encompass lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, fa’afafine and takataapui identities, as well as everyone in between and not sure. This word is used by many people, but it is also acknowledged that it is not the preferred term for everyone (Brown, 2007: 7).

Brown suggests that ‘queer’ informs a way of working collectively across difference, without excluding particular groups in New Zealand youth support. A significant area of development, differentiating it from previous LGBT support frameworks, is that *queer* support is inclusive of young people who do not conform to binary understandings of gender, or who occupy culturally located identities such as genderqueer, takataapui and fa’afafine expressions.

The thesis explores this ‘queering’ of community based youth support and the shifting understandings of t & gnc young people in New Zealand. It explores the ways in which the engagement of young people in community support spaces and practices informs who they can become and how support connects with an exploration of gender identity and expression. It also considers how a range of discourses frame t & gnc young people’s experiences, examining ‘norms’ or ‘ideals’ about gender and support practices which inform t & gnc youth support development. It both recognises critiques of dominant knowledges and explores the

significance of queer perspectives and other frameworks which have become valuable tools in promoting t & gnc young people's wellbeing. This chapter considers the growth of trans youth support and the discourses/literatures which inform it. This includes psycho-medical constructions of Gender Identity Disorder, LGB(T) adolescent and youth research literature, queer critiques of this, and the notable absence of gender in LGBT/ 'queer' youth approaches. It also considers New Zealand contributions to the field, particularly the development of new frameworks informing support from human rights and queer youth development approaches.

The growth of trans youth support

Within community based queer and trans support, transgender and gender diverse young people (inclusive of a wide range of gender identities and expressions) are commonly talked about collectively as 'trans young people'. As a result of recent activism, gender-based experiences and identities have become an increasingly prominent part of providing queer youth support in Aotearoa New Zealand (Brown, 2007; Macdonald, 2011). In a presentation at the sixth Australian and New Zealand Health Conference (2007), Nathan Brown, then coordinator of OUT THERE! (a National Queer Youth Development Project), highlights this growth of trans inclusion in queer youth support based on the work of local trans people, '[t]here is a small but active core of trans advocates in New Zealand working alongside queer youth groups to raise the profile of trans young people within these groups so that they may better meet the needs of trans youth (Brown, 2007:8)." He also describes the increase in attention to trans experiences alongside queer experiences noting that, "...this year, there has been a call for *queer* and *trans* to be used when possible to give increased visibility to trans identities within queer communities" (Brown, 2007: 8).

In New Zealand there are a range of networks, organisations and spaces of queer and trans community peer-based support (not all exclusively focussed on young people) where providers are working to advocate and respond to the needs and experiences of t & gnc young people. I describe these as being 'community-based', as they are initiated by members of New Zealand's queer and trans communities, ensuring some sort of support is available for young people, particularly when they first come out. The types of supports available around the country vary in both form and structure. They include queer youth and transgender groups, as well as other spaces of support open to transgender and gender non-conforming young people such as university-based queer support, online networks and websites, community radio programmes and local publications. Generally (with a few exceptions)

these are organised in one of two ways: either as transgender-specific support which is usually open to all ages, sometimes focussing on only one direction of gender transition (female to male or male to female) and queer youth support which is focussed on young people but inclusive of both gender and sexuality diversity (with some groups have trans youth specific support groups within them).

The age range of 'young people' in support for 'trans youth' is generally between 13-30 years, although the focus age range of youth groups is up to 25 years, which is consistent with other queer youth support provision. Due to the limited amount of support for t & gnc young people, this age range is applied more flexibly and groups are often accepting of those into their later twenties acknowledging considerable stigma and fear associated with people coming out as trans. This also reflects the length of time it can take for people to access additional psycho-medical services and the importance of support through gender transition (which takes a number of years) if this is a path people choose. This indicates that those providing peer-based support ensure that people have access to the same information, peer-based support, sense of community and referral services that they need. In addition, at the lower end of the age bracket, with no specific community based support for trans children, inquiries from families of gender non-conforming young people are also common.

The longest running specific trans youth support group is provided by Auckland's Rainbow Youth, which offers a broad range of specialised groups, education and other services under its umbrella. Many other cities and some towns also have groups that run regularly, providing spaces where trans and gender non-conforming young people can meet together in a facilitated environment with either queer young people, or trans people of all ages. Transgender focussed youth groups running alongside queer youth support offer specific support to transgender and gender non-conforming young people which recognises the additional needs and experiences of being both trans and young. These needs, distinct from their queer peers or trans adults, include some trans young people's desire to transition and the associated psycho-medical resources and support which are involved in this process, interaction with young people's families (particularly with increasingly younger members coming to groups), and lastly, a focus on the negotiation of gender, rather than sexuality in young people's lives. Adult focussed transgender groups may offer this support, but do not provide youth specific support, or offer spaces exclusively for young people.

Queer and trans youth support around the country works in association and alliance with a range of organisations. These include organisations such as the New Zealand Aids Foundation, Rainbow Youth, OUT THERE, UniQ, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, Family Planning Association, Agender, Sexual Health Centres and many more, who provide a range of additional expertise and resources to support a largely voluntary field of support. A key part of the support is that it is 'peer-based', ideally offered by other queer and trans young people (within a slightly broader age bracket up to around 30 years), most who are trained as group facilitators. They offer role-models to other young trans and gender non-conforming young people and have experiences of and knowledge about additional support needs and services, such as psychologists/counsellors people may be looking to access. Who is considered a 'peer' and part of a young person's envisioned 'community' or who is involved in providing or developing this support does vary particularly beyond the accessibility of queer based 'trans youth' groups in major cities. For one trans or gender non-conforming young person, peer-based support may be provided by someone who is a middle aged transsexual who shares a common identity as a trans woman or man with them. For another young person they may consider peer-based support coming from other queer people who disrupt gender norms, who are a similar age to them but do not necessarily share a common identity. The support available is produced in different ways by different people working to meet the requirements within a variety of local contexts. Experiences of support in small centres in the South Island can be very different to those in the Auckland region where a third of New Zealand's population resides. The development of trans youth support in New Zealand coincides with intensified global gender activism over the last ten-fifteen years (see Hines, 2007b), the growth of a human rights approach applied to gender identity and expression (for example see: Balza and Hutter, 2012; Hines, 2009), and transgender studies emerging academically (Stryker 2006: 1-17). Each of these areas have offered developments in theoretical and empirical work with trans populations, produced both locally and internationally, which directly informs support and social change more broadly for trans people including youth.

This is in contrast to more dominant forms of knowledge produced 'about' t & gnc young people in which they largely remain objects of study due to being labeled as having an undesirable pathologised condition, or 'difference'. Psycho-medical, therapeutic, educational and youth development literatures provide these dominant frameworks within academic study and research that informs support for t & gnc young people globally. In these literatures (as

will be discussed) t & gnc young people are predominantly framed as being ‘at risk’ and discussions are commonly focussed around best ‘treatment’ approaches for them. There is little attention to how trans young people experience and enact their genders, little critical or queer engagement, and few studies which acknowledge local community based support work. Narratives of transgender young people are frequently ignored, generalised or uncritically engaged with which raises concerns about who benefits from the research undertaken *about* t & gnc young people, and to what extent their inclusion is useful or contributes to the wellbeing of the people themselves. These concerns inform the approach of this research, especially as there seems little congruence with the current provision of trans and queer community youth support in New Zealand and these dominant narratives. The production of these dominant academic fields, and the gaps in their contributions, raise questions about what they are working to do, and the in which ways they are contributing to the broader picture of support development for t & gnc young people. These questions inform the initial chapter informing this thesis, examining dominant constructions of t & gnc youth, and their contributions to the development of support of young t & gnc people.

Psycho-medical constructions of ‘Gender Identity Disorder’ (GID) and young people

An international psycho-medical field of clinical and behavioural psychologists and psychiatrists, medical specialists and researchers are engaged in the ongoing development of knowledge about Gender Identity Disorder(s) (GID), the psychiatric classification relating to transgender and transsexual experiences. The most current definitions are set out in the DSM IV- TR (APA, 2000) and ICR-10 (WHO, 2007) providing the criteria for the clinical identification of GID as a mental disorder. The DSM IV definition focusses on an individual’s experience of a strong and persistent discomfort with membership in their genitally assigned sex and cross-sex identification. It describes the experience of bodily discomfort in this role as ‘gender dysphoria’, the most extreme form of this being ‘transsexualism’ (Halderman, 2000: 195).

The focus and naming of the experience of ‘gender dysphoria’ is used in contemporary psychiatric diagnosis to describe the sensation of feeling ‘in the wrong body’, a narrative reproduced by both trans people and psycho-medical professionals (Ekins and King, 1996). This description has replaced previous focusses on ‘transsexual’ and ‘transvestite’ persons and instead represents the broadening scope of clinical practice and continued interest in

gender diversity. Richard Ekins and Dave King illustrate the importance of this change in psycho-medical discourse in which the concern was “[n]o longer ... with a special type of person, the transsexual, but all who suffer from gender dysphoria” (Ekins and King, 1996: 97). This highlights how clinical attention has shifted to include a greater range of gender non-conforming experiences. Implied within the pathologisation of ‘gender dysphoria’, as Sociologist Sally Hines notes, is “that those seeking hormone therapy or surgery have been born, and so are living, in the ‘wrong’ body” (Hines, 2006b: 12), negating gender non-conforming experiences as legitimate embodied possibilities. Instead, this diagnostic framework defines GID and the ‘wrong body’ discourse as a pathology requiring specialist expertise and intervention to alleviate the distress associated with gender dysphoric experiences. Alleviation is achieved through psychiatric diagnosis, and when deemed appropriate, cross-gender transition via hormonal and surgical bodily interventions which seek to bring about a stable and coherent gender expression through the body consistent with a person’s gender identity as a man or a woman.

The development of the psycho-medical discourse is well documented elsewhere (see: Ekins and King, 1996; Hines, 2007a; Stryker and Whittle, 2006) and is recognised as the dominant position through which transgender identity and experience is viewed in contemporary Western societies (Hines, 2007a: 9). It produces trans & gnc subjects as pathologised individuals and makes links to psychological and psychiatric support as spaces of diagnosis and ‘treatment’. The dominance of the psycho-medical discourse maintains a central and powerful role in the way transgendered people are viewed and understood, and shapes the options they have available with respect to hormonal, surgical and legal options (especially important in regards to funding). Ekins and King in their review of studies of transgenering, describe how “[o]ther perspectives must take medical perspectives into account whether they ultimately incorporate, extend or reject them” (Ekins and King, 1996: 75). While there are likely exceptions to this statement, it indicates the centrality and dominance of medical constructions of ‘gender identity disorder’. Other understandings and productions of transgender or gender nonconforming identities and experiences are frequently constituted in relation to it.

Dualistic gender discourses are both centralised and naturalised within the psycho-medical model of GID. The recognition of two legitimate social and legal sex/genders works to reinforce and reproduce normative assumptions of gender as natural and psychically fixed,

problematizing the bodies as sites of ‘correction’ (Ekins and King, 1996). Critiques of the medical construction of GIDs are well developed. These problematize the dualistic limitations and additionally the reproduction of the necessity for congruence between mind and body for the successful production of healthy gendered subjectivity or psychic self (Hines, 2006). The goal and rationale of medical interventions is heavily invested in the reproduction and maintenance of culturally dominant and recognisable sexed/gendered bodies and subjectivities (Ekins and King, 1996; Hines, 2007b). It also draws on adult psychological developmental ideals of a stable, singular and coherent sense of identity/self as underpinning the justification for changing otherwise healthy bodies.

Psychiatric diagnostic criteria of gender identity disorders are used throughout New Zealand providing the gateway for access to cross-sex hormonal and surgical technologies in order to enable t & gnc people to transform their bodies. For people wanting to access these bodily technologies, they require specialist referral through a General Practitioner, and psychiatric evaluation. These processes operate independently of community based supports.

GID in adolescence - Psycho-medical productions of transgendering young people

The way Gender Identity Disorders (GIDs) are constructed and discussed within a psycho-medical paradigm about professional and clinical practice when working with adolescents offers an insight into the challenges of supporting t & gnc young people. While GIDs are recognised as affecting people of all ages, how they are assessed and treated is related to developmental stages – childhood, adolescence, or adulthood. Literature produced within psycho-medical discourse focussed on GID in young people, is frequently informed by key sites of treatment and research around GID – including specialist gender clinics and programmes around the world in which young transgender and gender ‘atypical’ young people are referred. These sites have often been developed to provide specialist treatments for transgender people, aimed to be more accessible, informed and supportive. Treatment for GID generally is recognised as remaining a controversial subject within the psycho-medical field in relation to the broader field of medicine, with particular criticism directed at the practices of sex reassignment, particularly medical interventions (of hormones, and surgeries) on otherwise healthy bodies (Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008: 1892). Most controversial is the treatment of children and young people based on a perceived lack of knowledge, continuing debate around the cause of gender identity disorders, and issues surrounding informed

consent, decision-making capabilities, medical ethics and challenges in making accurate diagnoses.

As a result of the complexities in the ‘management’ of GID in adolescence, medical practitioners and clinicians are especially cautious and conservative in relation to young people. Ongoing questions remain relating to regarding the fundamental status of GID as a psychiatric disorder, as well as how this may relate to the still unconfirmed theorising of a possible biological basis (Asscheman, 2009: 106; Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008: 1892-3). Caution is particularly evident in relation to clinicians working with young people who are reliant on ‘expert’ knowledge and experience to inform their ‘treatment’ when not of a legal age to provide their own informed consent.

While informed consent and decision making capabilities are central principles in the provision of all Western medical care, there is a far greater reluctance to provide irreversible bodily interventions to young people diagnosed with GID (compared to those seen as adults), significantly reducing the options available to them. While the distinction in approach to adolescent and adult interventions is marked, this is not based on a difference in diagnostic criteria (unlike GID in children which is distinguished). Rather, the different options and ways of working are linked to psychological development models informing professional and popular social understandings of adolescent subjectivities as less stable and more ‘risky’.

From a critical perspective, Susan Talburt (2004a; 2004b) draws attention to how dominant social narratives of young people are drawn from existing psychological preoccupations which focus on the adolescent period as an already challenging time of personal change, characterising the behaviours and emotions of adolescence as “tumultuous or risky” (Talburt, 2004b: 117), not to mention being based on heteronormative and binary gender norms. Compared with those viewed as having reached ‘adulthood’, this narrative of adolescence means that young people are likely to face greater challenges in accessing medical interventions as it places more importance on stability and consistency in cross-gender identification, as well as distress caused by gender dysphoria.

The difficulties involved in providing ‘treatments’ is particularly pertinent in relation to the use of cross-sex hormones and surgeries in young people, as these create permanent changes to the body, particularly at a time when bodily discomfort is largely expected during pubertal

development for all young people. However, framing all young people's embodiments as in a period of change, leaves those with transgender narratives as less visible and coherent. One result is that their experiences may not be considered as legitimate or serious as their adult equivalents. In addition, the way that GIDs are defined (within the DSM-IV or ICR-10) and treated, highlights a shifting field which has been subject to change over time (including changing diagnostic criteria, and terminology), responding to changes in social and medical understandings of gender, sexuality and human development (Asscheman, 2009: 106; Halderman, 2000; Talburt, 2004a).

The concern and uncertainty surrounding the treatment of transgender young people for psycho-medical professionals can be seen in calls from within this field for a greater focus on the development and standardisation of processes and protocols for working with adolescents, specifically relating to diagnosis and assessment by professionals (Asscheman, 2009: 106). Failure to engage with the assumptions informing the development of diagnostic criteria and knowledge about the adolescent period, is likely to contribute to clinician reluctance to engage with the complexity involved in the provision of psycho-medical interventions to young people. This can be seen in the hesitancy to provide interventions to those under eighteen (or sixteen with additional parental support) and an ongoing focus on informed consent processes and decision-making capabilities in discussions within the literature (Cohen-Kettenis and Pfäfflin, 2003).

The most recent debates surrounding medical interventions for adolescents with GIDs has focussed on the availability of hormone blockers (GnHR analogs) and the appropriate use of them (Asscheman, 2009; Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008). Hormone blockers provide the possibility to pause puberty in the body to alleviate further secondary sexual body development. As a fully reversible intervention this is seen as a beneficial option largely in order to enable more time for the consideration of the need for hormones or surgeries. However, research in the U.K. and Holland indicates that it is presented as the only option for young people until they are able to give their own consent for cross-sex hormone treatments (Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008: 1894-5).

Weighing up the usefulness of hormone blockers against the known risks involved has led to them being widely used, although debate around the appropriate age continues with a focus around the 13-16 year old age group (Asscheman, 2009: 107; Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008:

1893-6). However accessibility continues to focus on those considered most suitable for treatment (or least ‘risky’): those for whom the experiences of gender dysphoria cause extreme distress, as well as those having more clearly identifiable and stable ‘transsexual’ self-identifications - long standing and consistent cross-gender identification and discomfort within their current body (Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008). In recent literature in-action has also been highlighted as adding to young people’s distress, and in this way hormone blockers offer a more intermediate form of action without the same risks associated with irreversible body changes (Asscheman, 2009: 108; Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008: 1896).

Psycho-medical professional and research-based discussion suggest that many young trans people still have to wait until they are at least eighteen before gaining access to any form of intervention. This highlights clinician’s challenges in distinguishing between the construction of GID of childhood (largely associated with a childhood development ‘failure’ to adopt the appropriate gender identity and role, which is considered a more common phenomena not leading to a need to change gender), with those who experience gender dysphoria and a cross-gender identification or ‘transsexualism’ when adolescents and adults. This is despite evidence to suggest that the persistence of GID from childhood into adolescence has shown it to be a more stable experience of transgenering (Asscheman, 2009: 106). This links closely to the professional opinion that GID can only be diagnosed ‘with certainty’ in adulthood (Cohen-Kettenis *et al*, 2008: 1893), reflecting a tension in psycho-medical discourse between the theoretical development of child and adolescent GIDs as definable disorders, and the willingness and ability to provide effective support options for those whose experiences are diagnosed as such.

Access to gender specialist services (such as psychiatrists/psychologists, endocrinologists and possibly surgeons) are seen as an important part of promoting young people’s wellbeing within the psycho-medical field, and for many young people the availability of such diagnosis/interventions are central to ensure a range of options are open to them. The formal processes or ‘standards of care’ (such as the widely used Harry Benjamin *Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders, sixth edition*, (WPATH, 2001)) involved in gaining access to medical interventions, however, are frequently very narrow and prescriptive, and even more so for young people. These are based on a model of cross-gender transition and a focus on a stable gender identity, persistent need for change and proven ability to adapt to this (as demonstrated in a ‘real life test/experience’ which may take a number of years to complete)

(Cohen-Kettenis et al, 2008: 1893). Such approaches reflect adult rather than adolescent developmental expectations. Within this psycho-medical model, adolescent subjectivity is subject to largely ‘expert’ power/knowledge about what constitutes a legitimate ‘disorder’, and ambiguity or diversion from this will likely delay interventions due to clinician uncertainty. Ultimately, within this framework only a limited range of transgender subjectivities and embodiments will be legitimised and able to access medical technologies during adolescence.

Therapeutic approaches to the promotion of transgendered young people’s wellbeing

While the psycho-medical model presents the dominant and state-legitimated knowledge governing access to bodily technologies, it does not offer the only model of understanding gender diverse experiences. Its approach also demonstrates a production of inequality between trans people who can access medical technologies and those who cannot. The following section explores how another key area of professional knowledge has begun to invest in non-pathologising and de-pathologising narratives of transgender subjectivities informing the ways support may be envisioned and enacted for young people.

Where psycho-medical interventions focus on changing the dysphoric body to bring it into line with the psychic self, therapeutic approaches to supporting transgender young people, developed by doctors, counsellors, psychologists and social workers, offer a more holistic approach to action which locates young people within a complex set of social relations and contexts. Key titles in this therapeutic literature which has become increasingly prevalent over the last ten to fifteen years include: *Transgender Care* (Israel and Tarver, 1997); *Social Services with Transgender Youth* (Mallon, 1999); *Transgender Emergence: Therapeutic Guidelines for Working with Gender-variant People and their Families* (Lev, 2004); and more recently, *The Transgender Child: A Handbook for Families and Professionals* (Brill and Pepper, 2008). While not all of these texts focus on young people exclusively, each has a specific section or chapter on transgender children and young people that highlights specific issues and experiences unique to those who are both young and trans/gender diverse. The books and associated articles are written by those considered gender ‘experts’ in the field, a status usually based on the authors’ experiences of supporting trans clients through their professional roles.

Only a small selection of the therapeutic literature focusses on the experiences and support needs of transgenerating young people. This offers insights into their experiences and provides information about transgender young people specifically as a group (frequently not recognised as having specific needs distinct from either other transgender people generally, or other queer young people). Such approaches are significant when compared to the medical approach to GID where ‘adolescence’ is largely defined by a failure to achieve adult status and the ‘developmental standards’ required to autonomously seek and access bodily interventions. In contrast, the therapeutic literature about transgender young people is focussed on identifying and responding to the specific support needs of transgender young people and helping prepare them for engaging with the medical system as the most accepted treatment pathway. It employs a model of support that works in conjunction with psycho-medical approaches, drawing extensively on both medical standards of care and accepted treatment paths.

This literature draws attention to many key issues for supporting trans young people including dependency, the availability of youth resources, safety and security, accessibility to healthcare and appropriate services, decision-making, planning and the ongoing exploration of identity (Brill and Pepper, 2008; Lev, 2004). It is most commonly in the form of therapeutic handbooks designed to be a central resource for those working in these social service and therapeutic fields with transgender clients, as well as for families supporting a trans/gender diverse child. The handbooks may also be used in various contexts such as informing community support work, and offering an educational resource for those working with transgender young people and their families. They provide information about transgender lives and experiences, commonly focussed on issues of (inter)dependency, marginalisation and vulnerability, challenging myths about trans people and promoting the need to develop supportive relationships through education and the normalisation of trans people (see: Brill and Pepper, 2008; Lev, 2004). What is distinct in this literature is a move away from discussions of the diagnosis and treatment for those ‘afflicted’ with GID, to the development of ongoing support relationships with both the young person and their family in the promotion of wellbeing. This is based on supporting and guiding the young person through their journey of (trans)gendered personhood, which may or may not involve medical intervention during adolescence.

The therapeutic literature recognises an existing lack of knowledge and misinformation about transgender people in modern Western societies, including in professional settings, the challenges associated with living a transgender life and the frequent failure of service providers to provide effective care and support for transgender young people (Brill and Pepper, 2008). Transgender youth are viewed as being dependent, marginalised and ‘at risk’, and particular criticism is directed at programmes that claim the ability to ‘rehabilitate’ transgender, gender non-conforming and queer youth (Lev, 2004). An example of the resulting view of transgender young people promoted within therapeutic texts is provided in the opening paragraph of the chapter on transgender children and youth in *Transgender Emergence*:

Children and adolescents are powerless to access health care independent of their families, and they are often the unwilling participants in medical treatments that are sought by their parents and administered by medical staff who are trying to “treat” and “cure” the gender variant expression. Clinical intervention is based on the belief that gender variance in children is associated with later gender dysphoria and sexual deviance most commonly homosexuality and transsexualism. It is further believed that the earlier the intervention, the greater the likelihood of success, with success presumably defined as heterosexuality and gender-normative expression (Lev, 2004: 315).

The development of holistic therapeutic approaches to the support of ‘gender-variant’ young people seeks to resist the (re)production of psycho-medical understandings of trans young people as deviant or abnormal and develop alternative understandings and compassion for the challenges they face. Professional development and family support are both identified as key strategies to improve transgender young people’s safety and wellbeing. This is promoted through the provision of information to both inform and empower professionals and families to feel able to support young people, as well as act as advocates on their behalf – outlining options available for young people and techniques used to promote supportive relationships with transgender young people. In contrast to a focus on pathology, the trans youth focussed therapeutic literature regards the failure to accept transgender identities and experiences as legitimate gender expressions as further stigmatising those in need of support, which leads to both negative perceptions and experiences (Lev, 2004). Working with young people and families, in conjunction with other key spaces in the young person’s life (such as school), is promoted to develop acceptance and understanding, and encourage them to engage in learning about themselves, others, and the options available to them - including medical pathways.

While this literature is at times critical, it still represents transgender young people as largely passive participants in the changes concerning their lives, requiring expert and familial guidance and support in order to be able to achieve a sense of wellbeing in order to have their (cross-) gender identity successfully recognised. The central support relationships presented in this literature recommended for young people include those between the young person, their parents/family and specialists (including a psychotherapist to work alongside both the young person and their family, medical gender specialists and social work support for liaising with schools.) In one respect, this offers a broader approach to the support for young people by considering personal, familial and social transition processes and locating wellbeing in a much wider social context than that of psycho-medical discourse focussed on the medical transition of bodies. This broader focus allows for specific attention to social experiences of trans young people - including negotiating such experiences as changes in dress/appearance, bathroom accessibility, names/pronoun usage, bullying or harassment, as well as the promotion of general health and wellbeing, all within their local contexts.

The inclusion and development of a wider support network aims to provide a more solid foundation for the young person. However the reliance on family support, school support, and accessibility to gender specialists and informed psychotherapists, may not reflect the realities of many young trans people's lives. It is not uncommon for young trans people to lack the resources, access or family willingness to proceed in this direction. For others, their transgender experiences (more queer-based identities) are not intelligible or legitimated within therapeutic discourse. For those still legally minors and financially dependent, this would add additional barriers to accessing this form of support. Thus, while these therapeutic guides highlight the needs and benefits of support for young trans people in their local and family context, this may not be a possible trajectory for many trans young people. They may, in fact, work to compromise their safety and/or security through the promotion of coming/being out in order to seek support and acknowledgement.

The focus on cross-gender identification within this literature and, in particular, gender transition, is presented largely as the only legitimate long-term option for transgender young people. The focus on family education and support actively prepare others for this step, whether in the present, or at a later stage (as an extended decision-making period to allow for greater certainty). This is most evident in discussions around more ambiguous or

androgynous gender expressions, which are frequently discussed. References to ambiguous gender expressions are made in particular ways: associated with the time of early transition before the young person is able to pass in their desired gender; as a technique used to bring about compromise in gender expression between young people and parents' ideals; as a space to explore feelings about gender; and as part of normal youth 'expression' (not associated with a transgendered identity). Binary gender is maintained within this literature as the only legitimate gender experience reflecting a single, stable and coherent identity, the acquisition of which is viewed as the achievement of healthy mature personhood (as in medical discourse around the treatment of GID) (Hines, 2007a; Nataf, 1997). While the therapeutic literature on transgender young people attempts to develop a more contextualised and less pathologising model of options and support for transgender children and young people, it does so with only limited success as it is restricted by its ongoing investment in the very discourses it seeks to disrupt and provide an alternative to.

What is most evident in this field is the lack of transgendered people's own voices and experiences, although this is beginning to change, as is demonstrated in *The Transgender Child* (Brill and Pepper, 2004) (which includes some quotes by trans young people and their family members). Prior to this publication, this omission is most explicit in the inclusion of case-study examples, based presumably on clinical observation, but told from the 'experts' perspective seeking to describe events. This is used as a tool to help develop professional decision making and provide a more personalised means to developing compassion and support in clinicians. While these case studies highlight key issues facing transgender young people, the maintenance of the author's expert voice throughout does little to disrupt the construction of young people as passive, dependent and 'at risk', requiring adult support and intervention in order to promote wellbeing and healthy development.

Representations of t & gnc young people (on which their support needs are based in psycho medical and therapeutic approaches) are limited by frameworks that define their experiences and embodiments through their 'failure' to reproduce dominant dualistic gender discourses. This restricts the possibilities for young people to consider their diverse identities and experiences as empowering or desirable and/or framing support in ways that disrupt social 'norms'.

LGB(T) adolescent and youth literatures

LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) adolescent and youth focussed research provides additional information about the status, experiences and support initiatives for t & gnc young people. This literature on LGBT young people has emerged as specialty areas within adolescent development, and also educational research contexts, focussing on LGBT young people's experiences of 'difference' and inequality based on non-heterosexual identifications, behaviour or attraction. Most commonly this is organised around identity-based groups that including gay, lesbian, bisexual, and to some extent transgender young people. This research is important to local queer and trans youth support, offering a site of research-based information about the status of queer youth populations. This is particularly relevant to the funding of services through providing insight into the areas where support for queer and trans people is needed.

The findings from this body of work have been used to demonstrate the specific needs and experiences of LGBT young people and to advocate for changes to improve their safety and wellbeing. This information is also used to argue for the development of more inclusive social policies and the development of youth settings – most prominently schools, recognised as a primary site of youth socialisation (Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 109). Additionally, research findings have shown numerous links between experiences of being non-heterosexual and reduced physical and mental health, increased rates of suicide-attempts, school truancy, bullying and harassment/victimisation, and alcohol and drug abuse, among others (see: D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993; Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Rivers, 2001). LGB youth in this literature are shown to be the frequent victims of discrimination based on both their actual and perceived sexual orientation (Horn *et. al.*, 2009; Ryan and Rivers, 2003). Transgender youth are regarded as being even more 'at risk' although research involving them is lacking and their inclusion is largely assumed (Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 103).

This growing body of research has developed significantly over the last 30 years (Horn *et. al.*, 2009: 863; Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 103-4) from an initial focus on gay and lesbian youth experiences of growing up (for example see: Trenchard and Warren, 1984). Areas of focus are demonstrated in developmental and ethnographic studies (see: D'Augelli and Hershberger, 1993; Herdt and Boxer, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1990), and more recent school-based population studies of youth that have begun to include questions about sexual identity/behaviour. This began occurring in the U.S.A. in the 1990s (Ryan and Rivers, 2003:

105), and has occurred in similar New Zealand school surveys in the 2000s (such as the Youth 2000 and Youth 07 reports (Le Brun et. al. 2005; Rossen et. al., 2009)). LGBT community-based studies also provide additional information that includes specific data relating to exploring youth experiences of being LGB(T). Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have drawn similar results highlighting the increased ‘risk’ associated with being young and LGBT and community-based studies provide more in-depth information about LGBT youth experiences which are context specific (Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 111-3). The aims of this work are discussed by Caitlin Ryan and Ian Rivers in relation to U.K. and U.S.A studies:

The availability of prospective studies of lesbian, gay and bisexual young people ... has provided important evidence documenting risk behaviors, experiences of harassment and anti-gay violence, depression and attempted suicide, socialization, disclosure and family interactions (Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 105).

The more recent focus on a greater range of identities (LGBT rather than just lesbian and gay) has been an important shift reflecting both changing demands from LGBT communities and queer critical theorists, as well as the need for more specific and in-depth information about young LGBT people’s experiences and how they negotiate and constitute their identities (Ryan and Rivers, 2003; Talburt, 2004b). These developments are aimed to improve understandings of the experiences of non-heterosexual youth, to look at how different individuals and groups negotiate non-heterosexual/gender non-conforming identities and expressions, and the ways they can be supported. In recent years three key areas have been emphasised with respect to the development of support for gender diverse young people in this area: a focus on diversity within LGBT youth; contextualising youth experiences; and greater attention on gender-based identities (as well as other specific socio-cultural contexts).

The growing focus on diversity and difference in LGBT youth literature has developed out of queer critiques of research, particularly quantitative population-based studies which treat LGBT young people as a monolithic group (distinguished only as ‘non-heterosexual’, or ‘sexual minority’ youth) and assume this ‘group’ to have largely the same risks, support needs and resiliencies (Horn *et. al.*, 2009: 363; Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 105). Such critiques have highlighted how specific groups within this broad LGBT category have different needs and experiences of being LGBT, including different identities and particularities that relate to differing ‘risks’ and resiliencies (Ryan and Rivers, 2003). Furthermore, findings from

research with gay and lesbian youth are not automatically generalisable to all sexual minority young people. The importance of culture and local environments to the experiences of young people are increasingly acknowledged (Horn *et. al.*, 2009). This has important implications for the development of support as highlighted by Ryan and Rivers:

Only by carefully assessing the experiences of young people in different cultural groups and environments, can we understand the unique stressors and protective factors that mediate risk, thus enabling providers and policymakers to develop appropriate services and policies to create supportive communities for LGBT youth (Ryan and Rivers, 2003: 105).

Increasingly attention to recognising diversity within LGBT adolescent/youth populations provides the opportunity for researchers to identify and develop more sophisticated understandings of the experiences of particular groups of LGBT young people. There is some movement away from a focus solely on identity-based understandings of non-heterosexual or ‘queer’ (used uncritically as an umbrella term) young people to utilising critical social theorising of subjectivity and embodiment. To date, however, a focus on the needs and experiences of t & gnc young people as a particular group within the LGBT umbrella is largely absent in this field precluding specific attention to their development and support.

Critiques of LGBT approaches

Critiques of LGBT research approaches have provided important developments to the dominant narratives framing LGBT or ‘queer’ youth, with significant contributions being made by Susan Talburt and Mary-Lou Rasmussen. These include attention to how dominant narratives work to shape understandings of LGBT young people and how young people come to understand themselves. The discourses highlighted include LGBT young people as ‘youth at risk’ (Horn *et. al.*, 2009; Ryan and Rivers, 2003; Talburt, 2004b) or alternatively as ‘resilient and thriving’ or ‘having a secure gay identity’ (Talburt, 2004b). These critiques have shown the limitations of working within an either/or approach and highlighted this as the dominant mode of action in the area (Horn *et. al.*, 2009; Talburt, 2004b). Most prominently featured is the ‘youth at risk’ discourse which Talburt highlights as working to “nam[e] homophobic persecution as a cause of LGBT youths’ problems and [use] their status as at-risk as a justification for more inclusive practice” (Talburt, 2004b: 117). This, she and others argue, offers a limited understanding of LGBT young people. They caution against

associating all LGBT young people as 'at risk' due to this problematically reducing the complexities and diversities of their experiences and focussing solely on the 'deficits' or problems of LGBT young people (Russell *et. al.*, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2005; Talburt, 2004b,).

The promotion of resiliency and the development of models of 'successful gay identity formation' have also been critiqued (see Talburt, 2004b). Discussions of such approaches offering LGBT 'ideals' (with knowable risks and goals) demonstrate that these models represent the experiences of only some LGB(T) young people. In other words, the development of models for successful identity formation may provide unrealistic and unsafe approaches for many LGBT young people to follow (Talburt, 2004b). The need to draw on multiple representations and engage in analysing the complex ways young LGBT people negotiate their social worlds is emphasised (Ryan and Rivers, 2003; Talburt, 2004b).

This shift is largely a call for greater reflexivity in the field to ensure that the developments and interventions that are occurring, for example in schools, relate to the experiences and needs of young people and that they are working inclusively for the diversity of all LGBT youth not just those who fit an 'at risk' or 'resilient' LGBT youth model. A key suggestion is a focus on working to include youth in developing actions which support them and raising an awareness of how normative constructions and assumptions may underlie and limit change (Talburt, 2004b). It is also a shift away from the (re)production of knowledge 'about' queer and transgender young people and increasing focus on the experiences and needs of these groups. This indicates a movement toward more youth-centered and strengths-based approaches to youth development which engage with a post-structuralist focus on subjective knowledges, social contexts and empowering young people to promote their own wellbeing.

Gender in LGBT youth development

In conjunction with the shift to more poststructuralist and critical queer frameworks there are difficulties around the use of 'queer' in LGBT youth research. Most commonly confusion is centered on the distinction between queer deconstructive approaches to gender and sexuality relations and the use of 'queer' as an umbrella term to talk about gender and sexuality diversity. These are notably tied to different ideologies of 'community' and social change, and attempts to incorporate a post-modern shift to queer must do more than just replace 'LGBT' with the word 'queer'.

The inclusion of discussions about the support needs of transgender young people and the experiences of LGB young people's gender non-conformity in LGBT youth development literature provides an important shift to an increasing focus on both sexuality and gender (and to some extent the relationship between them). This inclusion however cannot be overstated, as it is under-developed, and at times a focus on gender is no more than an extra 'T' in the title of an article, which is then subsequently overlooked or conflated within a focus on sexuality (for a recent example see: Horn *et. al.*, 2009). When present and attended to, discussions of gender tend to fall into two categories. In the first, gender is regarded as the sole domain of those identified as transgendered, as a distinct 'sexual minority' group from lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, but with shared experiences and associated 'risks'.

Alternatively, gender non-conformity is talked about as being a significant factor in homophobic harassment and bullying for lesbian, gay and bisexual young people, extending to heterosexual young people as well (Horn *et. al.*, 2009: 865; Talburt, 2004b: 119.) This is a focus in reports of homophobic discrimination occurring to those perceived (rather than known) to be gay. Further attention to this 'perception', reveals that gender non-conformity plays a central role in determining that a person is (or rather is assumed to be) gay. These discussions do not, however, examine the relationship between gender and sexuality any further or to ask questions about how this may relate to trans-phobic violence or discrimination where gender difference is the primary motivator (against transgender people), or to ask why gender non-conformity should be significant at all.

While these two areas of discussion focussed on gender feature more frequently in this literature, their potential connectedness is given minimal attention, and they sit independent from each other. This highlights a continued privileging of distinct identity categories over subjective experiences and the potential inter-connectedness of a diverse range of gender and sexuality identities and expressions. The implications of this within LGBT and increasingly 'queer' youth development research, is that (self-identified) transgender young people are frequently distinguished and considered separate from other gender non-conforming youth whose experiences of gender are instead regarded as an expression of their sexuality.

The inclusion of transgender young people also sits uncomfortably within literature which is primarily focussed on sexuality when transgender people are expressing gender not sexuality

difference. Given that transgender identity is about a person's sense of gender, LGBT sexuality-based research and discussion will only be relevant to those transgender young people who identify with non-heterosexual sexualities, which many do not. The inclusion of 'transgender youth' within this literature potentially risks misrepresenting transgender young people's experiences as being about sexuality. While there is recognition of a lack of research focussed on the support needs of transgender young people, their frequently uncritical inclusion in sexuality studies warrants greater consideration and also suggests greater academic attention to the experiences of transgender and gender diverse young people, which focusses primarily on gender, is needed.

The attention to gender diversity and transgender young people within non-heterosexual and queer youth literature demonstrates a range of understandings informed by shifting sexuality (and some gender) theorising by contributors from a range of fields invested in non-heterosexual, queer and identity-based frameworks. These inform conceptions of community and ways of working to promote social change both individually and collectively, shaping local fields of support about where transgender and gender diverse young people 'fit in'. This has led to inconsistencies in the ways gender diversity is approached, if even included, demonstrating different political and social concerns and the tensions between these. What it does provide is an acknowledgement of the similar issues facing gender and sexuality diverse young people, and how these are intimately tied up with the dominant social (re)production of heterosexuality and binary gender.

An important and notable exception to research in the LGBT field, which engages in both a focus on trans youth and support which recognises a community context, is found in the article 'Creating Spaces to Support Transgender Youth' by Jennifer McGuire and Meredith Conover-Williams (2010). Based on focus group findings, they describe how transgender young people have specific needs and experiences distinct or in addition to LGB youth that shapes the support they may require. Recognising trans youth as different to LGB youth, they demonstrate how a range of contexts, including school, family and community organisations, all offer important sites of potential support (McGuire and Conover-Williams, 2010: 17-20). What is distinctive in this article is recognition that for many t & gnc young people, community spaces for LGBT young people offer important sites of support. McGuire and Conover-Williams also identify the important roles these spaces can offer for young people by promoting more widespread development of specific trans support in LGBT/queer

youth support settings. This signals increasing attention to young t & gnc people and their experiences within LGBT research and also a shift beyond educational or health contexts to consider the role of community based support for trans young people.

New Zealand research

In New Zealand the available research literature and resources focussed on developing support for gender and sexuality diverse young people are only beginning to show signs of incorporating (trans)gender into their analyses and activism. Two large scale quantitative research projects commissioned by the New Zealand Aids Foundation and Rainbow Youth, inform queer youth support actions; *Non-heterosexual Youth - A Profile of their Health and Wellbeing* (Le Brun et. al., 2005) and *Youth '07: Results for young people attracted to the same sex or both sexes* (Rossen et. al., 2009). These utilised collated data from the Youth 2000 and Youth '07 national surveys of New Zealand high school students providing an independent analysis of the data collected and contributing quantitative information about the status of non-heterosexual youth in New Zealand high schools (which would likely include gender non-conforming young people in its sample although they are not specified). These studies indicate a significant level of bullying and harassment towards those identifying/identified as non-heterosexual, consistent with international studies. Karen Nairn and Anne Smith's (2003) research on gay, lesbian and bisexual students' experiences of safety in New Zealand secondary schools, also demonstrates how the disciplining of students non-conforming gender expressions is central to homophobic attitudes and bullying, and affects the safety of queer students. They also share similar findings regarding non-heterosexual students' experiences of other 'risk' factors and behaviours. These projects demonstrate the need for a greater in-depth exploration of young people's experiences through further research to consider the implications for embodying non-dominant discourses of gender, and the connections between gender and sexuality.

In 2004, three New Zealand organisations supporting the wellbeing of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, queer and intersex youth communities collectively produced the resource *Safety in Our Schools: An Action Kit for Aotearoa New Zealand Schools to Address Sexual Orientation Prejudice* (Out There, et. al., 2004). The *Safety in Our Schools* action kit is a strengths-based queer community project into the experiences of non-heterosexual/queer youth in New Zealand's high schools. Aimed at making high schools more inclusive and safer for queer young people, it identified New Zealand's legislative framework and

recommended guidelines to promote healthy, inclusive and rights-based spaces to protect and enhance young people's wellbeing. This project begins to talk about t & gnc young people in addition to a sexuality focus through the language of 'queer,' but highlights that more research on trans young people in Aotearoa New Zealand is needed (Out There, *et. al.*, 2004: 26). The lack of focus on trans youth in New Zealand queer research demonstrates the continued 'silencing' of trans subjectivities and embodiments even within queer youth frameworks, where inclusive 'queer' approaches are not reflected in research practices.

Specific research from critical queer and post-structuralist perspectives has begun to offer a developing field of academic engagement with t & gnc people in New Zealand, notably contributions from Karen Saunders (2008) exploring trans people's queer embodiments and Joey Macdonald's (2011) work on trans masculinities. This developing body of research will be discussed in the next chapter within a discussion of theoretical developments in the constitution of t & gnc experiences, bodies and identities, particularly in relation to transgender activism and the associated field of transgender studies.

OUT THERE! Queer Youth Development

A major project that has been influential in shaping community-based support for t & gnc young people in New Zealand is 'OUT THERE! A National Queer Youth Development Project' formed through collaboration between the New Zealand Aids Foundation (nationally) and Rainbow Youth (Auckland). This project focussed on developing and promoting actions to support community-based queer support for young people. These included the development of resources for queer young people; research into the experiences and status of queer youth; development within the education sector (SS4Q); and building networks and working on creating closer links for queer youth support with broader youth support services in New Zealand. The use of the term 'queer' youth in the OUT THERE! project is inclusive of both gender and sexuality diversity and its target age range of 'youth' (those at secondary school, extending to those aged up to 25). The project particularly aimed at developing support for young people questioning and exploring their gender and sexuality, those 'coming out' and the people who support them.

The OUT THERE! project focussed explicitly on community development - building and linking 'queer' youth with those who provide support to queer and transgender young people. The inclusive language of 'queer' was central to defining the OUT THERE project and how

it engaged in building an inclusive framework to engage local queer youth groups and individuals around the country. The OUT THERE! queer youth development project offered an understanding of 'queer youth' as a diverse community of gender and sexuality non-conforming young people, building a sense of community across differences. It highlighted that the major challenges affecting young people stemmed from prejudice and discrimination in the attitudes of others.

OUT THERE maintained a strong status within queer youth support, providing a range of support and development work to assist queer youth and those who work with them around the country. This has now been handed over to local community organisations. The project was largely informed by the Ministry of Youth Development's (2002) 'Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa', applied to queer young people and taking a strengths-based approach (for how this applied to a queer youth context see: Brown, 2007). This is linked to a belief that developing young people's connections to their social worlds and investing in the processes of making these connections is central to developing healthy young people. Within queer youth support, this is achieved through a focus on involving young people in different types of support and activities to recognise their strengths and develop them within a safe, supportive and inclusive environment. This also provides them with access to resources and information through queer youth support spaces, as well as promoting interaction and developing a sense of connectedness to others to overcome isolation and so that they can feel good about who they are. Ultimately queer youth development works to bring about change to social status through promoting and building feelings of empowerment to do so.

The strategy and its principles are not necessarily overt or obvious in action, but rather set up a way of working with young people that encourages them to be who they want to be and focusses on developing their strengths, rather than focussing on queer young people as being 'at risk' and on the issues and negative experiences of being queer. A part of achieving this is promoting the importance of self-definition, providing positive representations and role-models, and recognition of the diversity within queer so that young people do not have to identify as queer.

It is in this way that queer youth development differs from previous support structured around identity groups to provide support (such as lesbian gay support groups), where individual identities, as gay or lesbian (or questioning whether you were) are no longer the focus and

basis for inclusion. Rather the objective informing the OUT THERE! approach was to bring people together who face similar social prejudices, barriers, and isolation to support each other and feel connected while maintaining diversity within community. It also reflects a shift away from viewing gender and sexuality differences as the basis of a person's identity, but rather experiences that are shaped by dominant discourses about (hetero)sexuality and (binary) gender. This involves the application of a more critical use of 'queer' as a non-identity being applied to the local context of community based support.

Human Rights Action

In addition to this queering of the local queer youth support context in New Zealand, (trans)gendered lives have also gained a greater focus in new debates around human rights and citizenship around the world. Attention to human rights abuses against trans people, healthcare, legal protection and legal recognition specific to transgender people, such as the recognition of gender identity under Human Rights law, have become key areas of recent focus (Balzer and Dutta, 2012). The development of the *Yogyakarta Principles: Principles on the application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity* (March 2007), reflects the global shift towards developing Human Rights law to meet the needs of and protect trans people. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission (HRC) undertook a national 'Transgender Inquiry' into the lives and experiences of discrimination of trans people, to provide local consideration of the inequalities being experienced.

The Transgender Inquiry report *To be who I am* (HRC, 2008) and the ongoing implementation of its findings and recommendations by the Commission in conjunction with local communities and individuals, occurs in a time of global networking and sharing, where the internet enables the connection of t & gnc people beyond geographical boundaries. For New Zealanders, this global context is particularly relevant, given our experiences are shaped by New Zealand's physical isolation, small population size and low population density. New Zealand's transgender and gender non-conforming (t & gnc) people are shown to be very diverse in their gender identities and expressions, and are further differentiated by age, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, occupation, and location among others (HRC, 2008).

The Transgender Inquiry involved a nationwide process of collecting submissions from trans and gender diverse people, community groups and other relevant service providers, and reviewing the current national legislative environment and gender status of trans people. This process involved listening to stories from trans people and those who support them and documenting the widespread discrimination and stigma faced by trans people in New Zealand. These narratives provide a public and political space for dialogue within and between trans and non-trans communities and demonstrate the huge variation in experiences and ways that people express and identify with being (trans)gendered, as well a wide range of issues affecting them. The ‘Transgender Inquiry’s’ final report *To be who I am* describes this process and the diversity of trans people with whom they engaged:

The youngest person to meet with the Inquiry was an 11-year-old intermediate school student; the oldest was in her late seventies. We heard from trans people who are in business, who are farmers, academics, artists, health professionals, sex workers, economists, managers, trades-people, parents and grandparents. They referred to themselves in many ways: whakawahine. Fa’afafine and fakaleiti gave submissions alongside Male-to-Female (MtF) and Female-to-Male (FtM) transsexuals, cross-dressers, androgynous genderqueer people, and some intersex people. Others simply wanted to be known as a man or woman. (Human Rights Commission, 2008:1)

Recognising this diversity, the report highlights specific issues relating to young trans people with a chapter providing the first study of trans-youth experiences in New Zealand. The focus of its findings center around the shift from dependence on others to independence, as well as increasing citizenship rights and responsibilities, both associated with an additional transition to adult social and legal status. Transgender young people coming out are recognised as being at a particularly important and vulnerable stage in their development, negotiating the transition from childhood to adulthood (HRC, 2008). Not only are they learning new social skills and responsibilities, forming and negotiating relationships as well as experiencing physically changing/maturing bodies, these are also happening in relation to exploring and/or changing gender identities and expression, within the social contexts of families/whanua, communities, schools/training facilities/workplaces, and peer groups (HRC 2008). They are also shown to invest in and construct a wide range of gender identities and expressions which are not limited to binary constructions.

Compared with the advances made in the social acknowledgement, education and gradually greater acceptance (or tolerance) of sexuality-based difference (particularly for lesbians and

gay men), transgender and gender diverse people in New Zealand are shown to be frequently targeted and discriminated against because of their gender expressions (HRC, March 2007; 2008). T & gnc youth, although small in number, are often visibly 'different' in how they express their genders, making it difficult for them to go unnoticed (compared to sexuality diverse young people whose orientation depends on their disclosure in order to for others to 'know' - although assumptions are made on the basis of gender expression) and therefore they are easily targeted.

Informing this project

This research project began from an initial interest in wanting to explore the developments occurring in my own local New Zealand queer and transgender communities, in particular, those shaping the way support is available and being provided for young people who are transgender and gender non-conforming. I had been involved in the wider field of peer-based support by and for gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, genderqueer and transgender young people (often first 'coming out'), since the late 1990s as a young person, support provider and developer. The formality or informality of its groups and networks, their specific support focusses, how they offer these, and who the groups/networks are for, have been ongoing topics of discussion and negotiation amongst those developing and providing this support. A focus on supporting t & gnc young people within queer support has increased in importance over the last decade, becoming the go-to place for support for those who are both trans/genderqueer and young. As a support provider, this has occurred alongside working to incorporate more critical queer perspectives into support, and recognising strength in the diversity of queer and trans people rather than viewing differences as a collective weakness.

Many queer and trans young people I have known have shared stories about the importance of the queer and trans communities or friends for support, often as the only spaces in which they felt they could be themselves and be accepted by others. For many years this was also my own experience. Queer/trans spaces offered experiences not available in heteronormative environments, experiences that made me feel good about who I was rather than feeling like an outsider or a disappointment to others. I remained involved in support to ensure other young people have spaces they could access which might provide them with a similar experience.

As this chapter demonstrates, there is little attention on understanding young t & gnc people's perspectives of what support means to them, or the role of community based supports in promoting their wellbeing. This is evident in the disjunctures found between current community support provision utilising inclusive queer frameworks, and dominant discourses which continue to constitute t & gnc young people through their 'failures'. These are emphasised through discussions of 'treatment' and the 'risks' associated with their identities. Equally of concern is invisibility, where t & gnc young people are unattended to in research about them, reinforced by the production of research that offers no more than a token T at the end of LGB to appear inclusive. The absence of young people's experiences and identities limits the possibilities to tell a range of stories about who they are and what experiences they have, including stories about trans and queer community based supports. I argue that this is of the utmost importance to providing them with the best support options possible and the task of this thesis. The changing landscape of community support influenced by the OUTTHERE! and Human Rights Commissions work, as well as growing global trans activism, are central to these stories.

The following chapter will explore how developments in theorising (trans)gender, and a rise in queer and trans activism is countering adult 'expert' knowledges as the only site of legitimate support knowledge constituting t & gnc young people. This explores and develops the theoretical framework for exploring the support experiences of t & gnc youth and how they and their peers and communities are engaging in trans activism to produce support practices which respond to their needs. Chapter Three describes the methodological approach for the thesis designed to explore queer and trans community/peer perspectives of support for t & gnc young people. This focusses on the stories young people, and those who support them, tell about the kinds of support they provide and receive. Chapter Four explores ways t & gnc young people talk about not conforming to gender and sexuality 'norms' and disorientations. And lastly, Chapter Five discusses key issues, barriers and challenges in developing, providing and accessing trans and queer community based support identified by research participants. This highlights ways in which providers and developers of trans and queer community based support are engaged in actively transforming support spaces to respond to the changing needs of t & gnc young people.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Frameworks of Change

What is certain is that our differences are ambiguous; they may be used either to divide us or to enrich our politics. If we are not the ones to give voice to them, then history suggests that they will continue to be misnamed and distorted, or simply reduced to silence (Sawicki, 1991: 32).

This project is informed by the emergence of critical ‘transgender’, ‘queer’ and post-structuralist feminist theorising and activism influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Susan Stryker, Elizabeth Grosz and Sara Ahmed, among others. These theorists and activists have provided challenges to modernist modes of thinking about gender, community and social change and are important to an exploration of transgender and gender non-conforming (t & gnc) young people’s experiences of support. Central to their critical reconceptualisation of social transformation is a shift in the way social ‘problems’ and ‘norms’ relating to sex, gender, and sexuality are understood as (re)produced and embodied within a range of social discourses. Rather than assuming that the ‘problems’ which inform support for t & gnc young people can be objectively ‘discovered’ or ‘known’, a post-structuralist/queer approach focusses on exploring supports as discursive practices. These practices are engaged in, by and for t & gnc people, constitute t & gnc young people in particular ways and are involved in the reproduction of a range of socio-political ideologies and goals. Within this broad approach, an exploration of the shifting context of community peer-based support for t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the experiences of people engaged in this, is not possible through a singular lens. Instead, the range of representations of transgendered or gender non-conforming (t & gnc) young people, how or what support for them is provided, by whom and the spaces of its provision, are important to consider.

Many different knowledges inform the development of support practices (as discussed in the previous chapter). However, problematising ‘knowledges’ *about* t & gnc young people is an important task in a critical transgender approach. In relation to this project, particular

concerns are central to the research area. These include questioning whether international theoretical approaches can simply ‘translate’ to a New Zealand context, a discussion highlighted by New Zealander academic and trans activist Joey Macdonald in his recent research into constructions of (trans)masculinities. Macdonald (2011), drawing on the work of Raewyn Connell (2007), highlights the way in which theory production in transgender studies has largely occurred within American and European contexts. This, he argues, raises questions about its application to a ‘peripheral’ context such as Aotearoa New Zealand (2011: 20). In terms of this project, this highlights the importance of reflecting on the applicability/usefulness of theory produced in other Western contexts and considering the ways in which different cultural perspectives and histories shape the production of gender and its diversity.

In a critical transgender approach, it is also important not to assume that productions of ‘support’ address the needs of some/all t & gnc young people. Terms such as *transgender*, *transsexual*, and increasingly *genderqueer*, are commonly used in Western countries to talk about gender non-conforming people. These distinctions highlight competing discourses of knowledge available about gender diverse experiences and identities (Kessler and McKenna, 2006). Furthermore, there are many others, including a range of non-western perspectives (see Feinberg, 1996). In the context of Aotearoa New Zealand community based supports for young people, the language of ‘*transgender*’, trans and queer ‘*community*’ and peer-based ‘*supports*’, are most frequently employed as collective frameworks within which trans and queer community based support is produced. Rather than offering a singular approach to t & gnc young people’s support, these terms are used to represent multiple, shifting and contested ideas and practices, shaping and shaped by peoples experiences, histories, knowledges and bodies about who t & gnc young people are and how support should be provided to them. The language which is used to talk about this support is a site of ongoing negotiation within local community support contexts in New Zealand and speaks to and of the people involved in its production. Trans and queer community supports are invested in creating space which enables diverse self-expressions – itself a significant feature of trans and queer activism. This does not mean, however, that particular groups are automatically included or have access to such spaces.

This thesis considers the negotiation of diverse discourses in the local provision of Aotearoa New Zealand’s peer-based community support and how *difference* itself has become an

important part of enacting support for t & gnc young people. This includes exploring how diverse experiences of gender non-conformity are negotiated and ‘managed’ within local queer and trans communities in the development and provision support to young people (particularly as alternative spaces of support to dominant psycho-medical discourses). It also considers constructions/experiences of t & gnc identities in relation to wider social discourses of sex-gender, sexuality, youth, support, culture, bodies and identities and how these shape the needs, experiences and identities of people accessing support.

This chapter discusses the theoretical developments which inform this project, in particular, queer and poststructuralist theorising, and the development of ‘transgender studies’ in the humanities and social sciences. It considers the conceptualisation of difference in (trans)gendered theory and activism, the role of language in constructing social change for t & gnc young people, and engages with a queer phenomenological approach in considering the experiences of t & gnc young people and constructions of community based support in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Transgender communities enacting diversity

The 21st Century has been an important time for (trans)people with post-structuralist and queer theorising becoming increasingly accessible and influential in actions for social change in the lives of many transgender and gender diverse people (Stryker, 2006). This includes critiques of essentialised explanations of gender which inform psycho-medical and identity-based approaches (Ekins and King, 1999). The acknowledgement of the diversity of subjectivities and embodiments in poststructuralist and queer approaches to social change, termed a ‘politics of difference’ (Sawicki, 1991), has raised important questions about how differences/diversity work within strategies of change for t & gnc people.

Attention to the negotiation of differences has a strong history in feminist scholarship, informed by debates about what it means to be a ‘woman’ and the politics of its representation. Post-structuralist theorising has provided a shift away from ‘identity’ in the singular to the production of multiple subjectivities and embodiments within discourses. Alan How (2003), for example, highlights how post-structuralism approaches what is ‘knowable’ as a product of discourse, reproduced through power relations and language. This enables an exploration of ‘changing forms of reality as they are produced by language or discourse’ (How, 2003: 144).

A post-structuralist approach rejects objective ontological assumptions associated with modernist research claims of the world as ‘directly knowable’ (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003: 30). This framework informs this project as it enables an investigation of how discourses shaping t & gnc young people’s supports represent knowledges invested in the production of a range of subjective embodiments. Viviane K. Namaste, for example, describes how the subject is conceptualised in a post-structuralist approach, “subjects are not the autonomous creators of themselves or their social worlds ...[but]... are embedded in a complex network of social relations ...[that]... in turn determine which subjects can appear where, and in what capacity” (Namaste, 1994: 221).

What constitutes support for t & gnc young people is connected with the discursive relations of power which privilege and enable some types of representations, embodiments and subjectivities in certain settings, and discipline and silence others. This theoretical approach acknowledges the multiple claims that are made to define gender diverse experiences and that these can be (de)valued and (un)available in competing discursive spaces. The production of t & gnc young people’s gender identities and expressions within local community support networks is, as Sawicki (1991) suggests, about negotiating and naming differences and has the potential to create change.

To illustrate this further, Wendy Griswold suggests that “social problems are cultural objects [representing] an interpretation, a set of meanings that fit a context of ideas and institutions, that translate random happenings into events, and that suggest attitudes and actions” (Griswold, 2008: 116). The premise that t & gnc young people are in need of support can be understood as a cultural object, a socially defined problem which is a product of discourse(s). The very construction of support relies on the (re)production of a problem, as Griswold notes. How we constitute a problem, and from whose perspective, however, relates to our experiences, the discourses we are invested in, the actions taken, and the solutions that can be imagined.

The provision of trans/queer community peer-based ‘support’ for young people in Aotearoa New Zealand is organised around commonalities built between queer and transgender communities activists. It is also informed by other discourses including queer/LGBT inclusive educational strategies, youth development principles and action, the psycho-medical

provision of health care to trans people, human rights action for gender and sexuality equality, and peer support provision in mental health fields. These varied discourses offer different understandings/representations of support, demonstrating how a queer/trans 'community' approach to support spans diverse knowledges and politics. While all approaches share a similar motivation for responding to the challenges and negative impacts on day to day life, health and wellbeing for t & gnc people, understanding these can be a result of transphobic discrimination, harassment and exclusion and the maintaining of hegemonic sex-gender 'norms' informs a critical queer approach to engaging with support.

A critique of dominant frameworks of sex-gender-sexuality is important as these inform dominant ways of framing transgender and gender diverse youth subjectivities in Western societies. Psycho-medical professional discourses, for example, carry an authority and guide professional practice in a range of settings, yet offer a limited range of subject positions in terms of what it means to be young and transgender/gender diverse. Central to an understanding of community support is an awareness of such legitimated forms of trans subjectivity and embodiment – the way adult 'experts' define trans young people and are engaged in enabling/denying particular transgendered embodiments and subjectivities.

A discussion of how different knowledges about t & gnc youth subjectivity shape the availability of socially comprehensible subject positions young people may occupy is also important. This includes focussing attention to the omissions and silences implicit in the production of narratives and the assumptions and understandings from which they emerge. This process is important to a discussion of community and peer support in demonstrating how these discourses relate to the ways support is negotiated and developed by transgender and gender diverse young people in local contexts, and the relationship between dominant discourses and the production of alternative narratives or counter discourses about trans and gender diverse young people.

Language in change

Language is an important site of change, and the development of the term 'transgender' has been central to the contemporary debates for those engaged in transgenering (see Roen, 2002). Sociologist Sally Hines describes how a number of key authors are working to contextualise this change linked to a growing shift to enact *transgender*:

Stryker traces a range of broader social and cultural shifts that have given rise to an increasing focus on transgender. Like Whittle (1996), who suggests that the growth of home computers gave increased access to a 'transgender community' for transgender people, which in turn, gave a new impetus to community activism. Moreover a changing economic and political climate, and the dawning of a new millennium lent transgender a zeitgeist flavor (Hines, 2007: 29).

Transgender, in this current context, has become central to talking collectively and creating a movement based on shared oppression and imagined community, distinguishable from modernist approaches based on shared identity.

The attention to gender diversity within 'transgender' is part of an even broader activist movement of resisting normative gender discourses whose disciplining effects are experienced by a wide range of people (for examples see Bornstein, 1994, 1998; Wilchins, 1997, 2004). An example is provided by gender activist Riki Wilchins (founder of the group GenderPAC) who critiques the way analyses of gender tend to focus on those who are at the most extreme end of disrupting or resisting the (re)production of 'normative' gender identities. She argues that in order to bring about change or disrupt the continuing discrimination and prejudices experienced by those who do not 'conform,' it is necessary to begin talking about experiences that are confined to those who are transgendered:

As *gender* becomes the new theoretical buzzword, in application it is confined to *transgender*. ...We're finally free to talk about gender, so long as we act as if the only people affected by it were this one, small, embattled minority. Yet just the opposite is the case, because at one time or another almost all of us have been harassed, attacked, isolated, or ashamed because we didn't fit someone's ideal of a 'real man' or a 'real woman'. Transgender is just the tip of a much bigger iceberg (Wilchins, 2004: 266-7).

Wilchins' comments are central to the ways in which this research project is framed and its goals. It acknowledges the broader focus of transgender activism, in particular, the ways in which gender discourses affect more than just those identifying with the term 'transgender' and considers the developments being made between gender and sexuality within a 'queer' framework (in local community based youth support). It also provides a space for considering the overlapping experiences of gender-based harassment for those who are gender non-conforming but do not identify as transgendered. The project engages in this by focussing on the experiences of young people who do not conform to dominant gender

expectations or discourses, based on their self-recognition of the ways they feel they disrupt or resist the (re)production of socially expected gender ‘norms’.

This informs the use of a more open descriptive category of ‘transgender and gender non-conforming’ throughout this project in order to include a more diverse range of participants and narratives about experiences of gender non-conformity and support. Such an approach is taken to include perspectives that are not limited by a single term such as transgender, or focussed on ‘transgender’ support as the only space that support actions occur - as is the case in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is not to reject the inclusivity of the term *transgender*, but rather to move away from the idea that only transgendered people experience gender as an issue and that only transgender identified people provide peer-based support to others. While transgender as a term can be used inclusively and can be politically powerful (see: Kessler and McKenna, 2006), it is still positioned in relation to dominant social gender ideologies as something ‘other’. For some t & gnc people, the idea of moving beyond (dualistic) gender, does not reflect the way they see and understand themselves. By not confining the study of gender non-conformity to transgender, the intention is to resist creating distinctions between gender and transgender expression in developing analyses of support. This acknowledges that all gender is socially constructed – man, woman, or something else, and that support is produced in relation to understandings of these constructions.

Barry Checkoway (2009) focusses on the centrality and challenges of diversity to contemporary democracies and the ways in which community change can occur. A central feature of his ongoing work is considering the different understandings and usages of ‘community’ as the site through which change may be organised and occurring (and in this case around the people/spaces of support). For Checkoway, community can be “a place where people live, or a group of people with similar interests, or relationships among those who share common concern” (Checkoway, 2009: 7). In relation to t & gnc young people, the last two understandings of ‘community’ are most relevant to this research. The focus is less on ‘community’ based on place as an organising principle, although the local context is still important, and rather on the similar interests and identities of transgender or gender diverse young people, as well as the recognition of common issues, or social experiences as the prominent organising frames of community change in relation to peer-based community support. These two ways of understanding ‘community’ are useful theoretically for exploring

the different ways community change can occur and its implications and central organising principles.

A key consideration of this thesis is the ways ‘trans or gender diverse young people’ are engaged in the process of community making in the current local New Zealand context through peer-support actions and exploring how queer and trans ‘community’ is conceived and negotiated (informed by a range of discourses from both the local and global contexts). The challenges to changing constructions of community are not unique to transgender young people, but are central to a shift from modern to post-modern social theorising and activism. How to negotiate difference in social change has been a key concern to post-structuralist feminists reflecting ongoing debates in the relationship between the ways gender is understood and the implications of this for creating political and social change through ‘community’ action.

Sawicki (1991) discusses how attention to post-structuralist approaches to social change can be beneficial to communities and individuals by maintaining a critical engagement with dominant gender discourses, enabling different types of communities to form. This makes it possible to ask questions about support as a site of community change - how/why are young t & gnc people are becoming increasingly framed and recognised as a distinct yet diverse group? How might this be changing support options and possibilities for subjectivity and embodiment? What is the significance in differences between the ways in which young people are defining or expressing themselves (including through individual and community constructions) and how professionals or ‘expert’ knowledges construct them?

Transgender Studies – Academic activism

A useful terminological distinction can be made between ‘the study of transgender phenomena’ and ‘transgender studies’ that neatly captures the rupture between modern and postmodern epistemic contexts for understanding transgender phenomena, the different types of language games that pertain to each context, and the different critical practices that characterize each project. The ‘study of transgender phenomena’ ... is a long-standing, on-going project in cultures of European origin. Transgender studies, on the other hand, is the relatively new critical project that has taken shape in the past decade or so. It is intimately related to emergent ‘postmodern conditions for the production of knowledge (Stryker, 2006: 12).

The cultural turn to theorising transgender and gender diverse subjectivities and embodiments within the humanities and social sciences informs transgender activism and community support actions, including (re)producing ideas about individual and collective identities. Central to this shift has been desubjugating knowledges. This involves the process of differentiating between approaches to knowledge production which construct t & gnc people as objects of study and knowledge and those which engage with t & gnc people as having legitimate knowledge about their own experiences. For Susan Stryker, a Transgender Studies approach positions “the embodied experience of the speaking subject ... to be a proper – indeed essential – component of the analysis of transgender phenomenon [and] experiential knowledge is as legitimate as other more ‘objective’ forms of knowledge” (Stryker, 2006: 12). She argues that in order to develop alternative understandings of gender diverse subjectivities and embodiments (for example, about local t & gnc communities) analytic approaches need to centre on transgender voices and stories in the production of ‘knowledge’ (Stryker, 2006: 12).

Transgender Studies academically, is a broad interdisciplinary global field intimately tied to the contested term ‘transgender’. It informs the activism for change in the status and lives of transpeople and the discourses being used to shape trans experiences. This body of work has been strongly informed by post-structuralist and queer critiques of heteronormative sexuality and binary gender constructions. As a result, in its broadest sense ‘transgender’ is used as a collective term that includes all people who transgress or disrupt the dominant binary gender (representing gender as fixed and either/or man or woman) order in some way (see Ekin and King’s (1999) modes of transgenering). Used critically in this way, the term transgender within a desubjugating approach has enabled a focus on gender diversity and an exploration of the diverse ways in which transgenering is experienced. In order to resist limiting (trans)gender to binary and singular options, there is often a distinction made between the term ‘transgender’ (to talk collectively) and the importance of individual self-identification and articulation of gender (which may draw on the term transgender, or use others, such as woman, man, transguy, genderqueer, transsexual etc). This reflects a key engagement with negotiating ‘difference’ in this dynamic academic and social field, enabling transgender ‘communities’ to be conceptualised collectively, while simultaneously maintaining and valuing the importance of individual subjectivities, embodiments and diverse experiences.

The development of the term *transgender* and its usages (see Kessler and McKenna, 2006) has been central to contributing to recent social changes. Key debates around the meanings and usages of the terms *transsexual* and *transgender* indicate the productive power and politics of language. It is important to acknowledge the contested nature and multiplicity of the term *transgender* and its usages within ‘transgender studies’ as an academic discourse. The development of the language of ‘transgender’ is associated with the production of alternatives to dualistically organising social frameworks, challenges existing norms (Kessler and McKenna, 2006).

Activism and research within Transgender Studies has drawn attention to the range of ways individuals may be constituted within gender discourses and, more recently, on the importance of social context in shaping possibilities for transgenering (Hines, 2006). This has led to exploring trans social subjects at both a macro and micro level, focussing both on individuals ‘telling stories’ and narrative analysis, as well as analyses of social changes, citizenship and critique of the psycho-medical pathologisation of gender identity ‘disorders’ (see: Ekins and King, 1999; Halberstam, 1998; Hines, 2007a; Monroe and Warren, 2004; Nataf, 1997; Sanger, 2008). Recent academic discussions within transgender studies have also demonstrated the importance of incorporating temporal factors into analyses of (trans)gender (Hines, 2006). These are central to providing a richer insight into, and maintaining the diversity of, transgender lives within research, while continuing to explore the interrelationships and meanings produced between trans people and their social worlds. Based on her research into the lives of transgender people in the U.K. in relation to the introduction of the Gender Recognition Act in 2005, Hines argues that “transgender identities are constructed in relation to temporal factors of generation, transitional time span, and social and cultural understandings and practices” (Hines, 2006a: 64). The investigation of the diversities and collectivities of peer-based or community support in this thesis is framed through an engagement with desubjugating knowledges, in particular, stories about a range of evolving activisms, transgender narratives and imagined communities that are shared by participants from within trans/queer communities, rather than knowledges and practices generated ‘for’ and ‘about’ them.

Bodies as sites of change

In developing understandings of transgender subjectivities and embodiments, contemporary transgender theorists are interested in both the discursive production of subjects within

complex power relations and language, as well as maintaining attention to their materiality (Stryker, 2006). This pays particular attention to how *difference* is being negotiated in people's gendered embodiments to shape the provision of support. The focus is on exploring the relationships between subjects and social discourses of transgender and how bodies and technologies are engaged in the (re)production of claims to certain 'truths' about what are right or wrong bodies, as well as the ways these may be challenged or resisted.

Judith Butler's (1990) conceptualisation of 'performativity' has been an influential contribution to theorising gender, "[t]o say that gender is a performative act is to say ... it is directed at others in an attempt to communicate, is not subject to falsification or verification, and is accomplished by 'doing' something rather than 'being' something" (Stryker, 2006: 10). Trans theorists Ekins and King (1999) utilise this performative approach to t & gnc people's gendering describing it as *transgendering*. Gendering, as a verb highlights, the ongoing actions individuals are engaged in as they accomplish gender on a day-to day basis through which they come to experience gender as part of their individual identity. Transgendering is used to talk about the process of gendering as it occurs for those who do not fit or conform to the socially dominant understanding of gender as a binary, based on biologically 'sexed' bodies as male/man/masculine or female/woman/feminine.

Ekins and King (1999) consider different 'modes' of transgendering - different ways individuals can transgress an essentialised binary gender order recognised as the dominant and naturalised social model of gender production. 'Migrating' involves crossing the gender binary permanently and is focussed on the reproduction of being a man or woman. 'Oscillating' is crossing temporarily, focussing on the production of a cross-gendered 'performance'. 'Negating' is described as "the 'ungendering' of those who seek to nullify maleness/masculinity or femaleness/femininity and deny for themselves the existence of a binary divide" (Ekins and King, 1999: 35-6). This articulates a desire to eliminate binary gender. Finally 'transcending' focusses on going beyond binary gender and engaging with alternative ways of understanding and embodying it (Ekins and King, 1999: 36).

These different modes of transgendering demonstrate a wide range of transgendered subjectivities and embodiments possible for t & gnc young people. They extend beyond those in dominant productions of support (largely focussed on reproducing gender binaries), to consider those which work to reimagine gender. This provides is an example of the

possible range of different trans subjectivities and embodiments present in support spaces, and how the ways in which we think about gender and the discourses we are located within have important implications for our (re)productions and experiences of gender. Rather than focussing on specific expressions/identities of transgenerating young people (such as basing a study on transgendered youth), this project focusses on the ways participants experience and negotiate a range of discourses about transgender, individually and collectively, within and beyond support discourses. This approach positions ‘support’ as a site through which bodies and identities are negotiated and constituted in a range of ways. Not limited to dominant ‘expert’ narratives about who transgendered people are, it offers a critical space of engagement, working outside of formalised ‘expert’ support provision to view trans young people as having their own expertise in producing support.

Embodiment is particularly central to a ‘transgender studies’ approach. It is emphasised in order to recognise bodily/corporeal experiences in the lives of transgender people. Theorising about embodiment informs this study because it acknowledges the performativity of the body and disrupts the mind/body dualism (Cregan, 2006). Embodiment is about “recognising bodies are socially important phenomenon ... [and] embodiment is the condition of possibility for our relation to other people and to the world” (Cregan, 2006: 2-3). In this project, attention to participants’ embodiments highlights the importance of bodies to trans subjectivities and experiences and explores how trans young people’s non-conforming bodies are constituted within context of New Zealand. This is an important part of analysing the way that discourses available in the support context shape trans young people’s experiences of support in New Zealand. John Holliday and Ruth Hassard argue that “in discourses bodies enact their locations both in accord and discord with those discourses ... [and that the] body is something multiplicitious, as a site through which competing and contested discourses of power and resistance are played out” (Holliday and Hassard, 2001: 8).

A focus on embodiment acknowledges the material experiences of being a young trans person in New Zealand – how bodies are integral to the experiences of gender non-conforming as meanings and experiences of those bodies inform people’s view of the world around them, how they are ‘read’ and how they read others. This is particularly important in relation to analysing how experiences and possibilities of gender production are shaped by broader social discourses, understandings, interactions and stories about gender. The

embodied subjectivities of t & gnc young people are an important part of an exploration of the support context, in particular, how they are shaped through the stories and spaces that enable/disable their very production.

The possibilities for recognising a person's actions in the social (re)production and negotiation of sex-gender through a disruption of a binary understanding of mind/body, is to acknowledge the body/corporeality. Not all bodies are the same - each has its own unique shape, form, and sensations which effect its (re)production and positioning within social spaces. Post-structuralist understandings that acknowledge the body as performative (whereby bodily productions such as gender appear natural due to their reiterated performances (Butler, 1990) and have a degree of discursive agency, do not fully express the extent to which the body is always already a physical body and cultural object, never devoid of meaning, especially in relation to understandings of sex-gender (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 128). From the time we are born, and at times even earlier (with increasingly specialised bio-technological medical and scanning advances), the sex-gendering of a baby is a central determining factor in its social production as a sex-gendered subject, which continues through its entire life. In other words, sex-gender discourses are already present and discursively producing experiences of the body as sex-gendered prior to subjective knowledge and action about these discourses. Simon Williams and Gillian Bendelow (1998) emphasise that the body, as a surface, is never devoid of meaning, but enters a world that already invests in particular beliefs and values about sex-gender.

A view of the sex-gendered subject in which meaning is not just simply inscribed on the body is important to this project in maintaining t & gnc young people as embodied subjects. Such an approach recognises that the type of inscriptions possible depend on the very biological surfaces which are being inscribed, and not all bodies experience inscriptions in the same way which influences their experiences of them. This includes the potential to be more or less resistant to certain inscriptions. Williams and Bendelow utilise this reconceptualised 'open materiality', suggesting a metaphorical representation of calligraphy to illustrate the relationship between the embodied subject and their subjugation to discourses:

As any calligrapher knows, the kind of texts produced depends not only on the message to be inscribed, not only the inscriptive tools— stylus, ink— used, but also on the quality and distinctiveness of the paper written upon (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 140).

The very categories and understandings of sex-gender-sexuality as normatively reproduced through what Judith Butler (1990) calls the ‘heterosexual matrix’ are brought into question simultaneously by both the physical and psychic/emotional expressions of gender diversity, posing a significant challenge to such binary understandings and the largely taken-for-granted reproduction of heteronormative dualistic embodiments. Transgender and gender non-conforming individuals’ identities and expressions demonstrate that what it is to be a man, woman, masculine, feminine, male, female and even heterosexual or homosexual can be quite deliberately resisted, and/or actively (re)produced and also queered in ways which disrupt such binary classification.

In addition, the dualistic constructions of mind/body and inside/outside are also challenged in the ways in which transgender and gender non-conforming embodiments incorporate both physical and psychic/emotional expressions of sex-gender, highlighting a corporeal sensationality which is both (re)active and relational, engaging both mind and body simultaneously, inside and outside. This ensures that bodily expressions (like pain or desire) are not ignored or downplayed in social constructionist accounts (Williams and Bendelow, 1998). In other words, such embodied sensations are an important part of experiencing the social. For transgendered and gender non-conforming young people, understandings of gender identity and expression frequently draw on existing socio-cultural knowledges about sexed-gendered bodies, but are also invested in expressing a sensation of body-self which may not easily reproduce a direct inscription of dominant knowledges and may be linked to other bodily sensations. The resulting embodiments may represent an alternative configuration of gender identification and expression, incorporating seemingly incongruous sex-gender understandings and bodily sensations to express a sense of self which does not necessarily conform to binary understanding. This produces a diverse range of possibilities for sex-gender embodiment and understanding of sexuality not contained or limited by these. The ways these possibilities (that is, a range of transgender and gender non-conforming identities, expressions and corporealities) inform understandings/practices of ‘support’ is central to this thesis.

Queer Phenomenology

The work of Sara Ahmed (2006) which develops a queer phenomenological perspective to focus on the experiences of interactions between bodies and objects in space as ‘orientating

devices' informs the theoretical approach employed in this project. Ahmed highlights how the shaping of embodiments is not based on what is necessarily present or absent in space, but on the way people are 'oriented' or directed in particular ways (Ahmed, 2006: 68). She draws on a 'queered' phenomenological approach to explore the importance of not only what is present or absent in space, but the movement of bodies towards or away from certain objects, that is, their proximity to objects and the range of investments in these. She describes how bodily 'orientations' in space involve "different ways of registering the proximity of objects and others...[and that]... they shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation as well as 'who' or 'what' we direct our energy or attention towards" (Ahmed, 2006: 2-3).

Ahmed describes experiences of straight and queer (in relation to sexuality) spatially, as relating to lines or directions one might follow. A straight line (representing a dominant heterosexual discourse) is largely pre-designated and is easily followed with many objects/others to provide direction. In contrast, a queer line has no pre-determined direction. It may involve some cues, but is made through an engagement with embodied sensations (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed uses this approach to explore how a range of sexual orientations are subjectively embodied, highlighting a level of agency in this process. Her focus is on the queer potential and possibilities for movement of bodies in space in resisting dominant sexuality hegemonies. I employ this approach specifically in relation to gender not sexuality, however, at times the distinction between sexuality and sex-gender 'orientations' is blurred (demonstrated in chapters four and five). I explore how t & gnc young people are engaged in support practices that respond to their bodily sensations of feeling different or 'out of line' (so to speak) and negotiate objects/others within their 'bodily horizons' (Ahmed 2006: 66). This acknowledges how an ongoing investment in particular objects/others in relation to sex-gendered bodies is central to becoming 'orientated' or 'disorientated' to a particular 'line'.

This 'orientation' process relates both to the shaping of others' embodiments from the position of subjects providing or informing support, but also to the very embodiments and investments of those providers who are already invested in and proximate to certain objects and others. In particular, this approach enables an exploration of a range of subjective and corporeal investments as equally legitimate possibilities, without reproducing or relying on existing hierarchies of gender/transgender knowledges of sex-gender or sexuality embodiment, or privileging the mind over the body (as occurs in psycho-medical discourse).

In contrast, gender (as conforming or non-conforming to dominant discourse) can be understood as a relational and intersubjective production, where all bodies are equally 'sensational' in this process, but can experience very different gender productions in their responses to differing objects and others in their body-spaces. The focus of the thesis is not on exploring gender identities, but rather the corporeal and discursive processes through which gender comes to have subjective meaning and the local peer-based intersubjective support knowledges and actions which play a part in shaping these.

In a queer phenomenological approach, it is not the body, as exclusively physical that is of interest, but the body as always embodied, in interaction and constituted through such interactions (Ahmed, 2006). This facilitates an exploration of more complex sex-gender-sexuality 'constellations' - the ways individuals negotiate a range of discourses, often in multiple, contradictory and fluid ways. Queer Phenomenology offers the possibility for examining how we experience the world in ways that is not limited by our subjective knowledge of it, but by recognising how bodily sensations play a role in extending or guiding our ways of knowing. This positions bodies as sites of potential activism, as the directedness of bodies can be both producer and product of a diverse range of narratives of what it is to be t or gnc.

Proximate body knowledges

In Ahmed's (2006) queer phenomenological approach, 'proximity' describes a sense of directedness or movement of bodies in the (re)production of sex-gender-sexuality orientations, toward or away from objects/others, as well as the embodied investments in these. In this thesis, 'proximities' are used to explore how support practices may work on bodies to (re)produce or shape the possibilities available for young people's sex-gendered embodiments. In a project invested in the desubjugation of young people's sex-gendered embodiments through peer-based support knowledge and action, this offers potential for exploring alternative positions to socially dominant discourses of sex-gender and sexuality as products of many of the same subject-object relations.

Focussing on interactions and investments of bodies and objects in space as inter-affectual and subjectively and corporeally negotiated, allows for a exploration of gender orientations within support knowledges and actions as experienced by embodied subjects engaged in the field of support from a range of positions. It enables an exploration of the ways in which

peer-based ‘supports’ potentially play a role in the production of young people’s gendered embodiments through their presence in the body-spaces of others. What is available and proximate to subjects is a key site of inquiry into an understanding of ‘support’.

Power also plays an important role in this process of shaping the ways different embodiments may be attributed intersubjective meanings in social spaces. As infinitely pervasive, power has an important role in the availability of gender discourses to subjects. This includes how power/knowledge shapes the potential for how subjects and objects/others can interact to create affective support, whether objects/others are available to bodies in space, as well as their potential extent of proximity. In relation to support providers and developers, of particular importance is the extent to which recognising the positioning of one’s own subjective investments in sex-gender discourses – including dominant and/or other discourses, may work to shape actions and understandings in support provision.

Spatial and temporal considerations

The ways ‘supports’ exist in relation to the (re)production of knowledges in the negotiation of transgender or gender diverse or non-conforming embodiments is centrally about understandings sensations of ‘difference’ within a particular local context and the relations of power/knowledge in these spaces. The role of people’s feelings and subjective investments, the collective frameworks available to them and the valuing/disciplining of bodies associated with deviations from existing social norms and expectations, are all part of this negotiation of difference within the current social context of peer-based support. Context is important and highlights the importance of exploring participants’ involvements and experiences of support in relation to their socio-historic location.

A focus on temporality and spatiality includes focussing on the foreground objects of inquiry to explore what support is responding to and how it is occurring. For example, participants’ stories highlight what ‘things’ supports are to them (as embodied subjects) or why they are used. It also necessitates extending this inquiry to the background in which bodies and objects are located and in interaction as these inform subjective and corporeal knowledges. This means highlighting the macro and micro contexts bodies are simultaneously engaged in and the interconnectedness of individual and collective frameworks of embodiment – including broader discourses about sex-gender and sexuality which provide a social framework for understanding such possibilities.

Ahmed (2006) describes how this process is important in exploring understandings of objects in space to ensure they cannot be assumed as a social given, as ahistorical or static. Rather body knowledges and interactions must be understood as located spatially and temporally in specific socio-political and historical contexts. Ahmed (2006: 38) writes, “a background is what explains the conditions of emergence or arrival of something as the thing that it appears to be in the present”. In exploring knowledges and actions of peer-based support for transgender diverse young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, this means not assuming that ‘support’ means the same thing, is experienced in the same way by all people, or that it does not change in relation to the movement and proximity of objects in space and over time. Ahmed’s approach highlights why it is important to avoid speaking of what ‘support’ is in any singular or fixed way, but rather to explore how it is (re)produced and relates to particular times, spaces and bodies.

Dis-orientations

Ahmed’s (2006) concept of ‘disorientation’ is also employed in this thesis. She talks about a sense of ‘disorientation’ in relation to the ‘queer’ potential of a phenomenological approach. Spatially bodies are in a process of always ‘becoming’, constituted in relation to shifting objects/others in space. For Ahmed, the directions bodies follow with respect to their sensations and discursive investments through being directed and proximate to some objects more than others, provides them with a sense of ‘orientation’ (Ahmed, 2006: 16). Through her analysis of sexuality, she describes how a deviation away from what is proximate or invested in, particularly when those things are discursively dominant (such as heterosexuality), may lead to a sense of ‘crises’ or loss of direction, a ‘disorientation’ until new objects replace those previously lost (Ahmed, 2006: 67). For example, this may mean having always believed and invested in being heterosexual, but one day experiencing an intense attraction to someone of the same sex-gender.

I draw on ‘disorientation’ to examine how t & gnc young people negotiate sensations of difference, or ‘otherness’, to dominant and/or assumed gender discourses in their intersubjective productions and the ways support practices respond to these. Ahmed’s (2006) work suggests that a sense of ‘dis-orientation’ may also offer a productive body-space for celebrating the rejection of normative reproductions, rather than needing to engage in re-orientation to ‘correct’ such deviation.

Within a Queer Phenomenological approach, experiencing sexed and gendered identities, bodies and/or language as ‘disorientating’ relates to a person’s deviation from dominant social narratives or discourses in the process of becoming intersubjectively constituted as an ‘acceptable’ sex-gendered subject. The notion of intersubjectivity refers to the way a person is positioned through joint interactions and understandings, co-constituted with other subjects. Experiencing sex-gender as disorientating, relates to discordance between the assumed knowledges/experiences people invest in others’ gender (re)productions, and a person’s own bodily sensations and experiences. Disorientation as a sensation, may initially be expressed through feelings of being ‘different’ or ‘out of place’. This very experience of not feeling connected to, or oriented within, discourses which work to frame and (re)produce ‘normative’ embodiments, expresses the power/knowledges that such discourses have to shape subjective understandings of bodies. Experiencing disorientation is linked, in this regard, to a resistance or non-conformity to largely taken-for-granted ways of constituting bodies/subjects as sexed and gendered. For example, it is hard for most people to imagine anything other than being either a man or a woman in a modern Western context. Even for many transgendered or gender non-conforming people this too is difficult to contemplate, that is, it is challenging to imagine alternatives to an assumed desire to be(coming) a male-man/female-woman. The negotiation or challenging of these assumed ideas, however, becomes central to transgendered and gender diverse people for them to be able to create understandings of their own sex-gender embodiments that are not limited to these normative models.

The dominant framings of sexed and gendered bodies and identities within Western cultural discourses are based on dualistic and essentialised understandings of sex, gender and sexuality, and how their constitutive categories relate to each other. The sensations of disorientation, therefore, are constructed within and through these dichotomies - through the production of knowledges that signify bodies or identities as either/or normal/abnormal, right/wrong, or real/artificial for example, and are the products of power/knowledges that mediate the success or failure of a subject to produce an embodiment or performance of sex-gender that is ‘readable’ and legitimate within a given cultural space. Feeling ‘different’ in relation to such a bodily production reinforces that there exist knowable ‘normal’ or desirable expressions of sex-gender productions (even if these are taken for granted) in which this sense of ‘difference’ is relationally constituted. Feeling ‘out of place’ similarly suggests

there is a 'right' place or way to be and a subject can experience a lack of recognition or connection between themselves and a space and others/objects around them within a given context.

How do sensations of disorientation, constituting subjects as experiencing themselves as in some way 'different' or 'out of place' (in relation to dominant discourses of sex-gender and the spaces these are reproduced within), not simply equate to subjects experiences of sex-gender as negated or 'lacking' a sensation of their sex-gender (and associated sexuality) as legitimate or authentic? This thesis considers this question within the provision of community support to explore the ways subjects talk about their experiences of feeling disorientated as part of a process of renegotiating becoming sex-gendered subjects in other ways. How is this part of individuals' journeys of finding supports, and what do trans and queer support spaces, peers and community offer as orientating devices (and in what directions)?

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

This chapter discusses the research methodology employed in this thesis. As ‘expert’ narratives *about* t & gnc young people shape the possibilities for trans-subjectivity and embodiment, different narratives and approaches will potentially produce ‘alternative’ knowledges, ‘spaces’ and bodies. The production of trans/queer community-based support spaces thus raises questions about the experiences and identities enabled by these spaces, as well as the types of support imaginable. What does support mean for young t & gnc young people? To what extent are there similarities and differences between expert based supports and those provided from community/peer perspectives? How does a community/peer support provider perspective offer a different position/narrative about what support is/can be for t & gnc young people? And in what ways do community/peer support providers and developers work across differences to offer support to a range of t & gnc young people in New Zealand?

Through the review of literature and engagement with theoretical frameworks about t & gnc young people, a recurring theme – *space* emerged. It is one which informs this thesis. Different spaces of ‘support’, for example, potentially facilitate the construction of alternative t & gnc embodiments. In their book *Contested Bodies*, Ruth Holliday and John Hassard consider how bodies, and the meanings that are made of them, shift in relation to different spaces. This is most significant for bodies which are ‘contested’:

Contested bodies are produced and consumed in particular places and localities; location and context are key to how bodies are experienced, read, constructed, produced and reproduced [...]. Distinctions between respectable and non-respectable bodies have long been at the heart of the boundary drawing process etched in space. Bodies are frequently marked as in place or out of place [...]. The public/private divide, for example is all about bodies in space: whose body can be in public, and whose must remain in private [...]. Moreover, as we move through space, we cross borders - and as we do so, this can shift the meanings our bodies have in an instant (Holliday and Hassard, 2001: 12).

Situating t & gnc young people as ‘contested bodies’, acknowledges the ways in which they come to experience and embody gender with multiple and contradictory meanings in relation to different social spaces through which they are discursively constructed. This not only

informs the research strategies and analysis of participants' narratives in this thesis, in particular, constructing a *space* for these 'contested bodies' to tell gender non-conforming stories. The rationale informing this approach is an acknowledgement of a *lack* of spaces for t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand to talk about their experiences and the supports they are active in.

This thesis examines support spaces for t & gnc young people from queer and trans community/peer perspectives by examining the stories young people, and those who support them, tell about the kinds of support they provide and receive. Exploring alternative/additional perspectives to expert narratives requires research strategies that enable the recognition of a wider range of discourses informing support, a greater diversity of gender identities and expressions, considers local supports and young people's stories about their experiences. This chapter outlines the methodological approach to creating such spaces, exploring stories and engaging with t & gnc young people and those who work to support them in Aotearoa New Zealand spaces of trans and queer community based support. The sections of this chapter discuss the research design, participant involvement and analysis of interviews. This includes the research questions, ethical practices and participant recruitment and interviewing.

Developing research strategies

Research strategies for this project were developed to maintain an interconnectedness between individual experiences of t & gnc young people and the (re)production of peer and community based support in New Zealand. The aim was to consider how subjective and embodied knowledges of trans and queer communities/peers may shape support for t & gnc young people. In other words, to investigate what support is currently available to/for young trans people coming out in New Zealand and how this relates to the (re)production and shifting nature of transgendered subjectivities and embodiments within 21st century global and local contexts.

The recent interest in transgender activism has seen the politicising of bodies in which gender is a site of contestation (for example those who are transgendered, butch, effeminate, genderqueer), utilising queer deconstructions of gender and human rights frameworks to advocate for greater recognition, protection and legitimacy of such embodiments. The *space* of this thesis is one which draws on this ideological shift and takes up people's stories of their

experiences of gender non-conformity to explore this change through the field of trans and queer community-based support. This is also informed by the recent focus on narratives/stories in the social sciences, such as Ken Plummer's work on the role of 'sexual storytelling' in recent social movements for change:

[S]tories and narratives depend upon communities that will create and hear those stories: social worlds, interpretive communities, communities of memory. The telling of sexual stories that can reach public communities of discourse has been a central theme. [...]. [T]hese stories work their way into changing lives, communities and cultures. Through and through, sexual story telling is a political process [...] [and] the analysis of sexual stories [...] is central to an understanding of the workings of sexual politics in the Plummer, 1995: 145).

The research strategies for this project are informed by Plummer's work which demonstrates the ways in which individual lives are linked through common experiences or in relation to shared oppressions. Thus, telling stories of gender non-conformity facilitates an analysis of the gendered world and its effects on those who do not conform (whether on purpose or accidentally).

Gathering narratives/stories from t & gnc young people around Aotearoa New Zealand involved in support was central to this project. Engaging with young people and support providers was important as there is no existing research into the community/peer based support provision of trans and gender diverse young people in New Zealand. The research process began with gaining ethical approval for the project, developing research and interview questions and practices in order to 'create the space' in which participants could talk about their t & gnc experiences and involvement in support. Finding suitable participants from all parts of Aotearoa New Zealand and building research relationships with them was a significant process. From the initial development of the research questions and proposal, achieving the research goals has involved a significant personal commitment to turning ideas into physical skills (such as developing interviewing techniques) in order to create the necessary relationship and *space* for gender non-conforming stories to be told.

Queer, feminist and post-structuralist approaches inform the research design. Utilising a personal narrative methodology connected with "illuminating the intersection of human experience and social context" (Cole and Knowles, 2001: 9), this project used one-to-one in-depth semi-structured interviews with providers, developers and recipients of support for t &

gnc young people. In-depth interviewing one-to-one with participants was chosen as the most appropriate method to provide a flexible approach that encouraged open discussion of topics relevant to participants from a range of spaces and perspectives of support. This was important given the challenge of varied locations of support spaces and individuals around New Zealand. Recognising that recruiting and interviewing participants would involve travelling to different locations, or alternatively utilise times when people would be visiting Christchurch (where the researcher was based at the time), one-to-one interviews allowed for flexibility in terms of where and when interviews could take place. The unstructured design also meant that interviews could respond to the different participants' experiences of support, allowing storytelling to focus on the areas research participants were able and willing to talk about, given their wide range of possible experiences and involvements in the research field.

The research focus on subjective understandings of what support is/can be, required talking to people about their personal experiences of being t & gnc or queer and how this shaped their support actions/knowledge. One-to-one interviews offered the best method to provide the most privacy for participants so that they could feel comfortable and safe in interviews in order to encourage open sharing of information with the researcher. This was particularly important given that participants would be involved in support in different ways and spaces around New Zealand and would have a range of experiences. In order to encourage talk, interviews were conducted at locations participants selected, where they felt most comfortable speaking about their experiences.

One to one interviews also provided the possibility to promote collaborative non-hierarchical relationships between researcher and participants, where reciprocity and rapport with participants could be developed in order to promote the perspective of the participants. This is consistent with feminist research approaches (Bryman, 2004: 336-7). As a researcher, this involved encouraging participants to ask questions about the project, actively talking about the research process and what was involved throughout the different stages. It could also involve sharing some of my own experiences of support involvement with participants and allowing them to get to know me in order for them to feel comfortable sharing their own experiences with me.

The focus on developing the relationship between researcher and participant, as one which is shaped by a collaborative partnership, functions in feminist and narrative research

methodologies to promote the wellbeing of participants. It also works to empower them through promoting their agency and involvement in the research process (Cole and Knowles, 2001). This is described by Ardra Cole and Gary Knowles (2001: 28) as ‘partnership research’, highlighting the “mutuality in purpose, process and result [...] equitable and authentically collaborative relationship”. In order to achieve this, the relationship should be built on the principles of intimacy, authenticity, mutual interest, care, sensitivity and a high level of reflexivity (Cole and Knowles, 2001: 26-28). By talking about the research and my involvement in the area of support, it allowed participants to learn that I was an insider in the field and identify areas of common interest. Emphasising my concerns for their wellbeing and feelings of safety showed them I cared about them, was working to minimise any harm and was genuinely interested in who they were. Similarly, all interviews involved asking participants how they identified and ways they liked to be referred to in order to ensure I was always respectful in how I spoke to them.

Ethical considerations

Achieving the promotion of participants’ wellbeing, and a space to openly discuss their gender non-conforming experiences (given the challenges associated with these for many people) were key issues in this project. ‘Preventative’ or proactive measures were incorporated into the research process. These acknowledge the need for cultural safety and respect for diversity in Aotearoa New Zealand. The development of a collaborative research relationship based on partnership with the participants, aimed at minimising the power relationship between researcher and participant by developing a relationship that encourages participants to have agency within the research process, ask questions, and be involved in the production of knowledge affecting their lives. The principle of *partnership* in the research relationship is central to feminist research (Cole and Knowles, 2001: 28), as well as culturally safe approaches to doing research. The notion of partnership in culturally safe research relies on a reflexive awareness and acknowledgement of the researcher’s own social position.

Another key element in promoting the safety and wellbeing of those involved in the research and minimising potential harm includes an awareness of the importance of participants’ privacy and confidentiality, a focus on informed consent processes, and ensuring participants were encouraged to be active in the research processes and comfortable with the stories they were contributing to the research. I undertook the research as a largely collaborative project, inviting and encouraging participants to ask questions and share their experiences and

perspectives of engaging in the research, as well as asking them to review the transcripts. I wanted to ensure that participants were still happy to contribute the stories they shared during interviews, given an opportunity to reread them. I approached this research as an extension of my existing commitment to supporting trans/gender diverse young people and contributing to this field of community and peer support. Thus, an ethic of care and respect for participants was always fundamental, and my own reflexivity essential, in order to both promote individual wellbeing and develop research methods which are inclusive and responded to the needs of participants as well as the research goals. The project gained ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee (see Appendix for information, consent, interview and community resource sheets).

Identifying participants

The interviews were designed to facilitate a range of positions/ perspectives about the context of community based support for t & gnc young people in New Zealand, for example, participants' experiences of queer/trans community/peer-based support. Different viewpoints about what support is, who provides it, and how it is/should be provided were important to consider. The age range of young t & gnc participants from 16- 30 years was designed to incorporate the experiences of young people in relation to the experiences of transgender and gender diversity at different ages. The focus was on the experiences (and support needs) of young people as they negotiate their gender expressions and identities as they enter adulthood. For some people, this is negotiated while they are school-aged. The starting age of 16 years was designed to be inclusive of those who may be at school.

In order to ensure a range of perspectives were included, three different 'types' of participant were recruited, representing different people's involvements with support. These included *young t & gnc people* (aged 16-30 years); *'support providers'* (who would also be young people who are t & gnc); and *'support developers'* - other people involved in informing the support available (who would be t, gnc and/or queer as members of the wider queer/trans communities). *Young t & gnc* participants would potentially offer perspectives on being young and t or gnc in the current context, including finding support and talking about their experiences of this. *Support provider* participants would potentially offer perspectives on providing peer/community support to other t & gnc young people, as well as their own experiences of being t or gnc. *Support developer* participants would potentially offer perspectives about broader projects and initiatives informing and shaping the way

community/peer based support is being provided and/or about supports which were not youth specific such as some transgender groups.

Participant recruitment

Transgender and queer community networks nationally were used to find research participants. Recruitment of participants utilised snowball sampling to include a diversity of roles and potential experiences across the three ‘types’ of participants. Particular areas of representation were also important to include. These included representation from a range of formal and informal supports available to t & gnc young people in New Zealand; different ages of participants (particularly within the 16-30 years extended ‘youth’ age bracket widely used in t & gnc support); different locations and spaces of support within the New Zealand context (including those beyond the major centres, online space, and additional modes of support action); a range of involvements in the field (user, provider and developer perspectives); and a range of gender identities and expressions of participants (including those on both MtF and FtM continuums and including non-Western perspectives).

As an insider in the field of both trans and queer support networks, I had met and worked with a number of support providers and developers over the years previous to undertaking this project. Identifying potential participants for the project was informed by my experience in and knowledge of the diversity of the field of community and peer-based support. I knew of many different types of supports being provided – such as local groups, online networks, national projects and hui, as well as variations in the formality and regularity of these. I was also aware of the range of gender identities and expressions of young t & gnc people around New Zealand and the ways in which existing supports were often used or only accessible to y particular groups of t & gnc young people, such as specific FtM or MtF spaces.

To develop my knowledge further I spoke on the phone and emailed three support contacts in different areas of the country about the project in order to help identify possible participants. These conversations involved talking about the research project and asking about current involvements and knowledge of local support actions (who was involved and what was known about other areas). In particular, I wanted to ensure that t & gnc young people from areas I had less knowledge of were included. One particular gap in my knowledge at the time was of support further south of Christchurch, particularly Dunedin, where local support providers were more physically isolated from the rest of the country and larger support

organisations and national interaction. In the queer/trans support networks at the time, interactions between groups in Wellington, Auckland and Christchurch were occurring to some degree, but there was little interaction with other places – especially further south of Christchurch.

One contact I spoke to recommended a person in Dunedin. I made contact and this led to two interviews taking place. Through this process of speaking with people involved with support and talking about my project I developed a potential participant list of support providers and developers in Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin where support was most actively occurring. With very small numbers of t & gnc young people and support providers within the New Zealand population the possible participants were limited but also very diverse, reflecting many different experiences of being t & gnc, as well as many different spaces/locations of support.

Given this diversity, participants were selected to include as many voices as was practical and possible (without funding to travel widely). Most participants (eight out of eleven) were t & gnc young people, six of these were also support providers who spoke about both their own experiences and their extension of support to others. The remaining three participants were involved in queer/trans community support for t & gnc young people but were either not t or gnc (one), or over the age of thirty (two).

From an initial group of approximately twenty possible support provider and developer participants identified around Aotearoa New Zealand, I approached eight to participate in the research. These provided a representation of the areas of interest. I interviewed these eight support providers and developers and an additional three t & gnc young people. Due to the limitations of a Masters research project, covering the range of variations in support was challenging. It was important to ensure participants with both queer and transgender (both FtM and MtF) perspectives to gender non-conformity were included to enable an exploration of connections between these areas of support and commonalities and overlaps in experiences. Additionally a range of cultural perspectives and locations around New Zealand were included different to consider different worldviews and contexts and how these might additionally shape support experiences. A limitation of my location was that I was unable to travel to Auckland where more culturally specific support was potentially occurring

(particularly bring together fa'afafine), as I was reliant on other peoples recommendations and my ability to find times to meet with people in person.

Participants

Participants included people involved in the following support groups/organisations: OutThere! (national), the New Zealand Human Rights Commission (national), Rainbow Youth (Auckland), Tranzform (Wellington), NZTransguys (online), OUSA Queer Support (Dunedin), Same-difference Youth (Dunedin), Agender (National/Christchurch), and Transister Radio (Christchurch). Additional summary information about participants is presented in the following table:

		Number of participants
Age distribution of participants (Years)	16-25	4
	26-30	5
	30+	2
Participant's Gender Identity/Expression	Queer	1
	FtM	3
	FtM/Neutral, Queer	1
	Neutral/Female, Queer	1
	Fa'afafine/MtF	1
	MtF/Neutral	1
	MtF	1
	Neutral, Queer	1
	Neutral	1
Location of support involvement	New Zealand wide	2
	Auckland	2
	North Island provincial town	1
	Wellington	1
	Christchurch	2
	Dunedin	3

Participants' self definition

For all t & gnc participants (aged 16-30 years) their inclusion was based on their self-recognition of being transgendered or gender non-conforming in some way. This approach

was taken to acknowledge and respect the importance of people defining and articulating their own identities and expressions of gender within the broader area of ‘gender diverse young people’. Other support providers were also encouraged to define and articulate their own identities and expressions of gender, in particular, how this relates to providing support to t & gnc young people. This was done in order to create a space for them to represent themselves in ways they felt comfortable with and talk about how their own experiences potentially relate to their support provision and development.

Identifying participants, or representing them in this thesis, provided a challenge to conventional forms of description within academic analyses which simplify identity markers such as gender. Describing all of the young participants in the project involved negotiating a range of factors across the group with respect for their diversity of identities and expressions of gender. This included recognising the need to: maintain participants privacy and safety; representing participants in a way that could be understood by a reader who had not met them, but that was still respectful to the ways they identified themselves; bringing an awareness of the need to work critically in relation to constituting/naming participants; and also approaching participants through the most basic of lessons when working to support trans and gender diverse young people – ‘don’t assume anything, ask’. This encourages and values self definition and expression.

First and foremost this research carries the ethic of respect for the safety and privacy surrounding participants contributing to this project as paramount, and works primarily from a position of self-definition or expression based on participants’ own words to represent them. Acknowledging written language as the mode of communication in this thesis space, certain decisions about how to write about participants had to be made to find a compromise to allow them to be accessible to a reader and providing enough information about the different participants without having to represent gendered identities. This is not an issue isolated to this thesis but reflects the constant negotiation people who do not conform to normative gender expectations can face on a day to day basis. This is captured with the all too frequently demanded question ‘are you a boy or a girl?’ to which answers can include, ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘some days’, ‘it depends on what you mean by such terms’, or ‘both’ representing a range of resistances to demands to dualistic sex-gender embodiment.

Names additionally are largely already gendered or ‘unisex’ within a particular cultural

context and participants' real names were omitted to protect their identities. Pseudonyms were not used as they would further work to construct them as gendered (and potentially misrepresent them). Instead participants are referred to generically, for example as 'Participant A', based on the order they appear in the thesis. This is done to maintain their anonymity and to resist attention being deflected away from their self-representation. This ensures that the experiences of the negotiation and redefinition of such gendered markers and experiences occur within the context of the stories they tell. In addition to the language surrounding the gendering of subjects, the pronouns used throughout this thesis will reflect participants' own self-identification and selection, or will be avoided, whatever is most appropriate in respecting the person's self-expression and comfort within gendered language. Some additional information is provided to help the reader gain an initial sense of participants' gender (dis)orientations. This highlights participants' movement away from, or the further development of a cultural 'sexing' of their bodies, and in what direction.

For transgender and gender non-conforming young people, names, pronouns and gender identities are frequently a minefield of negotiation, with the idea of 'passing' or expressing the gender of their choice (subverting those used or 'pre-given') often more a focus than any assertion of birth sex, or legal status. This highlights the workings of power/knowledge through language to the extent that language is closely connected with both the disciplining and maintenance of binary gender categories, as well as being an important site of resistance when strategically employed. It draws attention to the ways people express gender and communicate with one another, as well as the power and feelings associated with having easy access to a taken for granted name and gender pronoun which is widely accepted. Conversely, attention can also be drawn to how a sense of self may be brought into question, or thwarted by others when these do not fit easily.

An introduction to participants and exploration of the diversity of t & gnc embodied subjectivities includes the ways young people talked about themselves at the time of being interviewed. These expressions were made in relation to being asked how they identified, and what words or terms they felt comfortable using to express their sense of gender. In addition to these self-representations, the following additional information is provided - participants' age and the relationship between their birth sex and gender identity or expression through the following categories: MtF (born male, moved/moving towards a feminine gender identity/expression); FtM (the opposite of MtF); and F(or M) (with a

neutral/resistant/genderqueer identity/expression), describing those who were designated Female (or Male) at birth but live with gender non-conforming embodiments, resist gender categorisation, or utilise multiple expressions. Additionally queer identities are also noted where participants highlighted these. This information is provided not to reinforce to readers the importance of ‘sex’ at birth, but rather to help understand the direction of sex/gender young people are disorientated in relation to, and the direction of their re-negotiation in embodiment.

Adding the additional information about participants is offered in order to remain open to the idea that the cultural (re)productions of particularly dominant sexed-gendered bodies/knowledges may be significant to shaping the ways people are able to resist or experience non-conformity. It also demonstrates how binary categories could not be used to successfully describe all participants’ gender identities and expressions singularly, even with the use of a third ‘neutral’ category to represent a range of non-conforming positions which resist dualistic organisation. This highlights the need to be wary of the challenges surrounding creating categories or groupings when describing transgender and gender diverse people within research. The range of diversity in such a population to socially taken-for-granted notions of binary sex-gender categorisation, and the possibilities for how these may be resisted and reworked, can be viewed as collectively empowering but the creation of sub-categories may work to undo this potential. The group of participants involved in this project offer examples of a range of resistances and investments in different sex-gender positions, both dualistic and more multiple.

Participant	Age	Gender identity/expression (including self definitions)	Sex at birth	Role in support field (as per contributions made in interviews)
A	20-30	Queer	M	Support developer
B	30+	FtM	F	Support developer, support provider
C	26	Neutral I am different from your normal typical female... I do not look or act at all girly ... I am comfortable within my own body and I put out there what I'm comfortable in. I suppose if you want appearance, you know, you've got your girlies with the long hair and the makeup, and things like that. I do not have long hair and I do not wear makeup [laughing]. ... I cannot tell you the last time I wore makeup ... so yeah.	F	Young person

		... I hate being called a girl ... girls not cool, but in saying that, when I get called a lady I don't like being called a lady either. I don't know why, I just don't like it. I find it quite amusing because I'm far from ladylike ... But I mean. I suppose if I had to give myself a name I would say I'm a woman and that's how I would put it out there.		
D	26	FtM Ok I guess I would see myself as a transguy, female to male, umm FTM, umm yeah.... In my day to day life, most of the time I'm just a guy, that's about it. And in some spaces I am a gay guy, um, and nothing else [laughs] and even within the queer community some people don't even know I'm trans, but that's quite limited as I'm quite out as trans in some other places just cos of the work of done in support stuff, so people generally find out I'm trans or know I'm trans by who I'm with at the time [laughs]. Yeah, so it's, yeah, but generally in everyday functioning um people would have no idea, however I do get the odd strange look cos I kept one of my birth names as a middle name so, which is, a very very feminine name so it kind of stands out on my ID [laughs], so I kind of get people looking at my ID and looking at me yeah.	F	Support provider, young person
E	18	FtM I'm 18, turning 19 at the end of the year, and pretty much just see myself as a regular guy. Yeah.	F	Young person
F	18	Fa'afafine/MtF I don't really mind if people know that I'm a trans but the word trans where I come from, it's not really popular. People go by the term fa'afafine, fakalaiti, faggot, poofter, but they don't really know the name trannie cos it's not a common name. ... I use 'a woman in a man's body'. I don't care if people know. I can be as flamboyant as I want to be. I don't care if they find out that I'm a trans cos I know who I am. It's when they start talking to me, it's a different story. They stereotype me and assume things until they're really talking to me.	M	Young person
G	26	MtF/Neutral I identify as a native American two-spirit, neither male nor female but present in a more feminine manner cos it's what I'm more comfortable with. I'm originally from [Major US city], and then [city name], and now I live in the wonderful city of [name].	M	Support provider, young person
H	24	FtM/Neutral, Queer I should say, like the words I use – I use queer to refer to myself, I use trans. I usually don't specify trans anything, I just like trans. ... I use genderqueer too. ... I feel that I exist in this kind of in between space – between the queer community, because queer so often doesn't include trans, and I can totally operate in that world and dyke dyke dyke, la de la de la.. I like dyke and fag both equally ... tending towards fag. ... So I can operate in that world and I feel fairly comfortable in that world, though I'm starting to definitely push my friends in those kinds of spaces to talk about gender more – to talk about yeah trans related stuff, and so even if it's just through jokes- it's usually just jokes. ...it was a big step for me this year really going with the trans word, and I realised that I was going to do it with my dissertation, I may as well go with it in my personal life. I even told my parents – that was exciting.	F	Support provider, young person
I	25	Neutral, Queer O.K. this is hard. I do not really identify as things, but I don't have a self-conscious desire not to identify as things, which makes it hard, because everyone wants you to identify, even if it's by not identifying. Umm, but it's more of something I've just not felt compelled to come to a conclusion about. ... Um, I do identify as queer I suppose.	F	Support provider, young person
J	30	Neutral/Female, Queer	F	Support provider
K	30+	MtF	M	Support provider

Interviews

I first travelled to Dunedin to interview three support providers/developers there and subsequently to Wellington for a national hui of trans/queer youth workers and young people where I had the opportunity to meet and organise interviews with four participants. I interviewed the remaining four participants in Christchurch – either while they were visiting the city (two) or were residents (two). Meeting potential participants, and interviewing them face-to-face, was the preferred research strategy. Contact was made in person with all participants prior to interviews taking place where detailed information sheets, consent processes and interview topics were discussed. All interviews took place as face-to-face interviews, except one that was arranged for a later date to be undertaken as a phone interview at the convenience of the participant due to limited face-to-face contact time and the remoteness of their residence.

All interviews were conducted in one session, except for one which was completed the following day due to its extended length to allow the participant to have a break. One interview was undertaken with two participants at the same time in Dunedin (by their request) to ensure they were both able to be involved in being interviewed with limited time constraints. All interviews were digitally audio recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Interviews took place in a range of locations which worked to offer choice and convenience to participants. This included cafes, a library, an airport, a participant's hotel room, on a marae, at a participant's home, and at the researcher's home. No difficulties were experienced with the variations in location, with quieter areas chosen in order for successful recording if locations were busy.

The process of developing and undertaking interviews that provided rich narratives of gender non-conforming experiences and support provision, relied on careful planning, ongoing development and reflexivity. Designing the interview approach was an important part of the research in order to produce quality narratives. Semi-structured interviewing allowed for flexibility to engage with a wide range of different participants in depth and focus attention on their views and experiences as they arose within interviews (Bryman, 2004). An important part of this was considering how to start conversations which would encourage the participants to share detailed stories, while maintaining connections to the research topic.

Developing interview questions involved developing different ways of getting the participant to think about and describe how they 'do' gender in different contexts, how they understand and are active in their gendered embodiment within social relationships, how they think about what 'support' is, and how this affects them. The different discussion topics within the interviews allowed for moving through different ways of talking about gender - from initially a self-descriptive position to eventually having the participant able to articulate their experiences of gender non-conformity and tell stories about support, using examples from their life. As the interviewer, my attention was focussed on active listening and asking questions in different ways that prompted the person to think about their experiences and ways of identifying which drew on not only what they 'knew', but also their feelings and ways they understood or experienced their bodies. This could include questions such as: *What identities, labels and/or words do you feel comfortable using? Where do you feel comfortable expressing yourself? What activities do you find hard to do because of how you look/act? Does your gender expression reflect how you see yourself? How have your experiences changed over time?*

Participant's experiences of gender non-conformity and support were at times closely associated with assumptions about their sexual orientation (for example, lesbian or gay). A number of the stories highlighted a blurring of focus between gender and sexuality. Allowing time for participants to talk about their sexual orientation, rather than shutting this down provided spaces in which participants shared stories about changing understandings of their embodiments through different lenses of sexuality and gender. Not rushing interviews, and allowing for periods of silence for them to think about their responses were an important part of developing this more detailed level of response (Tolich and Davidson, 1999:118).

Another successful strategy to facilitate talk was providing participants with a discussion guide prior to the interviews (at the same time as the consent and information sheet). These were not used to structure the interviews but to give participants an idea of areas of interest to them within the research and to encourage them to think about what they might want to share before the interview took place. One participant actually wrote notes to remind them of experiences they wanted to talk about in the interview (based on this discussion guide). While the notes were brought to the interview, they were not looked at. This was because the conversation encouraged wider ranging talk about experiences than what the notes had

covered. Another comment made by a participant after the interview was that they, “didn’t know where all the stories came from”, and that they were surprised at the ease at which they were able to talk about the topic. Many also become so focussed on the interview that they did not realise that over an hour (or sometimes two) had passed when we drew the interview to a close. Participants seemed to enjoy talking about their experiences and became more relaxed with the conversation as interviews progressed. All interviews were arranged to ensure participants would have as much time as possible to share their stories.

Research journal and field notes

A research journal and field notes were utilised in this research to promote critical reflexivity, in particular, a consideration of the researcher’s embodied subjectivity and position as central to the research process. Throughout the interviewing process a research journal was kept for informal reflections on the research process, including observations and field notes from interviews and events attended by the researcher which played a role in the analysis. This includes writing about what one “hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003: 110-111). The journal has been particularly useful as a record of interactions, feelings and experiences in different places and events. It offered a safe space to write about my experiences with participants, including things I found particularly surprising or interesting in the stories participants shared, highlighting areas I wanted to find out more about, or even in informing my own ‘identity’. In particular, writing descriptions of interviews soon after I had completed them was particularly useful to reflect on things that had been successful (or even unsuccessful), to consider how I might be able to build particular skills further, such as developing ways of asking questions. Descriptions of where interviews took place and what the environment also helped to remind me of the ‘space’ and mood during the interview.

The research journal offered a reflexive space for considering methodological, theoretical and substantive issues and findings, as well as reflecting on my own practice as a researcher. These methods reflect the approach of the project, focussing on the centrality of subjectivity and the body in the construction of meaning making (including my own) within different support spaces in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the analysis and writing process the research journal was an important tool which provided a space to develop and explore connections between the transcripts and literature in the research area. This relates to the ongoing relationship between the researcher and research, transcending when fieldwork stops and

analysis begins. It provides an ongoing space for thinking-writing as Christina Hughs (2002: 191) highlights, “[o]ne not only becomes conscious of one’s thinking through writing but writing shapes and transforms our thinking”. While the research journal does not directly appear in the thesis, it offers an important space for reflection and the development of research practices.

Researcher reflexivity

Drawing attention to and the ‘I’ that lurks in the background is an important part of feminist and other social research methodologies (Bryman, 2004; Pink, 2001; Plummer, 2001). This acknowledges the influence the researcher has upon research. Reflecting on the ‘I’ is consistent with an engagement in reflexive practice within narrative research. Alan Bryman describes how this involves researchers “be[ing] reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate [and it] ... entails a sensitivity to the researcher’s cultural, political and social context. As such, ‘knowledge’ from a reflexive position is always a reflection of a researcher’s location in time and space” (Bryman, 2004: 500). Wright describes the centrality and importance of reflexivity within her own research:

A brief history of the genesis of the study and the processes by which I, as researcher, came to make certain choices about the theory and methodology that shaped the study is important for understanding the rationale behind these choices. Such an understanding also requires an indication of how my biography and subjectivity informed the questions posed and the methodology chosen to answer them. This is in keeping with both the feminist and ethnographic aspects of the project (Wright, 1995: 2).

This is consistent with post-structuralist approaches to knowledge production as inter-subjective and relational. In the process of doing research, researchers may “engage in a kind of dialogue with their informants [and are] shaped by what they learn from their informants” (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003:31). This highlights a level of co-construction for both researchers and participants. As I undertook this research as an insider in the support community for t & gnc young people, my relationships with participants were already shaped by my involvements. I had spent time with some participants in the past as fellow support providers or developers. For those I had not met, the common experiences and challenges faced in local communities and in experiences of gender non-conformity were always at the forefront of my engagement with people. I explicitly talked about and acknowledged my own experiences,

recognising this as just one example within a huge diversity of gender non-conformity. I highlighted how all experiences were valuable and relevant to the project, establishing recognition of relational difference alongside a need for mutual respect, support and greater understanding. This was done in a discursive manner, largely through talking about the way the project was designed, the research aims and potential outcomes. The approach put participants at ease and made them feel respected and supported in their own gender expression, and was reflected in their enthusiasm to be involved in the research and in interviews where they spoke openly and with confidence.

My role as a researcher during interviewing was very much focussed on ensuring that participants felt valued and that their stories were worthy of being told, so that 'small' things were not just trivialised, or experiences seen as not important or 'big' enough to talk about. My own experiences have been central to developing my awareness and sensitivity to the effects of others' gender assumptions and the complexities people can have to negotiate intersubjectively with people who take gender (and sexuality) for granted. One of my particular interests in this project, which was discussed with participants, was exploring the ways t & gnc young people may do things differently: investing in different understandings, utilising different resources, and making sense of themselves in a range of ways which relate to their own contexts. Asking participants about the spaces in which they live and how they negotiated their 'difference' allowed them to tell stories about how gender expectations shaped their experiences and how these informed their involvement in support. At times I shared my own experiences, offering some reciprocity in order to recognise the contributions participants were making and also 'give back' and share in the level of trust built in the interview.

Analysis

The analytic process began through transcribing the interviews. This involved coding the transcripts manually, highlighting different themes and ideas emerging from participants' accounts. Through the coding process two quite separate areas of focus emerged from participants accounts which directed the analysis in two different directions. The first of these considers the ways participants talked about their experiences of finding and accessing support and what support meant to them. This included those from young people's perspectives – both young people seeking support and also those young people providing support who spoke about their experiences of coming out. What was particularly notable in

participants' talk related to what support was for them. This commonly did not relate to 'known' or available identities (as trans or genderqueer, for example), but more to their experiences of 'difference' to the dominant assumptions and expectation of gender and sexuality they experienced as they grew up into young adults. Feeling 'different' informed a need/desire to find some sort of support but it was often not for a number of years before they became aware of t & gnc identities. This developing understanding of their 'difference' shaped the kind of connections they could make with queer/trans community based supports.

In order to think about support for these young people it was first important to consider their experiences of non-conformity, how these informed their support needs and how they came to understand support (and for some go on to provide it to others). Most significantly in this non-conformity was a crucial negotiation young people were undertaking in making sense of being 'different' in relation to their gendered embodiments with, feeling unable to describe, understand or know any other way of being. An underlying assumption of support for young people is the extent to which it relies on an understanding or sense making in order to provide a direction in support. A Queer phenomenological approach offered a way to explore these experiences and maintain a view of young people as agentic. Young people actively engaged in producing alternative embodiments through various social cues or experiences and would find various spaces of support. This links to Ahmed's (2006) model of 'queer orientations' and 'disorientations', where people may find themselves 'out of line' or 'disorientated' from dominant experiences of gender and is useful for exploring these experiences. This approach forms the basis of the first analytic chapter informed by Ahmed's Queer Phenomenological approach introduced in chapter two. It explores these experiences and considers the ways young people negotiate t & gnc embodiments.

The second theme which emerged from the coding of participants' interviews centered around the provision of community/peer based support as a site of activism, recognising that the stories people shared were not just about 'services' they were providing but about contributing to a movement engaged in redefining t & gnc subjectivity. Plummer's (1995) 'sociology of stories' informs this approach recognising the centrality of stories to the (re)production of social worlds and in particular the stories central to movements of social change. It is relevant to considering local trans/queer community based support as providing a site of resistance to dominant models of support and the importance of this storytelling in contributing to this action. The stories told by t & gnc young people and their

peers/community about the local community-support context for young people and how it is experienced, are used to consider the negotiation and enactment of t & gnc young people's embodiments in support spaces, where 'expert' narratives are replaced or accompanied by other focusses and actions of support.

Plummer (1995) highlights that the telling of stories is a political act, connected with giving voice to those in society marginalised or silenced. The telling of such stories as is undertaken in this project is also very much about embodied experiences. Throughout my time involved in youth support, which informs this project, storytelling has been used as a central tool of support action. The sharing of personal stories one-on-one, or in group settings, as they relate to gender and/or sexuality, is a common process on which much support is based. Storytelling is used in many different ways – for example, to establish common ground with others, to locate shared oppressions or issues, to provide options and possible solutions, to demonstrate openness or inclusiveness, to tell other people about key decisions that have been made, to share examples of negotiating coming-out, to assert personal identities, and to challenge others' assumptions. It is therefore important to acknowledge that storytelling is a process of inter-subjective discursive production in action. Storytelling is about locating ourselves in relation to others and social discourses - identifying similarities and differences, things we have in common or areas of disagreement, offering examples through which to learn, and opportunities to be challenged and changed (Plummer, 1995). These are important areas of exploration in considering the ways in which support providers and young people are involved in the co-constitution of community based-support, and the ways in which this action is informed by not simply diversity but an investment in a range of queer orientations.

Chapter Four

Disorientating Storytelling and Support

It is hard for most people to imagine anything other than being either a man or a woman in a contemporary Western context. Even for many transgendered and gender non-conforming (t & gnc) people it is challenging to imagine alternatives to a culturally assumed desire to be(come) either a male-man or female-woman. Negotiating the cultural expectations about be(com)ing a man or woman is an important task for t & gnc people, not just within their social interactions, but in creating their own understandings of their sex-gender embodiments that are not limited by normative models. Problematizing dualistic and essentialising categories and considering alternative knowledges about gendered bodies is important for an analysis of the subjective experiences of t & gnc young people and support.

This chapter explores ways participants talk about not conforming, discovering they were ‘different’ and the ways they felt ‘out of place’. I employ a Queer Phenomenological approach to thinking about the significance of different spaces, objects and others, the proximities of these, and different directions people follow in negotiating gender. Ahmed’s (2006) conceptualisation of ‘disorientation’ is used to frame participants’ experiences of non-conformity and the ways it informs their support practices.

Participants in this chapter include young self-identified t & gnc people (aged 16-30 years) and support providers who were also young people (16-30 years) who spoke of the experiences informing their support work. Focussing on participants’ stories about the ways in which they experience and embody sex-gender (at the time of interview and previously), I explore how they construct their embodied identities through talk. I also focus on the ‘sensations’ of bodies in relation to other bodies/objects in order to explore the experiences of disorientation and support in non-dualistic and non-hierarchical terms. Experiences and feelings of disorientation in participants’ accounts illustrate how their developing awareness of gender expression is disruptive of normative constructions of sexuality and/or gender identities in various ways.

The first section explores the distinctions and connections between a sensation of difference (one that is located in feelings and bodily directions), and a discursive knowledge about such difference (how a person may understand themselves as different in relation to other people's experiences through available contextual knowledges). The second section explores how participants actively negotiate a growing awareness of being different and produce alternative gender identities and expressions. The final section explores some of the ways participants found useful forms of support and actions which helped to affirm and enable their t & gnc identities.

Elizabeth Grosz (1994) likens the embodied subject to a Möbius strip in which the two sides of the single strip disrupt binary oppositions of mind and body and inside and outside in their interrelatedness:

Bodies and minds are not two distinct substances or two kinds of attributes of a single substance but somewhere in between these two alternatives. The Möbius strip has the advantage of showing the inflection of mind into body and body into mind, the ways in which, through a kind of twisting or inversion one becomes the other. This model also provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one onto the other, the passage, the vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside onto the outside and the outside into the inside (Grosz, 1994: xii).

This model is useful to think about how t & gnc young people negotiate gender identity in which social interactions are constantly shaped by cultural meanings which inform (and are informed by) the meanings people give to their and others' bodies. The experience of gender is not just defined by how people think, or what they know, it is also about how bodies feel and how they are interpreted and valued by others. This is what Connell (2009: 66-8) describes as the process of 'social embodiment'. In this chapter I argue that simply viewing gender non-conformity as 'failing' to reproduce dualistic gender norms is not adequate in approaching gender diverse embodiment. Rather gender non-conformity and the feeling and experiences of disorientation are part of a process of actively disrupting binary gender and opening up embodiments to alternative productions. This invokes the Möbius strip model which rejects a mind/body dualism and recognises that corporeal sensations and subjective understandings of experiences are never separate but rather co-constituting within a given context.

Disorientating sensations, spaces and objects

The taken-for-grantedness of (hetero)sexuality, and a two sex-gender binary in constituting sex, gender and sexuality 'norms' within spaces participants occupied (such as school and family), informed their sensations of feeling 'different' or 'out of place'. In these sites, participants experienced many challenges in negotiating gender non-conforming embodiments. These included assumption and expectations from others about their sex-gender-sexuality embodiments, many of which actively worked to close down the availability of alternative gender and sexuality possibilities. Karen Saunders (2008), for example, discusses the central role families have in the production of young people's embodiments. These, she argues, provide a foundation of normative knowledge about gender and sexuality through the very existence of the heterosexual family as a primary site of orientation of children (Saunders, 2008). Within this space, ambiguous or non-conforming embodiments, are 'instructed' to conform:

Families influence and create the way in which children live their embodiment through preconceived ideas of sex, gender and their own embodiment. Such embodiment is developed through intergenerational, often unspoken, lived bodily connections or in many cases disconnections. ... Binary sex ... instructs the way in which bodies are interacted with within the family and the family acts as an agent of control, monitoring and regulating any ambiguity (Saunders 2008: 65).

Family spaces were talked about by a number of participants as the place where others often worked to shape/contain their ambiguous or non-conforming embodiments. These accounts demonstrate that the family is a frequent site involved in the normative reproduction of binary gender and (hetero)sexuality for young people.

Additionally schools regulate and limit ambiguities which challenge many taken-for-granted and institutional practices. These practices work to reinforce 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1980; Youdell, 2005: 253). Examples such as single-sex schools, gendered toilets, changing rooms, sports teams and uniforms all rely upon and reproduce a gender binary. This process naturalises an either/or approach to understanding sex-gendered embodiments which needs to be actively negotiated by t & gnc young people. Being complicit in/accepting this framing of gender binaries and assumed heterosexuality can offer t & gnc young people a sense of shared identity as a 'girl' or 'boy'. However, those with more ambiguous and non-conforming embodiments (as discussed by participants) required opting out of or resisting the pressures to conform.

Participants described their resistance to these normative spaces and the objects/others in them with respect to how thought about themselves and the ways they actively presented their bodies. Even when being punished or receiving negative feedback on their bodies, participants' sensations of 'difference' were something they continued to negotiate. What is significant at this time of early adolescence, as discussed by the participants, is that heteronormative and dualistic models of sex-gender-sexuality are all they have available to them. These bodily norms, rather than offering a space of shared identity with others, worked to limit and confuse their self-expressions.

Without alternative options, participants describe sensations of disorientation in relation to these normative (re)productions. This shapes the way they can understand themselves as only 'different' or 'other', contained outside acceptable gender identification or expression. A lack of alternative representations of gender produced an ongoing sensation of disorientation – for example feeling confused, not fitting in, and failing to meet family/school gender expectations. Participants described disorientating experiences in the ways they engaged with others/objects. Participant 'C', for example, who described herself as 'different from your normal typical female' explained how she 'broke away' and 'started to break out of my shell'. These sensations of being disorientated articulated her disconnection from the limiting norms influencing her embodiment. This process for participant C began during childhood at the time she moved from primary to high school at around twelve years of age:

- C. I think I first felt different when I started high school. I went to a Catholic [primary] school so it was very much religion based ... umm and it wasn't until *I broke away* from that and found myself interacting with you know, more diverse people with different beliefs and you know, different social perspectives - you know sport and that, that I suppose I started to *break out of my shell* then, but not to the point of really realising who I was (E. right) umm ... I mean for me school was very sport orientated -
- Evan. That was an area you felt comfortable in?
- C. Yeah
- Evan. - and accepted?
- C. Right. Looking back now, and knowing what I know and how I felt then ... I realised who I was at an earlier age. I remember having a crush on one of my primary school teachers, but it wasn't until I really was/ I was having a conversation with someone one day, I think it was, and I, you know, I was "Oh my god I had a crush on this woman" who was like 50 years older than me, [coughs] O.K. not that much but you know what I mean, so yeah you know. So it was like realising who, ... *looking back from say now to then , I knew then but was too young and things like that for it to actually click, and to understand what it really meant.*

(Participant C, December 2008, emphasis added)

This sensation of movement, linked to feeling gradually less constrained by dominant discourses, shaped participant C and other participant's experiences of disorientation – whether they invested in a gender or sexuality re-orientation or not. However, participant C had to negotiate a sense of uncertainty in her sense of embodiment with no alternative orientating objects/others than her own sensations of what felt 'right' or 'good'.

In the second part of the excerpt participant C invokes 'looking back' and in taking this retrospective glance makes a distinction between 'knowing' that you are different in relation to particular gender and sexuality expectations and experiencing difference at a sensory level. In 'looking back' participant C felt or sensed her difference at an earlier time, but this awareness/articulation of this only become available later. Thus, for participant and C and others, feeling that they did not 'fit' with those around them (but having no way to articulate this sensation) meant that they could only understand themselves as different or 'other'. It also demonstrates how orientations can change over time as new contexts and knowledges can enable reflection on and reframing past experiences of 'difference'. This raises interesting questions about the way experiences or feelings are subjectively embodied for t & gnc young people, when and how they become part of one's understanding of their body, and to what extent social understandings of gender can be resisted or be unintelligible when only limited options are available to them.

Participant D, who now expresses himself as a transguy (or in more specific ways in different social spaces) also talked about his early experiences of a lack of language/ knowledge about alternative understandings of his gender. His experience of disorientation was shaped by the disciplining of his gender expression, particularly by his mother, and developments in information available to him:

- Evan: So when did you come out? Did you come out in relation to gender or sexuality?
 D: Umm O.K., well that's quite early on really. I can remember, umm, just having odd thoughts about stuff. I remember being about thirteen, um and just thinking I'm *preferring seeing myself sort of in a masculine context*, rather than female, but not, not really totally understanding it or thinking about it too much, they were just odd observations about things.
 Evan: So what sort of things? If you want to talk about it
 D: Umm, yeah just things like, I was more into wearing guys deodorant and that sort of thing, and random other things, which my mother was absolutely freaked out by (who just thought it was the worst thing in the world).
 D: ... I didn't really come out when I was thirteen; it was just my first awareness. Oh and even slightly younger than that. Younger than that I remember being about eleven, I had a quite intense crush on an older woman, and that kind of made me think about stuff, and what I

was perceived as being. In the circles I was in, well that wasn't something that you talked about, because there was no-one to talk to about it, I didn't even know about Rainbow Youth at that stage. ... Yeah that was something that was just kind of put away somewhere in my brain and I didn't really do anything with until I was about sixth form at school, and ... there used to be a late night youth talkback, and they just happened to have someone from Rainbow Youth talking about their life and about Rainbow Youth and what they did, umm and I just sort of identified with some of that.

(Participant D, Interview 1, October 2008)

The proximity of objects and others are highlighted through D's bodily sensations of being 'turned' towards or away from things in space (both attractions to people and objects such as 'men's' deodorant). This, combined with the reactions or silences to these turnings from others (which highlighted them as inappropriate or undesirable), worked to inform a sense of difference and disorientation in relation to his gender and sexuality for a number of years. Not until later in high school did he find information that helped him to begin to make sense of his feelings of difference. These focussed around his sense of "seeing myself sort of in a masculine context", discovering there was the possibility of an alternative sexuality identity (butch lesbian), and later (trans)gender orientations which could work to inform this sense of himself.

For participant E, his sense of disorientation related to his sense of gender as different from normative expectations for a long time, but again, he lacked any framework through which to articulate this (a point that will be returned to). In this excerpt, he describes the moment when he unexpectedly found it was possible to make sense of what he was experiencing:

- Evan: So, um when do you sort of figure out that you were trans?
 E: Um, well in some ways I guess I always knew, but I didn't know it was possible [laughs] for a while. Cos I only found out it was possible to transition a few years ago.
 Evan: Right. So how did you find that out?
 E: Well actually I watched a movie [laughs]
 Evan: What movie was it?
 E: *Boys Don't Cry*. It's a good movie.
 Evan: Yeah...
 E: It's about Brandon Teena, and I was watching it with my ex, and *it just clicked*, and pretty much as soon as we finished watching the movie I just jumped on the net and started googling. So it pretty much hit me straight away after that. Yeah.
 Evan: So what about it did you identify with?
 E: Um just the whole, you know ... I guess, um things kinda hard to explain [laughs]
 Evan: Just do your best...
 E: I'll try and nut it out. Um, I guess it was like, you know, seeing that ... in a way I kind of got where what he was going through, cos I'd been through that, or going through it, and seeing that and hearing that it was possible it was like 'yeah – there's something I can do about it'. So yeah.

(Participant E, Telephone interview, March 2009, Emphasis added.)

The knowledge that there was a way in which participant E could act on his feelings enabled him to embrace his sense of difference and incorporate this information and sense of direction into his identity at the time. He also talked about how he had become aware of other people's gender and sexuality identities (such as that of the possibilities of transgendered women and butch embodiments). While these offered alternative expressions of gender and sexuality, these orientations never felt connected to his sense of self. It was discovering the possibility of transgendered men that was most significant for him:

- E: Well I'd pretty much always known about trans women but I'd never in my life heard of trans guys, you know. There's just not a lot of coverage on them.
- Evan: Yeah it's interesting isn't it?
- E: Yeah. Going from them to us is kind of odd.
- Evan: Do you think, like, I'm thinking of butch women – were you aware of that being an identity that you could have?
- E: Um yeah, but I never really liked being seen as that – cos I always knew somehow that I was not gay, and I don't even like the word for female gayness – it makes me shiver [laughs]. But I guess I always – well obviously since I came of age, previously to that I was blissfully unaware. But yeah since then I've heard about the whole butch thing and been like oh yeah, no. It's not me.

(Participant E, Telephone interview, March 2009)

In this discussion, participant E highlights how he did not feel oriented toward the identities of 'trans woman' or 'butch'. In fact, knowledge about these possibilities did not lessen his confusion about his experiences in the way that learning about transmen did. Disorientation in this regard relates not only to an awareness of difference from heteronormative assumptions about sexuality and binary gender but also non-conforming sexuality and gender. For participant E, it was not simply a case of reorientation to an 'other' non-conforming gender/sexuality, but that many different orientations are possible.

This raises questions about what types of support are most accessible/suitable to t & gnc young people, how support might effectively relate to their different experiences and how people might identify with or be directed toward different types of support. Where participants C and D invested in discourses around sexuality queerness to some degree through their narratives of 'coming out' (orientating themselves within 'gay', 'lesbian' or 'butch'), participant E resisted such movement and categorisation. Instead, he required a more specific understanding of his feelings relating to an expression of masculinity within a female body (but not one based on sexuality), in order "for it to click".

Disorientations and reorientations may develop and change over time. For participant D, for example (who has also transitioned from female to male), identifying as transgendered was the result of an additional disorientation to his attempts to identify with a lesbian identity. The confusion between gender and sexuality, or the extent to which they are experienced as separate or intertwined, relates largely to the discourses about gender and sexuality and their (re)production in the spaces open to them. Deborah Youdell (2005) addresses this interaction in her research in relation to young peoples (re)productions of gender and sexual identities. Drawing on Butler's (1999) assertion of the "inseparability of gender and sexuality in the current social context", Youdell (2005: 250) argues that these categories are intrinsically linked and that viewing them as such enables a fuller examination of the ways such identities constitute subjects in similar ways.

For participant F, who is now transitioning from Male to Female, a conflation of gender and sexuality previously informed a lack of differentiation between understandings of gender and sexuality (as separate knowledges) in the spaces she occupied. This meant she (and others around her) read her expression of femininity within a 'male' identified body as one of male homosexuality, rather than as gender non-conformity or an alternative gender expression:

F: When I was young I liked hanging round playing with girls, yeah, and I didn't know the terms of what to use, of what my sexuality was cos I was usually called a fag or a poofter. So I thought I was a faggot. And then as I'm getting older, I know who I am now, but before I didn't, I just saw myself as the way I was treated, as a person who does cleanup and shit like that. And yeah, not allowed to go anywhere, go straight home after school and things like that.

(Participant F, March 2009)

For participant F, her deviation from socially expected gender norms for a boy child, such as that of playing with other children of the same sex-gender, meant that her gender expression was regulated and she was labelled with terms implying homosexuality. This information initially provided her with a sense of orientation for her feelings of 'difference'. This was associated not only with sexuality but more broadly to an understanding of her 'feminine' embodiment as socially less valuable (related to the roles/tasks that were expected of her and the constraints on her movement) and based on how she was treated compared with others in her family. Her experience highlights an additional intersection between gender, sexuality and the cultural norms shaping these, where participant F's gender non-conformity of expressing femininity in a male body meant that she was viewed/positioned by others as not only homosexual, but as socially less valuable.

In retrospect, highlighting the reflexive changes and re-readings possible in subjective embodiments, participant F can now see how this occurred through her failing to comply with the expectations of others (for herself in the role of a young male). She remained in a place of disorientation through this time and largely accepted this position (viewed as homosexual, and subordinate socially). However, it did not provide her with the knowledge to express herself fully as feminine, but rather limited her identity to others' heteronormative ideals and judgments.

Constituting selves

Based on the discussion so far in this chapter, the gender (dis)orientation of participants' embodiment is shaped by three key areas. First, feelings of 'difference', or being 'out of place' through the directedness of bodies towards/away from objects/subjects in space in ways which are unexpected or undesirable by others. Secondly, the expectations and reactions of others on such proximities and investments and, thirdly, the perpetuation of norms in primary orientation spaces (such as home and school), including those existing through silences and the invisibility of alternative discourses. These three interconnected areas shape the intersubjective experiences of gender non-conforming young people as they attempt to make meaning of their sensations of disorientation.

Other people play a significant role in informing participants' sensations of gender 'difference' and contributed to experiences of disorientation. In particular, negotiating between understanding their unique embodiments and others' attempts to direct their bodies to conform to dominant heteronormative gender ideals was highlighted as an important task. In orientation spaces for young people such as the family and school, participants' gender non-conforming embodiments were expected to live up to others' heteronormative understandings. Alternatives, however, often remained hidden from view and deviations from these 'norms' were frequently disciplined. This (re)production of dominant discourses within such spaces worked not only to keep 'other' bodily possibilities out of reach of young people, but also conflated knowledge about gender and sexuality. This was raised as a significant barrier to young people developing an understanding their gender non-conformity, when it was predominantly only discourses of homo-sexuality (based on binary gender) which became available as they got older.

Access to alternative sexuality discourses provided a framework through which some young people (such as participants C and D) could begin to understand and articulate their sensations of difference more specifically. However, this was not always sufficient to enable people to connect this knowledge with their sensations of embodied gender disorientation. Thus, for gender non-conforming young people the effects of these constraints on their own bodies and movements were significant. When spaces lacked diversity, or did not enable an expression of difference, finding other spaces was necessary in order for participants to feel comfortable and connected to others. Understanding their gender non-conformity and feeling connected to others was recognised by many participants as having developed over a timeframe of many years, extending past when they left high school and/or home. In relation to their feelings about their bodies, gaining access to different ways of understanding other gender and sexuality was valued highly by participants and legitimised their feelings of difference. These offered them a sense of direction to negotiating ‘contested bodies’ in relation to normative binary gender and heterosexual expectations.

The following examples consider the ways participants talked about examples of re-negotiations of, and resistances to gender expectations, particularly in ways which challenged dominant discourses. This demonstrates how even when disorientated and not having a knowledge of their ‘difference’, t & gnc young people continued to be active in the production of their gender embodiments, even when their attempts for expression or recognition were not always completely successful. It is thus crucial to explore the complexity of the challenges young people can experience (this informs the ways support knowledges and actions have the potential to promote positive change making and/or enable the production of diverse discourses of embodiment, discussed in chapter five).

The first of three examples focusses on the outward expression of gender non-conformity. It explores participant E’s connection with the gender expression and identity of a tomboy throughout his childhood. Being a ‘tomboy’ worked as a way to view himself and for others to read his sense of masculinity at the time. He felt comfortable with this identity and proud of his success in ‘doing tomboy’. This was especially the case in relation to others’ expectations of him where the recognition of this embodiment meant that he got out of having to conform to typical gender expectations for girls (which he found highly undesirable). Additionally he talked about his experience of a co-ed school in Australia

where he maintained a non-conforming gender expression through choosing the uniform he wore. In this space, participant E's embodiment was frequently read as masculine and he was assumed to be 'one of the guys'. However, the freedom to express himself in this space was simultaneously restricted and he was punished for his 'failure' to conform to others' expectations about how a 'girl' should be. This became an ongoing negotiation for him:

- Evan: So were you kind of a tomboy growing up?
 E: Oh yeah.
 Evan: A very good one?
 E: A very very extremely good one.
 Evan: And what were your family like?
 E: Um, well I think it was only my dad that tried to really push me into dresses. Which I promptly got out of [laughs]. But yeah mum was pretty good, and my dad's alright about it now, I guess. I guess it's cos he's so far away. [...]
 Yeah. Well school over there [Australia] ... it's only really private schools that are single sex, and then everything is co-ed so there's guys and girls and they all ... when they both gang up on you cos you're different, well it usually ends up in this big pile up and you get beaten to a pulp. [Evan: ahhh]. Yeah I've had that a few times and it's not nice. You kind of limp home.
 Evan: Yeah that's no good.
 E: Yeah you limp home sit on your bed and say I'm not going to school tomorrow.
 Evan: So what were they targeting you for?
 E: I guess cos I had a girl's name and all the teachers said I was a girl and everything. But everything I did and the way I dressed and the uniform I wore - cos I wore the boys' uniform cos the skirt - I can't stand them, even though I'm part Scottish and should be used to wearing skirts [laughs]. But yeah I wore the boys' uniform, I played on the sports teams, I was a bit of a nerd. And I guess - well all but one of them were guys and we all played bull rush and stuff and tackled each other for no particular reason, and then the odd idiot would walk past and go 'hold on - you're a girl, I'll beat you up' and I'm like 'no you shouldn't be doing that, excuse me, you're wrong!' So after a while I learnt to fight back, but it got me into a little bit of trouble.

(Participant E, Telephone interview, March 2009)

Through his assumed identity of 'tomboy', participant E developed a strong sense of himself through childhood which allowed him to develop his expression of his masculinity in a way that was socially sanctioned, if not viewed as ideal by others at home. At school his strong sense of masculinity, while challenged by teachers and other students, forced participant E into negotiating the implications of his gender non-conformity. This occurred alongside maintaining his sense and expression of self, where his embodiment reflected his masculine identification. This demonstrates a strong sense of desire to constitute his gender identity as masculine regardless of the challenges this posed. The challenges to the legitimacy of his gender expression through the authority of others' assertions he was 'really' a girl highlight the disciplining of his production of gender from others. It also shows how, in standing up for himself, he subverted his reliance on others for his sense of masculinity. A key part of participant E experiencing disorientation was the reduced availability of a 'tomboy' identity

as he moved into an adult world (in which ‘tomboy’ was rejected as an appropriate gender expression for a young woman). This led him to experience a period of his teenage years without a viable identity until discovering the possibility of ‘transman’ as an alternative gender identity/expression that engaged him in a process of re-orientation.

In the second example of exploring how identities are negotiated in various contexts, participant D describes how his mother’s strong reactions to his gender non-conforming expressions shaped the way he expressed himself. Participant D also refers to his own resistance to engaging with his sensations of gender disorientation, instead ‘shutting down’ and hiding his thoughts. This highlights the significant impact others can have in constituting a young person’s understanding of themselves in the world and creating (or limiting) spaces/opportunities for them to explore sensations of difference, let alone assert an alternative. Participant D reflects on his naivety at the time he finished school, having lacked the queer discourses which would become centrally important to his developing understanding of himself in relation to both gender and sexuality. From this time on, frustrated with his disorientation, he became more active and began to explore his sense of difference (initially through homosexual discourses as he came out as gay). In particular, he sought out queer books at the local library and later found crucial information through listening by chance to a talkback radio show with a ‘butch’ lesbian. Participant D’s early covert library searches informed both his support knowledge and sense of queer corporeality, leading him to articulate his gender expression further over the subsequent years:

[Of mother’s response to early gender non-conforming expressions]

D: Well I, I saw she was very vocal about that sort of stuff, and I saw, I think in some ways that added to my not going there, and not, or at least not talking about and I shut down a lot in relation to that, and I had a bit of a history with depression as a result of which/ well probably associated with other things as well ... Yeah that was something that was concerning.

(Participant D, Interview 1, October 2008)

Evan: How did you feel about the world at that stage? [at the time of just leaving school and coming out as gay]

D: That’s a big question [smiles]. To be honest I think I was a bit naïve about the world at that stage, umm, but at the same time, I’d really been umm quite sheltered – umm well in terms of queer stuff anyway. It’s not that there was nothing, but there was nothing that was talked about, nothing that was visible. Umm and yeah I remember sneaking off to the [public] library to look at queer books [laughs].

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

While being discrete and withdrawn within his family space that was not open to him expressing gender non-conformity, participant D's experience demonstrates more subtle ongoing attempts to negotiate his disorientation, largely undertaken out of view of those who he believed would not be supportive.

In the final example of a young person's negotiation of disorientation, participant F talked about how others' disapproval of her gender non-conformity and attempts to re-constitute this as heteronormative, developed into an urgent sense of needing to act to re-claim the production of her own embodiment. She highlights the intensification of pressure from her family for her to resist becoming fa'afafine which made her feel this way. As described below, the investment in her gender/sexuality from others was not minor (offering insight into the importance of the issue for some). Her family worked to force this upon participant F, even providing her with a completely different home, school, church and social environment. Although she attempted to conform, she was unable to move beyond her sense that she was just 'faking it' - performing the gender and sexuality others wanted for her rather than reflecting how she felt:

F. My family saw that I was going to become a transgender, but in what they call a faggot so I had to go and live with my Uncle for two years ... They had a whole future planned for myself. I had to go to church college, go to church, hang around boys. ... Everything was just different, even for me my voice changed, went deeper, excluded girls as friends and hung round boys – faked it. It was just a life of being fake really. I had to go out with girls to prove I am a heterosexual. ... I had to move [in with my uncle] cos he saw that I'm going to become – get older and become a fa'afafine, cos that's the Samoan side, so I went to live with him and he's really posh and doesn't drink or smoke and thought that I was in a bad environment. And it just came to a point where I couldn't - I'd had enough of that life, cos I was raised really ghetto living circumstances. And when I was living with my uncle everything was posh, cos as a family we never ate together, never went out together, I wasn't allowed to ask my mum for money like to go on trips, so I just wouldn't go. I wasn't allowed to talk to my mother in front of my father, I wasn't allowed to eat with the family at dinner time ...

Evan: This was because you came out?

F: This was because I was transitioning and they in the Samoan way – my parents were never raised in an Island way, my dad he was into, you know, like patch life. He just thought being a fa'afafine was wrong... I moved home cos I gave my cousin a hiding because she called me a faggot. And that was because she knew before I came to live with them that I was a little fa'afafine and living a life of lies. So I moved home and went back to school and with my parents. Life was still the same but it got worse as I got older as I was carrying on transitioning. ... When I was younger I wasn't really out with makeup and stuff, wasn't into um...at the age of sixteen. Then moved back with my parents I decided that that's enough, enough is enough, I'm gonna live my life the way I wanna live my life so I slowly started plucking eyebrows and stuff like that.

(Participant F, March 2009)

This extract demonstrates how culture, belief systems and class offer further frames and interactions through which gender non-conformity is read and which can shape the actions people take. Participant F's experience highlights how the gender expectations experienced by young people can be the product of multiple discourses – coming from different areas informing family 'norms' about gender and sexuality. In this example these included gang affiliations, Samoan culture, religious beliefs and also the pressures of lower socio-economic status.

Despite continued resistance to her gender non-conformity from these diverse influences participant F still worked to assert her 'real' gender. After attempting to transform her gender expression to conform to others expectations, but realising it was not how she wanted to live, participant F returned to school. Here she affirmed her transgendered identity, working hard to not only express how she felt, but to also leave a positive representation of herself as a fa'afafine in the school space worthy of being respected:

[Of her last year going to high school]

F: I made sure that I was noticed, you know, my name was noticed so that people could treat me with respect, so I joined the health council, peer sexuality support, student counselling services – I was in a lot of groups. I even joined Waka Ama – the boys Waka Ama team and I even got player of the year. The reason being it is a strong sport and I wanted to look – like I might look like this soft fa'afafine but I do have energy to do man things as well. When it came to rugby and things like that I'd be the last person to be picked, cos people think I can't bowl over someone cos I was so little, but when I got player of the year the boys were asking if I could play on the rugby team in PE but I'd say no I'd rather play for the girls so I can bowl you over for calling me a faggot [laughs].

(Participant F, March 2009)

In this move to assert her fa'afafine identity, participant F demonstrates additional skills which enable her to be successful in this. In producing an alternative expression of gender she also strategically aligned herself with higher status activities within the school (Waka Ama) and used humour to gain the respect of her peers. Through these activities she was able to gain respect and be part of school culture. An understanding of the experiences of 'disorientation' in relation to sex-gender from young people's perspectives, is important in relation to the directions they take in finding and seeking support. Focussing on disorientation as an analytic frame enables an exploration of the ways gender non-conformities are experienced as the effects of power working to reproduce 'normative' discourses and identities and constitute 'others' as 'wrong', 'abnormal' or subordinate.

This discussion highlights the ways in which participants experience disorientation in a range of spaces, for example, as a result of others' responses to their gender expressions in ways which leave them feeling 'out of place'. However, disorientation is also as a space of resistance to normative expectations which enables participants to 'do' gender differently. In addition to the pressures of gender and sexuality conformity, the difficulties those who find themselves disorientated experience are often based on a lack of alternative knowledges, people and/or spaces to affirm their own bodily sensations, expressions and identities. The final section of this chapter will explore the ways young people unintentionally engage in support seeking through looking to re-orientate themselves, in particular, the movement participants made towards (or away from) a range of 'supports' as they negotiated their social embodiments.

Unintended directions in support

What 'support' meant for participants was often shaped by finding themselves going in unintended directions as they built up knowledge about who they were/could be, how they wanted to express themselves and what people, spaces and things worked to support this. The following examples highlight this process for a range of participants indicating that support seeking is often not a straight forward linear process of accessing information which then enables change to occur for a person. This relates to Ahmed's (2006) argument that, within 'disorientated space', there is little orientating a person and no clearly formed paths to follow. In participants' accounts, 'supports' represent objects or others which helped to orientate them in some way. This does not necessarily mean they informed a re-orientation or the finding of new path, but rather provided things with which they identified with or shared with others.

In their early experiences of finding supports, participants highlight often varied and multiple sites of quite unintended people, spaces and things that offered sensations of support (for example feeling accepted, understood or that they shared their experience with others). This process involved finding what support meant for them, as well as what and where this was available and, perhaps, leading them. For some participants this process started from the point of knowing nothing beyond heteronormative representations of gender and sexuality other than their own bodily sensations and others' attempts to regulate their bodily expressions. Alternative gender and sexuality identities and expressions had been hidden

from view, or they were unaware of them in the family spaces they grew up in. The directions they took, however, drew them into spaces or towards people which offered them alternatives or directed them to information, spaces or others who could support them. The following discussion demonstrates how finding supports came not through an active seeking of support (based on a need to explicitly seek queer or trans based support), but through following embodied sensations and responses.

Participant D's process of finding supports took place over a number of years. Initially this occurred in relation to thinking of his gender disorientation through a developing awareness of himself as a butch lesbian (before articulating his sensations of gender as that of a transguy). His initial 'discovery' of queer community-based support came from an unplanned encounter on a radio station he listened to. He identified with the woman who worked for the local queer youth support group and was drawn to her speaking about herself and life as a masculine woman. This reflected both how he understood himself and the way people saw him at the time. Through listening to her, he also became aware of the local support group. This discovery of a local youth support group was also accompanied by a fear of making contact and it took him six months before he was able to manage calling them up. At this point, however, the woman speaking on the radio was a significant support for participant D:

D: There used to be a late night youth talkback, and they just happened to have someone from Rainbow Youth talking about their life and about Rainbow Youth and what they did, and I just sort of identified with some of that ... It was one of their staff members who was a lesbian woman, um very butch at the time [laughs] ... I think I kind of identified with the concept of - she was referring to herself as a masculine woman, and I thought well that's how people perceive me - there must be something in that. So that was the very start of my coming out. I hadn't heard about Rainbow Youth prior to that - that probably would have been in about [year]. Then, for maybe about six months after that, I'd written the details of Rainbow Youth and I carried them around with me on a piece of paper cos I was so scared of calling them up.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

This passage highlights the way in which people's narratives can help to inform others' sense of gendered self as an act of support through the sharing of their own experiences. In particular, it indicates the way in which sharing one's experience (in this case in a public space) can operate as a support for others. For participant D, gaining knowledge that there was a group to support queer young people raised his awareness of other options for support. When participant D did eventually make contact with the group, finding the support that was

right for him was not guaranteed and instead became another step in the process of figuring out who he was and what support meant for him:

D: I did get in touch with Rainbow Youth and it was all very cool. It was interesting - my thoughts of it and what it actually were - it's like I heard of this coffee group that met in town in a café and I'd never really been into town cos I lived out in the suburbs [laughs], Yeah, so I kind of had this ideal of this group that kind of took up the entire café [laughing] and when I got there, there was like eight to ten people sitting round a table so yeah. It was weird cos while it was a queer space it was very much just gay and lesbian, in fact I don't even know if I knew anyone who was bi at that stage. But that didn't matter so much at that stage because it was like there's people and they're not all like straight, which was really cool - at the time, because when I'd grown up, there were queer people around but my parents had hidden that from me. I don't know how intentional that was ... At that stage I was still at school- I would have been sixth form going into seventh form.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

Participant D's experience highlights how contact with a group or service that focusses on providing support does not guarantee that a young person will experience the space/people/information that responds to their needs. Participant D talks about how his preconceptions about the group he attended were different to how he imagined it would be and also how the range of queer identities were limited to gay and lesbian sexualities. This echoes Stryker's argument that "queer remains code for 'gay' or 'lesbian'" (Stryker, 2004: 214) and does not necessarily represent the diversity of gender and sexuality expressions. Susan Talburt and Mary Lou Rasmussen (2010) also discuss the limited possibilities for 'queer' youth possibilities

For participant D, the group's supportiveness was based on it being a queer (but limited to gay and lesbian sexualities) alternative to heterosexuality rather than also providing him with information/examples of gender diversity. As the next passage from his interview highlights, participant D's ability to articulate his sensations of gender difference, in order to make more sense of his disorientation as one related more to gender, came through his support seeking within this queer space. While he found support in connecting with other queer people in the group space, a failure to feel a shared identification with the other lesbians he spent time with meant that he recognised a further need to understand his sensations of 'disorientation':

D: It was very much at that stage, it was really about connecting with other people - it was all very new, and it was like I was, um, I mean surely in the back of my mind somewhere I had an inkling I was trans but it wasn't consciously thought about and, I think it was connecting with people who weren't trans that kind of helped make that difference in me kind of realising that hey these people are queer but that's not - they're not queer in the same way that I think I am. I hung out with a lot of lesbians because, well it was very - it wasn't totally

segregated but a lot of the girls were hanging out with girls and a lot of the guys were hanging out with guys and I think it was kind of ... intensified.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

While participant D felt strongly about his queer identity as well as greater support from attending the queer youth support group, the support space was not completely able to provide him with a sense of being orientated, even queerly. The experience of being able to connect up with other queer young people, which was a key source of support for him, was also the catalyst for realising that his own disorientation was in some way different to those he was meeting. This entry into a queer space and his developing queer knowledge would also provide an unintentional direction in finding information that was more meaningful to him. This came from being drawn to a focus on 'butchness', representing a form of female masculinity, rather than a lesbian identity (see: Halberstam, 1998). Through an interest in 'butch' identity he learnt about female masculine expressions and, in particular, transguy identities and how these were distinct from lesbian identities:

D: The first thing I actually found that was trans was actually in a lesbian porn mag *On our Backs* - it's all butch women mostly and it's very ... pushing boundaries. I kind of thought that's how people perceive me [as butch], so there must be something in that. I'd never really consciously thought about it, I was just me and that's just how I expressed myself. In my very dyke identified six months to a year [laughs] I did everything and anything in collecting books and magazines and that sort of thing – anything that I could come across that was queer because I hadn't had that for so long and I found, yeah I found a - it was just a general magazine, it was one of those lesbian publications. ... It was from overseas and it was imported and there was an ad for this porn magazine and I thought, yeah that might be interesting so I found a copy of that, and [laughing] I mean it must tell you something when you start reading porn magazines for the articles, yeah. It was a really good article actually, and it was really thorough. There was a whole section in it about non-trans partners relating to their butch and FTM identified partners sexually, which was quite good really - although that was just a side bit, and then mostly it was about identifying as trans and how that differed ... from being lesbian, and how these guys came to terms with their trans identity. At about that time I saw *Boys Don't Cry* as well, and umm I was absolutely fascinated by that and I just kept watching it, which is interesting as at that time yeah obviously I wasn't out to my parents and trying to watch this movie [laughing].

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

The discovery of this article was, for participant D, pivotal in making sense of his continued feelings of difference to other lesbians. Seeking information about representations of butch women led him find an article that became central to him being able to learn about transguys. This was similarly reinforced by his attraction to watching the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) which features a young transman as its central character. Through these increasingly

orientating steps participant D was able to develop much more specific and intentional support seeking.

Participant C talked about supportive actions and knowledge largely in terms of spaces in which she was proximate/ drawn to. This was based on offering more gender diverse environments. Finding support was the unintentional effect of being in spaces and around others that affirmed her sense of self as sexuality diverse and gender non-conforming. She described a sharp distinction between her sense of connectedness within her school space compared with the sports that she was into. Sports spaces offered her the opportunity to come into contact with other women who had different understandings about who they could be and in what ways they could express themselves:

SCHOOL

- C: I had my group of friends that I always hung out with at school. Come the end of the day that would be it ... I never really had a strong connection with those friends because I knew that I was different, and they were always talking about guys and dresses and things like and things that never really interested me. It wasn't that I wasn't able to talk about my stuff. I wasn't comfortable within myself to come out to my friends.

(Participant C, December 2008)

SPORT

- C: I found [a different space] through sport ... because I was I was either at school or I was training, so I was quite often out doing my sport thing but also in a social environment where I was comfortable because I knew that there were other lesbians there and things like that. ... It's not so much about lesbians full stop, it's about the queer community and knowing that you're in similar company, you know, people who aren't going to be judgmental, and umm have gone through some similar things in life you know things in life that they can relate to. ... I think it [gender expression] is talked about but not in like a deep and meaningful way I suppose, it's like a lot of people, we all get to a point where we know who we are and yeah and in that respect we get talking about it and things like that.

(Participant C, December 2008)

The contrast between these areas of her life was significant to participant C when working to make sense of her disorientation. In her school space her sense of difference was reinforced through her friends' attention to the reproduction of heterosexuality and gender norms through talk about boys and feminine fashions. Participant C highlights how this space silenced her, making her feel like she could not talk about her own experiences and feelings as they were not consistent with her friends.

Through sport, however, she felt affirmed and developed an awareness that there were other lesbians around, and beyond that, a sense of queer community which was part of not only the

sport itself but, as she highlights, offered a social environment in which she could participate. Her sensations of support in this space were based on feeling like she was around people that had “gone through similar things in life” and feeling that the environment was non-judgmental and respectful. Talk about gender within these spaces, as a support action, was based on people talking about their own experiences within an environment that was inclusive of greater gender diversity.

Participant F, like participant C, also highlights how sensations of support within different spaces enabled her to understand what support felt/looked like through contrasts between spaces. For participant F this focussed on the way spaces enabled (or restricted) her ability to express herself as a woman. Although not intentionally sought, being in supportive spaces was informed by how she found herself experiencing the space as affirming her identity rather than struggling within it:

SCHOOL

F: I was [able to cross-dress]. I used to go to my friend's house though. I used to go to my friend's house and change my clothing for like mufti day and go to her house, get changed and put makeup on. But the teachers weren't very supportive of that, of putting makeup on you know. So I'd go to school and still get in trouble, but I wouldn't care cos it made me feel like a woman. I was getting shit at home, shit at school, shit in the community and it just made me feel more of a woman and I just wanted people to know that I'm a transitioning woman. And I just made everything obvious really.

(Participant F, March 2009)

COURSE

F: While I was on a course – I left school and went on a hairdressing course, and [name] was there and I was just me you know. When I left the house I felt more, you know ... more love, not seeking attention, but I just felt like I was wanted in the community in course, and I always have a smile on my face, and that's something that shocked a lot of people, cos when they found out my story they wouldn't imagine. They thought that I'd come from a loving family, accepting mum and dad, nor did they know I was going through all that shit at home, shit from school and shit from the community that still I could have a smile on my face.

(Participant F, March 2009)

For participant F, school mufti day offered an opportunity to express herself in a more feminine way. This was centrally important to affirming her sense of self despite responses from others. She talks about how this was made possible by a friend whose house she would go to before school in order to change her clothes and apply makeup. The lack of support she felt in the spaces of her life meant that she felt she gained more by doing so and getting in trouble than by hiding herself.

In leaving school to attend a hairdressing course not long before the time of interview, participant F experienced a much more supportive environment in which she also met another young transwoman/ fa'afafine who she became really good friends with. The course offered participant F a space where she was free of the difficulties she had experienced in other spaces. She highlighted how this change to feeling much more supported in this space was embodied - she identified feeling 'more love' and smiling.

Participant G offers a slightly different perspective, specifically talking about finding support when already identifying as a 'gay boy', indicating how support in terms of gender non-conformity is not the same as for sexuality difference. For participant G, unintentional support came through getting involved in a community event focussed around transgender people as an ally, particularly working with a transgender woman on this project, and doing this over a period of time. This provided participant G with a space and knowledge to discover and/or accept her own transgender identity. Prior to this support action, her only knowledge of transgender women had been through news coverage of Georgina Beyer becoming the world's first transsexual mayor in New Zealand. The proximity of working with transgender people on this project and her increased knowledge about transgender people enabled a growing awareness of her changing identity:

G: In the States when I was a young 'gay boy', I met a trans woman, and this was after hearing about Georgina Beyer who was actually the first trans woman that I ever heard about [laughing] - yes on the other side of the world. And then I had to rush to a map to look at where this little third world country of New Zealand was [laughing]. So a friend of mine [name] started the Transgender Day of Remembrance, so we got involved helping her and was doing that for two years before I was like whoa - I'm not an ally, I don't know why I'm doing this as an ally - I'm a tranny.

(Participant G, March 2009)

Participant H also talked about the importance of people, information and spaces are. For participant H, his sense of gender difference, which focussed on his developing sense of himself as genderqueer, was not a part of gay and lesbian discourses he was involved with at the time (which focussed only on sexuality). He felt like there was no-one visible to him who he was able to identify with. He highlights how the language used within gay and lesbian spaces was developing at this time (2003) to include queer but suggests that at this time queer was just being used as a synonym to talk about sexuality difference rather than also being inclusive of gender diversity:

H: Like back in 2003, I hadn't talked to anyone about myself at that point. I would have felt yeah it's really scary, there's no-one visible that I would at all relate to or feel that I could have as a role model or anything like that, and there was a lot of gay and lesbian stuff and queer - but queer meaning gay and lesbian, not queer meaning including gender diverse, and now I think that has changed - it's getting towards being more trans friendly and genderqueer friendly and there's a lot more discussion now.

(Participant H, November 2008)

The development of local queer spaces highlights the ways discourses are shifting and how gender has become an increasingly focus over the last decade within the production of 'queerness'. This has implications for the availability or accessibility of supports and the extent to which critical understanding of queerness may be increasingly incorporated into support (including both sexuality-focussed and gender-focussed support spaces/objects).

In conclusion, the ways support is provided has important effects on young people's experiences of disorientation. In particular, barriers to locating or accessing support are frequently ongoing as shown through participants' narratives. These extend from seeking any alternative to the heteronormativity young people frequently grow up with to a lack of diverse representations of sexuality and gender difference within 'queer' support discourses/spaces. In their experiences of disorientation participants sought different ways of thinking about gender and sexuality to inform who they were and what support might work for them.

As this chapter has demonstrated, gender disorientations are not only informed by the (re)production of certain gender expressions and identities as being more desirable and acceptable than others, but these also play a role in influencing directions of support. The examples provided highlight the different forms this can take and the usefulness of 'disorientation' as an analytic tool for exploring how gendering works to constitute 'normative' identities. This is valuable in recognising disorientation as a space for self-articulation given the right spaces for re-negotiating gender, as the participants' experiences highlight. Central to this is the availability of alternative narratives and identities to offer insight into the ways this may be accomplished and that these can be available in a range of forms.

For transgender and gender diverse participants, the stories shared in this chapter suggest that normative gender and sexuality discourses, and particularly binary understandings of these, are a barrier to many young people being able to move beyond feeling ‘different’ or ‘out of place’. To do more than just resist this (re)production often requires a greater range of resources and sense of empowerment to create change. This is frequently found quite unexpectedly in objects, spaces and others. Often however, this takes time and relies on shifts in the spaces accessible to a person leaving young people, in particular, vulnerable for many years. This is not just in relation to those young people who are transgendered and waiting to be able to transition from one gender to another, but rather a range of young people who are constrained by binary constructions which negate other ways of understanding and expressing themselves. Once dominant heteronormative discourses are critiqued by a person who is disoriented by them, the ability to represent, express and affirm oneself in a way that recognises the full diversity of sex-gender-sexuality possibilities becomes more viable.

Most significant in this chapter is the degree to which young people need to continue negotiating their disorientation and redefining gender and how this informs their understandings/practices of support. Some participants were able to find a sense of support in the spaces proximate to them where connections with others, objects and information offered alternative gender representations which helped them articulate and affirm their disorientations. The following chapter will explore this process further, providing an analysis of the ways supports can work to inform and help to create change in embodiments through intentional support seeking and actions developed within community-based supports.

Chapter Five

Directions and Spaces of Support

What are the links between stories and the wider world – the contextual conditions for stories to be told and for stories to be received? What brings people to give voice to a story at a particular historical moment? What are the different social worlds' interpretative communities that enable stories to be spoken and heard in different ways? And as the historical moment shifts, perhaps into the late modern world, what stories may lose their significance, and what stories may gain in tellability? (Plummer, 1995: 25)

This chapter focusses on issues, barriers and challenges in the development, provision and accessibility of trans and queer support identified by participants who are young people, support providers and developers. In particular, it examines the ways support providers respond to the needs of t & gnc young people through exploring how they talk about what supports are available and what these mean for them; how different locations and media of community and peer based support shape what and how support is available to t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand; and how attention to diversity is informing support practices/spaces. Key areas highlighted include connections between the wide range of support spaces and media available to t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand; responses to the accessibility of support to people in a range of locations (not just limited to the major cities); and how queer and transgender groups develop support in ways which emphasise inclusivity for young people with diverse t & gnc subjective embodiments. The analysis draws on what Plummer (1995) describes as the 'context of stories' told by t & gnc young people and community based support providers – exploring how their perspectives/practices are shaped by their locations, experiences and connections. Insights into the current provision, availability and development of support in Aotearoa New Zealand are offered.

A changing context of youth support

For participants, the possibilities for young people exploring alternative gender identities and expressions (including at times their own), requires the availability of different spaces/media of information and support. In recent years there has been a notable increase in representations of transgender and gender experiences, in particular, those of female-to-male

trans people and also transgender children. These informed a number of participants' narratives. *My secret self: A story of transgendered children* (2007), which featured on 20/20, Michael Beattie's (the 'pregnant man') appearance on Oprah, and the New Zealand documentary *Intersexion* (2012) were three examples of this increased media visibility mentioned by participants. Both in mainstream, and particularly queer media, increased attention to trans people has emerged, often linked with strategies to increase awareness of the experiences and challenges that t & gnc people face.

The greater public awareness of t & gnc experiences was frequently talked about by research participants as having to be actively negotiated. The young participants in the project often made reference to texts which they had read or watched from queer and mainstream media which they found useful in informing and orientating their subjective embodiments. Participants who were support providers also highlighted the significance of these representations in their work. Participant K, a trans woman and adult community based support provider involved in both transgender and queer based supports, indicates how New Zealand has recently had some significant public transgender figures that provide examples of the possibilities now open to t & gnc people:

K: Georgina [Beyer] was very visible in Parliament and that's been a good thing because they go 'well they have high powered jobs'. Sarah's in the Police force which has been great cos she's a person in authority, so you go 'oh ok', so you get like little blips on the radar, but there are so few of us out to that degree that, you know, baby steps – we're always going forward.

(Participant K, February 2009)

While not huge in numbers, participant K regards these public figures as being significant for their very presence providing positive representations of transgender experiences and identities. Such figures and representations have been used as educational resources for people working in support networks. Participant B, for example, spoke of his work in the Transgender Inquiry:

B: That 20/20 documentary with trans youth had already been on TV and that became something you could direct people to because it had been on TV and it was up on different websites and people could go and look at it, and they were very young trans people – particularly the MtF's.

(Participant B, March 2009)

Participant J, a support provider/developer, suggested caution was needed as mainstream media often offered normative representations of trans people which could not be relied on to inform the support needs of some young people. For her, the importance of maintaining and developing personal and local contacts at a community-support level were more significant:

J: The localness yeah, really important, because how can anyone – there's that mirroring effect I think that goes on - I mean you're processing your own stuff but I think it's always really good to have a mirror to that, someone who can go 'aw look, this can be successful, you know you can have jobs, careers' and it's not this idea that you sometimes get portrayed in the media.

(Participant J, November 2008)

Participant J describes the media as a site of struggle over meanings which can be read in different ways. While increased representation of transgender people is important, support providers do need to be aware that these may reinforce heteronormative discourses and inequalities. Consideration of where representations originate, what purpose they serve, who they are targeted at and to what extent the media can be considered a space of support have become important questions within support provision. A consideration of how young people engage with/read/make sense of such representations is an area which requires further research attention. Participant J also emphasised the importance for young t & gnc people of local and personal contact and being able to have feedback within support actions to offer reassurance and challenge stereotypes in their (dis/re)orientations.

Media resources about transgender people can, however, be difficult to access. Participant D, a young trans person and support provider, talked about the challenges he found in relation to building a queer support organisation's library to incorporate more trans focussed resources:

D: They have a library and a DVD collection and I've been very instrumental in finding trans [material] ... including donating half of my own videos [laughs]. However, a lot of those resources are still quite inaccessible, and I mean, it's quite interesting, like we've got a copy of *Body Alchemy* in that, and there's been more than one comment ... from young people who were not trans, that see that book, and there's been the odd comment that they've been a little freaked out by it. But I'd rather they were freaked out by it and they have access to it so that it does continue to be there. But the problem is that because trans resources are less accessible, they are more expensive to get, and there in is the whole other problem for finding resources and things, and the resources that we do have are not necessarily as good as we could have, though we do try.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

Due to the fact that most resources are published overseas (and the costs involved in buying them), accessibility to them in New Zealand is limited, particularly within the queer/trans youth support field which operates with limited funds. Thus, adding trans focussed books to the queer library, keeping resources up-to-date and relevant to those involved are ongoing challenges.

Developments in support

Online spaces were highlighted by many participants as being important for finding up-to-date information. A range of free support resources having increasingly become available through queer and trans support focussed websites. For both young people and support providers, the internet now makes a range of resources accessible and provides an increased diversification of support spaces. Online spaces were viewed as offering a range of ‘supports’ for trans and gender diverse young people and providers. These include resources, support-focussed websites, blogs, people’s personal sites, YouTube videos, discussion lists and the recent trend toward social networking sites such as Facebook, among many others. Participant D discussed the way in which the internet has been a key site for trans young people in Aotearoa New Zealand for over a decade. It enables finding information and connecting with others around the globe and has transformed the way t & gnc young people can engage in support (as well as reconceptualising what support spaces looked like). Participant D, for example, talked about his experience of accessing support via the internet as a central tool in finding out about being trans and connecting with others:

D: At the time I was looking quite a bit online - um this was about July 2001 to January 2002 – I sort of did my big coming out thing in January 2002 as trans. Yeah and I um I had come across this site online, it was ‘queer oasis’, it was an online writing community. It was just people doing their blogs and writing various things, and one of the contributors had blogged - at that stage it wasn’t really a blog just a collection of articles, that sort of thing. But they’d written articles and identified as female-to-male, and they’d come out slightly before I did and sort of written about the whole thing. Right from the start, from when they were really dyke identified and coming out as trans. I think that was the kind of point where I’d never really met anyone else - any other trans guys, so it was kind of like um - well it was online so it was kind of different, but I got to the point where I started sort of connecting with this other guy online and was initially was very curious.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

Participant K also viewed the use of the internet for support by trans people as a successful development, linking its popularity to being able to find information from the safety of a person’s home. She suggested this is an empowering process that is not associated with the

risks of other forms of information seeking due to the anonymity it allows, particularly when contrasted with the experiences of earlier generations (including her own) of trans people:

K: I remember going into a library to try and find a book, and was terrified to ask someone you know, 'do you have a book by Jan Morris?' because they'd know it was a book about someone having a sex change and then they'd think 'oh my god'— that whole closeted hidden thing. So now that you can do it in the safety of your own home, and anybody can access the web, as long as they've got a computer, and they find out information, and information is power.

(Participant K, February 2009)

As suggested by many participants, accessible information is central for t & gnc young people to be able to make sense of their feelings of difference and explore ways of orientating themselves within available ideas, experiences and ways of knowing the world.

The proliferation of the internet in conjunction with the development of *transgender*, and especially the more recent *genderqueer* (non-binary gender identity/expression), information in online spaces was identified by participants as an important source of support for many t & gnc young people in this exploratory time. In particular, the amount and variety of information accessible to young people exploring their gendered subjectivity from around the world, offers new possibilities for considering and enacting gender, as well as new challenges. Participant D reflected on this development within the context of support provision and its importance for t & gnc young people:

D: I think the internet is a really great place to go – well in saying that, I mean, it's difficult to figure out where things are and what are appropriate resources and what are good resources, cos there's so much out there. There are more and more supports being identified over the internet. When I was coming out, there used to be a great international - well U.S. based list, but that doesn't seem to be there anymore. But there are things like LiveJournal and other avenues there. The internet is a great resource for trans youth because it's a place that they can try out identities. I don't know if that's the best way to put it but umm ... like, say if someone in their everyday life was not out, or was only at the beginning of exploring their journey, and they are thinking of living or identifying as male - if they'd been presenting living as female prior to that - then they could try out doing so online, without, like some of the risks of doing so are taken. In terms of kind of exploring how they felt about that, rather than without having to risk their safety or whatever by doing that in reality.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

As Participant D indicates, online spaces can provide young people with new opportunities to 'try out' identities. This is without the same risks to physical safety (associated with

alternatives such as cross-dressing in public) as doing so in person. Expressing alternative identities online does not require a person to be necessarily 'out' or identifiable as t or gnc in their physical life. However, participant D does raise some concerns from a support provider's perspective around useful or appropriate spaces for young people online in an often unregulated environment, as well as the possibility of some sites changing and disappearing.

Presenting new types of risks and challenges to t & gnc young people, online spaces thus offer an ambiguous relationship with community support. Concerns around the availability of information online include people coming out younger and ethical debates around access to medical technologies. Participant K talked about the need for both queer youth and gender specific support providers to respond to these shifts in the contexts informing the local support provision:

K: [The focus on trans children] it's going to be a real controversy, because of the use of puberty blockers and all that, which is amazing. Science is moving faster than we can keep up with, and the problem is with the technology that we touched on earlier, that because that knowledge is out there people are putting names to their feelings and saying 'actually this is who I am', and you know you can't – we've gone past the era where people could just say 'well it's a just a phase, you'll grow out of it' cos you don't. And if you don't support them then you can end up with very unhappy adults.

(Participant K, February 2009)

Two participants discussed the difficulties surrounding the accessibility of internationally produced support resources for New Zealand young people. While young people are online and have greater access to information, the participants noted how a large amount of this support/information comes from the United States or Canada. New Zealand and even Australian internet-based support is less developed. This tends to impact on the expectations young people have about local support networks which may not match local support provision. One of these support providers, participant I (a young genderqueer person) highlights this incongruence of how online supports do not always offer continuity with those available in local communities:

I: All the really good information I was finding was on American websites, so if I were to refer someone, I wouldn't necessarily refer them to [local New Zealand support groups] if they can't personally get in contact with someone. They may as well go to a better website.

(Participant I, November 2008)

Being able to get the best information and make contact with someone, ideally in person, were both viewed as central to offering effective support. For genderqueer young people, for example, international sites have offered the primary space accessible to young people in New Zealand. This relates to their disruption of binary gender discourses which local trans and queer support organisations/networks were only just beginning to be inclusive of at the time of the interviews. Participants indicated that providing the best information to young people and offering them contact with local people with similar identities was not always possible. They talked about this ‘gap’ in local transgender support spaces and the importance of genderqueer or non-binary information. In this extract, participant J, a support provider, reflects on her experience:

J: American [websites] were the first port of call. I think online’s good, I just think it’s good as a starting point in terms of people being able to discuss and actually reach out. I suppose my one concern is, and I don’t have the concern for New Zealand so much because [name] runs the [FtM email] list, is that for youth who are still trying to find a language to describe their feelings, and describe how they feel, how accessible is the process of joining one of those lists? I don’t know really what the answer is, because again it’s that complexity of wanting to protect the community as well as wanting to offer support. But I just wonder sometimes, if we didn’t have such a good open minded person involved, what would happen, can we still actually have lists where/ and there’s a lot of really good gender queer lists, and I’ve been on some of those, but in New Zealand, you know, I just think it’s important to maybe open up that sort of process, and that sort of language, especially for the young people.

(Participant J, November 2008)

Developing inclusivity around a range of gender identities and expressions in support provision, particularly to include genderqueer experiences, was understood as central to providing effective youth support. The inclusion of information relating to non-binary identities and expressions, specifically within the New Zealand context, was identified as an important gap. This highlights the importance of non-binary understandings to participants involved with local trans and queer community support networks. Similarly, the limited availability of internet-based supports that link to ‘real life’ support in person was also of concern. Participant H, a trans young person and support provider, provides the example of how local New Zealand support websites often rely on internationally based websites for more diverse support rather than developing it themselves:

H: Like a lot of these (New Zealand) websites have links to some of the American websites that I end up going and getting information from, and it would be really good if they could have New Zealand specific information in terms of contacts and in terms of the specific cultural stuff – I think that’s really important ... but instead they just say ‘no go to this website it looks fine to me’,... but I’m not going to explain to you the importance of context.

(Participant H, November 2008)

Participant H's experience indicates how support spaces do not necessarily meet the needs of young people. When young people's support needs shift from readily available basic information about 'transgender youth' to more in-depth exploration about gender diversities, this requires more specific personal experiences, identification and cultural specificity. For participant H, identifying as a genderqueer person meant that attempting to find local individuals to provide support from a peer-mentor was challenging. Redefining who peer-based community support is for, in ways that keep up with shifting t & gnc discourses about gender and sexuality (and considering how these inform subjectivity), is an ongoing task in support provision. This has led to demands on trans and queer community based support to change in order to keep up with the types of support actions young people are seeking. The changing identities of young people involved are crucial in enabling this process.

Participant H's experience suggests that an effect of shifting who support is inclusive of (for example, online support becoming inclusive of genderqueer people) may not necessarily mean that the types of support offered in another space (such as in a local city) are available. Here, participant H describes the difficulty of finding a mentoring type support relationship because of his genderqueer identity:

H: Just thinking of the number of people that I know who have some sort of mentor who have like role-models and mentors who've taught them everything and told them everything - and it's that kind of handing down of knowledge that I think probably historically has been more what's going on, because it's probably more recent that things are actually being published, that funding is being made available, and things like the Inquiry, that the Human Rights Commission, can even take that project on. People who are more genderqueer, or somehow ambiguous or in between and not trans in a stable kind of either trans woman or trans man kind of way, I think that's harder because you're less likely to find a role model or a mentor and because generally the older people don't relate to that identity as much so it's harder for me to find an older person for me to talk to about all of this.

(Participant H, November 2008)

Participant J also considers the increasing availability of genderqueer informing young people's support needs. She highlights this as an ongoing issue as non-binary gender discourses become more prominent, particularly amongst young people. These, she suggests, need to be incorporated into existing support and appropriate referral services in a way that remains inclusive of both binary and queer gender identities:

J: I've started to see [genderqueer] start to creep into New Zealand, and I think it's going to raise a lot of questions for the trans community, a lot of questions for the medical community, and they're actually – my main concern is ... is that when Standards of Care get written for New Zealand, that it actually has to have something in there ... that people should be able to self identify, and it's about informed consent, not Harry Benjamin [referring to the Harry Benjamin Standards of Care used to inform the treatment of gender identity disorders] says you have to have done this, this, this and this, in order to fit this, because otherwise we're not planning for the future. We're not planning for these generations that are coming through and who actually have had more freedom than other generations have had. And yet that still doesn't negate those people who do have a very much – do have from the ages of one or two know that they are – that their brain is different from their body.

(Participant J, November 2008)

The developments in language and understandings around gender to incorporate greater fluidity and multiplicity to existing dualistic understandings is already an active part of youth culture informed by recent trans/gender theory and activism, related particularly to global online spaces and trans activism. While this information is frequently North American based, the ideas informing new possibilities for t & gnc identities have made their way to New Zealand in a way that is relevant to the development of spaces of support for young t & gnc people. Online support spaces offer the advantages of providing up-to-date information and being accessibility anywhere a computer and internet access is available. However, using online sites as support can mean that people are disconnected from contextually specific information and experiences, such as local peers and community, which also inform the ways people are orientated.

Peers and community

A key theme in many participants' discussions about affirming their t & gnc identities/embodiments included meeting others or 'peers'. This included those experiencing similar challenges who they were able to share stories with and could offer advice based on their own experiences. Participant B, a provider and developer of support for trans people, talked about a key part of providing an email support list, which he worked to set up and moderate, was based on this peer-support relationship:

B: What is that, the phrase - 'you're from the same litter' somebody said, because you're not kind of like twins – I don't think you necessarily have the same parents if you're in a puppy litter, but you're hanging around doing the same things at the same time [laughs]. I like that analogy.

(Participant B, March 2009)

This analogy informs an understanding of who constitutes ones 'peers' within a community support discourse and suggests that t & gnc people connect with each other to provide peer support based on a shared experience of gender non-conformity. With a small number of trans people within any population, the task of finding others 'from the same litter' may not be straightforward. This was evident in the stories from participants in a South Island major centre, who talked extensively about how they were affected by both a low population density and geographical isolation within the New Zealand context.

Those involved in undertaking the work associated with the Transgender Inquiry (as well as the 'Out There' project), are/were based in either Auckland or Wellington. Extending their work outside of these areas therefore relied on travel to other places. Thus, these major centres, or those close to them, benefited most from their work and community development actions. Those further afield were left largely unaffected. Given the limited resources available, different emphases within support development emerged in different settings/spaces.

The focus on 'queer youth' support as a site for t & gnc youth support, or closely engaged with it, was understood by participant B as a recent phenomenon reflecting a new generation of support based on developing alliances and acknowledging diversity within a queer framework:

B: So I guess that's another model, a bit like Waikato queer youth. You wouldn't – if you were doing a workshop around trans adults who had faced employment discrimination or something, I can't imagine a whole group of lesbians or gay adults who'd had those experiences, who'd come along.

(Participant B, March 2009)

Participants indicate that while gender was more inclusively framed within queer youth support (and this inclusion was widely accepted around the country), maintaining and providing trans/genderqueer specific support in these spaces was an ongoing challenge due to small numbers of support providers. Even in New Zealand's largest city participant D, whose motivation to become involved in support was to create gender specific support that was lacking when he came out (a common theme amongst the support providers spoken to), talked about the level of burnout from offering support within voluntary organisations and the knowledge losses this creates. This was in addition to a lack of funding for queer youth

support, let alone funding opportunities to provide specific support for t & gnc youth within a queer umbrella:

- D: The main reason I've hung in there is because I don't feel that we've moved on enough and that if I stepped away that the same level of support would be there. Umm and it's challenging 'cos we go through staff members like anything, because they burn out, um and every time they move on half of that knowledge goes and that it's up to the volunteers to carry on with that level of knowledge and if they're not being adequately supported. Like [queer youth group] doesn't receive any government funding, and we have to find our own funding really.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

Participants in a South Island centre indicated that the distance from the North Island main centres impacted on the ability to engage in national change to the same extent as those from North Island major cities. The costs and challenges involved in providing supports to its smaller population often meant services and organisations were without a local base (for example the New Zealand Aids Foundation, which provided the base for Out There, is located in Christchurch to cover the entire South Island area). Those living south of Christchurch were thus not consulted, or not consulted as often, when working on tight budgets. This is also an issue for providing peer and community support to t & gnc people where contact is largely made via larger organisations nationally. Participant J indicates that this means options become limited in terms of where people can go for support in smaller centres:

- J: For some kids that might not actually be the best place to go [referring to national transgender support organisations], and to queer support at the university - I don't actually know if they could actually do that given that it's for university students, so that becomes problematic. Otherwise you're going outside [South Island city] to get bread bought back into [South Island city] and they can contact people down here. ... Yeah, so we do lack something formal, but then the other question is – do you need something formal?

(Participant J, November 2008)

Where more formalised support spaces may be lacking (such as organisations or regular support group meetings), local informal networks and contacts often become more centralised, and *who* is available, rather than *what* groups or services are present, was seen as more important.

Barriers and limitations in support seeking

Both location and population were important factors in influencing the type and emphases in discussions about support provision, shaping the ways support knowledges are shared and interpersonal contact is made. This section explores how support spaces, objects, others and information relate to developing or affirming t & gnc young people's subjective embodiments. It considers some of the barriers, limitations and challenges in support actions raised by participants. When participant H began specifically looking for information to understand his sense of genderqueerness, the support he was looking for was based on wanting to make connections between his own experiences and others. Central to this was finding examples of how others had gone about negotiating possibilities for genderqueer productions. He describes his frustration with the limited availability of these in the local community and needing to look further afield, for example, information online. For him, a sense of local connection was important in support – and even when online he maintained this focus, searching for narratives from people within Australasia:

H: I went through a phase ... of trying to find blogs written by trans people in New Zealand and Australia online, because I felt like I could look at a website that had terms and explanations but very sort of technical information, but I felt like I was ok with that. It was narratives and personal stories that I wanted and I wanted to know how other people were living their lives, and I felt like their weren't enough people for me to talk to in [South Island major centre] about that, and I did feel really cut off about that, so that was earlier in the year. So online, reading people's blogs was really interesting to me. More in depth information, more personal information, not just 'hey here's some safe sex information, here's what these words mean' because I think that's useful, and it was useful and it still should exist. I remember reading that in high-school and that was where I was at that point, that was really useful to me, but now I feel like it would help to feel more connected to the world through actual stories and experiences.

(Participant H, November 2008)

What distinguished this support seeking, in addition to a preference for 'local' narratives to connect with, was the way in which participant H sought in-depth personal information in order to "feel more connected to the world through actual stories and experiences". Storytelling was a very important support action, as it was for other participants (for example, participant D's experience of listening to the 'butch' woman on the radio sharing her stories, see page 81).

Participant E, a young trans person, who had a clear idea of knowing that he was an transguy after watching the film *Boys Don't Cry*, initially found it difficult to find information to allow him to take the next steps on his journey even while actively information seeking. In

response to being asked what he had been doing to find support since he watched *Boys Don't Cry* over the previous three and half year period, he talked about employing a range of actions to overcome feeling isolated and unsupported in his transgender experience:

E: A hell of a lot of research, and then I found NZTransguys and got talking to [name] and a couple of the other guys, and then I got recommended a therapist, and then attended the hui, and then got onto the therapist and yeah ... I was looking for a bit more information and also to find other guys out there, cos when you're in a small town, there's not a lot of anyone around. You feel even more alone when you're kind of different. So for quite a while I felt kind of stranded, I guess. I kind of wanted to meet some guys who were a bit closer than America. [laughs] Their laws are different to the ones over here.

(Participant E, Telephone interview, March 2009)

The types of supports participant E identified were varied and multiple. On the one hand, participant E was looking to find others to connect with. He also had the additional challenge of being more isolated in a provincial New Zealand town. His search for information led him to find North American information and people through the internet, but it was not until he found a New Zealand email list for trans guys, and was able to then make contact with some of its members locally in New Zealand, that he felt he had found the support he needed. On the other hand, participant E was looking to find information about the process of making a gender transition in New Zealand. He mentions how the laws around the world vary, so finding out New Zealand specific requirements for negotiating the health system required local knowledge in order to get started. Being recommended a therapist was a significant step in getting support to be able to start the gender transition formally. His developing sense of social support, through being able to attend a national queer youth hui and meet other young queer and trans people, also offered him a sense of perspective in relation to the isolation he felt living in a small provincial town which exacerbated his sense of being different. Overcoming his isolation from other t & gnc young people and gaining access to new types of information contributed to participant E being able to find the support he needed.

Participant F, a young fa'afafine, also experienced frustration in terms of formal supports which failed to provide the support they were set up to offer. She talked about the limitations of support at school, for example, the school counsellor. She suggests she never felt that the counsellor ever really understood her perspective and the challenges she faced:

F: The counsellor at school was O.K. but she didn't really understand where I was coming from, cos she was really just there to listen, but I didn't really come out with my story back at school. I was still quite, like you talk to [name] and she'll tell you I was going through so much at home – not allowed to do all this, I felt excluded from my family, but I always knew they were my family, and I knew that when my dad got drunk hide, cos he'll come to me because he wants to beat me up, because once he sees me that's it for me, hiding for the night. My Dad's an alcoholic so that happened every day.

(Participant F, March 2009)

For Participant F, the support the school offered never responded to her actual needs and, while it may have provided her with a space to talk, there was no point of connection (through a sense of shared knowledge or link with other support options). It was thus ineffective in helping her to change the situation she was in. This was in contrast to the support she experienced at the hairdressing course she attended where she met another young fa'afafine. Participant F's experiences of support actions show the importance of a wide range of support actions for young people. Many of the most pivotal and effective examples of support in participants' narratives were informal or less formal (inter)actions. Most significantly, they were the support actions that allowed t & gnc young people to express themselves without fear of prejudice and/or engage with other gender and/or sexuality diverse peers with whom they felt a shared commonality. It is also possible to see how different contexts, identities and social positions impact on support seeking, with additional challenges focussed around support at school and home and access to psycho-medical services.

Creating change in 'our' identities

The final part of this chapter focusses on the motivations in support – why and how people come to (re)produce support and the directions they see it progressing in. Participants who were support providers, developers and young people talked about change, in a variety of ways, as informing many of the motivations for the development or provision of peer based community supports. For some, this change reflected being involved in trans/queer communities for many years while for others it was through coming out and not finding what they needed (which often informed their involvement in developing new supports). For a few participants it was through observing changes occurring in their local organisations and communities, some of which they had actively contributed to. Participant A, a queer youth support provider and developer, talked about change in relation to the development of 'Out There' for New Zealand and its links to Governmental social initiatives occurring around 2003. This was a project motivated by and linked to youth suicide prevention, as part of the

New Zealand 'National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy' (Ministries of Health, Youth Affairs and Maori Affairs, 1998) and the 'Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa' (Ministry of Youth Development, 2002). The link between 'Out There' and broader youth development strategies promoted a new focus on developing greater connectedness between queer and broader youth support discourses in New Zealand. Participant A describes this as a significant development for queer youth support which has developed primarily from previous gay and lesbian community based youth support:

A: I guess that our support has had to arise in isolation because of social prejudice and stuff, so now as we are merging into an era where there's more social acceptance we're needing to actively try and make those connections again.

(Participant A, July 2008)

This indicates significant changes for 'queer' youth support, shaped by increasing social acceptance for queer people. 'Queer' youth subjectivities (or at least some of these) have gained greater legitimacy and are far less marginalised than a decade ago. In addition, the connections with other youth support have also given 'queer' youth support more legitimacy.

Participant B reflected on how changing understandings of gender and sexuality (demonstrating greater inclusivity and diversity within the terms 'queer' and 'trans'), have been promoted within the Transgender Inquiry. The Inquiry process has not only sought trans/gender diverse youth submissions but has also initiated ongoing education work focussed on bridging trans/queer differences. In the current context, particularly within queer youth support, the focus is increasingly on gender diversity. For example, the Human Rights Commission has invested in creating change within queer youth spaces as a key site of education with the Transgender Inquiry implementation. Participant B spoke about a lunch and a 'trans 101' education session developed for queer and trans youth by the HRC in conjunction with the 'Assume Nothing' photographic exhibition:

B: Even though at the lunch there were hardly any other trans youth there other than the panel – I think we got one or two other local trans young people who came, it still felt – well at least they were interested and we kind of mixed it up with them giving ideas for the planned Curious website, and it was pretty clear that lots of them didn't have a clue ... and in the workshop it was some of the queer youth who were really interested but asked the inappropriate questions like 'have you had the operations yet'. I think they were overly interested.

(Participant B, March 2009)

In this example, while the people active in this session were not necessarily transgendered, they showed a significant level of support for the event demonstrating an openness and interest in becoming more inclusive. It also shows a lack of awareness of respectful ways to engage with trans people, despite coming from 'queer' perspectives. This emphasises both the different support needs of trans and queer young people and the importance of information/education being (re)produced for a wider queer audience. This will enable 'queer' youth spaces to operate as informed support spaces for both sexuality and gender diverse young people.

Participant G's discussion of developing an inclusive trans youth group highlights additional challenges in relation to developing a gender-focussed group with close links with queer networks. She identified how supports available to young trans/gender diverse people are rapidly transforming in relation to understandings of 'family' support. She suggests this is because a greater level of support for young t & gnc people is coming from biological families, reducing the importance of trans/queer 'family' as the basis of support:

G: That's why those kind of roles are disappearing, because we don't need that other mother, the other family, and while we all have an external family from our blood family that we build, the queers and the trans people no longer just have that family - we're keeping our blood family, a lot more people are keeping their blood family. So I think that does change a lot.

(Participant G, March 2009)

Here Participant G describes a shift in support with respect to the changing roles of queer/transgender peers and community for t & gnc young people. She suggests this is the result of increased social acceptance of diversity within families and families becoming more supportive of trans and queer young people. This shows how some support roles in trans/queer communities are potentially less important as a wider range of support possibilities grows. However, as the trans youth group participant G is involved in running has experienced, there is now demand for support from parents and families who find the experience of having t & gnc young people challenging but want to offer their support.

Transgender community development was also discussed as an important site of change. This includes developing the inclusiveness the term 'transgender' (to incorporate a wide range of t & gnc experiences) and taking ownership of actions that affect trans people, as

distinct from those of the queer community, while not rejecting a relationship between the two. Participant G talks about how she sees this distinction is being understood:

G: Well I happen to be a trans lesbian so I am queer, but for many trans people the only thing we have in common is that society puts us in the same box. I think that - not that we need to push away the queer community, but in some ways we're starting to realise we have to stand on our own.

(Participant G, March 2009)

Participant G described the importance of the broader queer community in providing a space of support for t & gnc people that has enabled a growth in a distinct trans collectivity. Part of this transgender community development has been recognising the differences in these experiences:

G: We're creating our own things that are separate from the queer community but in a way that empowers us all. I think trans people have started to realise that it's unfair to expect gay people to know any more about us than the straight people do – and why would they? ... Because of that we are starting to stand on our own and say O.K. we can't rely on the gay people to offer us/ to do everything for us because they don't know what to do, so we need to do it ourselves. And so that's I think more of what is happening and needs to happen even more.

(Participant G, March 2009)

Participant G suggests that the growth of transgender activism (as distinct from queer activism) is the result of articulating specific transgender based issues and understandings and trans people starting to take responsibility for their own change-making.

The work of the Human Rights Commission has been important in building a collective transgender 'community' in Aotearoa New Zealand (as discussed in chapter one) through strategically working alongside trans people in the Transgender Inquiry. The focus has been on identifying key areas in need of development, helping different groups work together around common goals, finding common ground to enable activism to occur and increasing visibility to create change in both trans communities and more broadly. Young t & gnc people have been actively included in these processes (HRC, 2007). Participant G, suggests that there is also a wider social acceptance of gender diversity, where gender 'roles' and expressions have become less polarised:

G: Even within the queer community - especially among the lesbian community, there's a lot less people identifying as butch or fem, than along the middle, and I just think that's an

overall gender thing. Society has loosened up a lot around those roles in society – men can wear pink shirts without getting giggled at or beaten up, you know.

(Participant G, March 2009)

She talked about gender expressions as being less rigid and exploring more of the middle ground, citing the urban ‘metrosexual’ as an example of a new form of masculinity. In transgender and queer communities, she similarly indicated less focus on the extremities of masculinity and femininity (such as butch/fem identities losing currency with queer youth) and more attention and visibility of androgynous and genderqueer expressions.

The proliferation of gender diverse language and identities such as ‘genderqueer’ and others focussing on both/neither gender categorisation, particularly within queer/trans youth culture (which can be seen in participants’ self-expressions in Chapter three), are a recurrent theme in support provision. When asked about the presence of genderqueer in support, based on her own involvement in support, participant G responded:

G: I don’t think it’s a new thing, it’s been around in the last ten years while I’ve been doing support. I don’t think the theory is new, I think the words are new, I think the prominence of it is new.

(Participant G, March 2009)

This has been informed by queer deconstructions of gender that developed in the 1990s (for example: Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* 1990; Judith Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* 1998; and the activism that has followed, for example, Kate Bornstein’s *My Gender Workbook* 1998 and Leslie Feinberg’s *Transgender Liberation* 1998). At the centre of this is a critique of the assumption that there are only two distinct categories of sex/gender.

Participant D described how he was involved in the development of a trans youth group within a major queer youth group in 2002, demonstrating this movement to develop a focus on transgender within queer:

D: Even in an environment such as Rainbow Youth, even at that time - that was about 2001 early 2002, umm there was very/ oh I was going to say there was very little transgender visibility, but I’m not aware that there was any at all - it wasn’t visible anyway. Even in an environment that was supposedly queer friendly, I had incredible anxiety about coming out as trans, and that it was very difficult for me to vocalise. I spent many hours in that one setting trying to do it.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

For participant D the establishment of a trans-specific youth space actively challenged the lack of visibility of transgender identities and issues in local queer youth space at the time. He talks about the way in which queer space provided allies for him as a trans person, but did not provide any specific gender-based support due to a lack of information/knowledge about trans & young people's support needs. He saw the HRC's Transgender Inquiry as central to creating further change providing both visibility and attention to trans people and an awareness of the discrimination they experience:

D: I think [the Transgender Inquiry] definitely made things a lot more visible, in terms of trans people and the discrimination that they're facing in New Zealand. Prior to that I think that got overlooked.

(Participant D, Interview 2, October 2008)

The impact of this shift to focus on transgender as an area requiring greater attention has had an impact on queer youth organisations such as Rainbow Youth, where participant D suggests the attention to sexuality and gender have become more balanced.

The move towards the language of queer was also cited by participants as being significant to the current developments shaping support. Participant I also noted the shift from gay and lesbian support to the use of the acronym LGB, T (transsexual), to then additionally adding I (Intersex), T(transgender), and T(Takataapui). The use of this acronym was particularly prominent in youth support in order to ensure people's awareness of its availability and focus on issues relevant to them. This helps to explain the move away from identity groups and politics (used to affirm individual members through a common identity) to a recognition of diversity and a focus on common ground for all under a queer umbrella.

Participant J, as a support provider at the time, talked about how adding a T to LGB was an important issue around 2004 in the support spaces she was involved in and how it was important that groups represented themselves as being supportive of all members of the queer community. This commitment to becoming inclusive of gender diversity, however, required more than adding a token T to describe who is included within support spaces and actions:

J: [I] started doing some awareness stuff about [I] how it had to be more than just adding a T on to LGB, that there actually needed to be an actual commitment to supporting gender

diversity within [South Island major centre], and especially within the university setting, because at that particular time it was, it was pretty tokenist.

(Participant J, November 2008)

The shift in discourses from the gay and lesbian movement and political reforms of the 1980s and 1990s to transgender/genderqueer ideology also represents a generational shift in support. Participant J (aged thirty years at the time of interview) describes the experience of being between both and how that has impacted on support provision:

J: We've had a lot of young people come through in the last few years and I think – I think partly with me it's a generational thing, because, because I'm 30 and the generation I sort of grew up with is sort of in between that political lesbian-gay movement, and this young generation that's coming in with gender queer. There's been this really interesting schism in the middle that I think has lacked support from its own generation.

(Participant J, November 2008)

Participant J suggests that the focus within support changes in relation to changing discourses (and technologies) which inform the (re)production of gender and sexuality:

J: I love looking at those battlegrounds and how language is being used, but I think it has sometimes played out in the ways that support is being offered, so that the support is now not for transsexuals, it's actually for transgender, or trans or just gender - for people who are questioning their gender and/or their sex not just a box - this is what you fit into. So I think that's been a bit of a change in the last few years.

(Participant J, November 2008)

Highlighted through the participants' observations and involvements in a range of supports, is how shifting understandings of the relationships between gender, sexuality and transgender inform the directions and motivations for community-based supports available to t & gnc young people. At this point in time a dominant focus on diversity is connected with empowering young people in support provision. This can be seen through the moves to (re)produce support as inclusively queer and trans. The Transgender Inquiry demonstrates that diverse narratives about gender identity and expression, generation, location, culture, and age are all important factors informing the current context of support in New Zealand (HRC 2007). Now, in addition to the existing psycho-medical model of the 'transsexual' and 'gender identity disorder' as pathology, has come a distinct critique from t & gnc communities, and a shift in support provision in New Zealand as a site of activism, utilising language and community building around 'transgender' and celebrating gender diversity incorporating a range of gender identities and expressions. There is also an emphasis on self-

identity, rather than psychological diagnosis or group-based identification, in peer-based community support as an empowering principle, working to validate all people as individuals not just those who fit an official diagnosis or reproduce social group norms.

The challenges and responses within queer, transgender and gender diverse supports focus on how to maintain diversity so that young people have access to supports which affirm who they are and provide support actions in ways which build connections across different media. Participant J highlights how this is based on developing support which promotes equality amongst t & gnc young people, valuing each individual equally within and beyond support, in contrast to the legitimisation of a limited few within the psycho-medical approaches to support:

J: Yes there are going to be some of you who 'fit the model' but there are also those who experience their life narrative differently and that they're all just as valid, and they all actually deserve the same rights and the same support systems as anyone else.

(Participant J, November 2008)

Conclusion

The paradigms shift all the time and you identify within a certain paradigm or across several different paradigms and so depending on what the cultural paradigm is - that will determine a lot about how you talk about yourself.

(Participant H, November 2008)

While there are many differences and complexities in the support provision available and accessible to t & gnc young people within the New Zealand context, most importantly, as this chapter has highlighted, it is undergoing a period of significant transformation. This change is most evident in the language and media being used within support. It is now possible to talk collectively of a focus on alternative gender expressions and identities within the broader terms *trans* or *queer*. This enables individuals the space to identify themselves through an increasing recognition of diverse trans discourses which range from binary to queer understandings of gender. In the support context, being able to work at both the collective and individual level are identified as important, that is, from being able to meet an individual's own support needs (which relate to their personal experience of gender), to working collectively to improve the wellbeing and rights of t & gnc young people as a community, through challenging discrimination, prejudice and social isolation.

The participants' stories indicate that achieving this is an ongoing challenge due to limited resources and relatively few people involved in providing support. There is not one single space of support for trans young people in New Zealand, although increased attention to gender in the current context within queer youth groups, or alongside them, has meant these spaces are the focus of where this is developing most actively. This can be linked to an existing shift away from identity politics within queer youth spaces and an extension of queer deconstruction into gender with 'genderqueer' identities and expressions also informing trans spaces.

Who t & gnc young people are is also changing in relation to shifting discourses of gender and transgender, as well as the availability and accessibility of this information. T & gnc people are more visible in public discourses in ways that challenge binaristic representations and open up the possibilities for those negotiating their feelings of difference. The recent commitment by the Human Rights Commission through the Transgender Inquiry to trans people, with specific attention to trans youth, has engaged trans and gender diverse people to work more inclusively and build stronger communities through the action of telling stories to enable a focus on celebrating trans diversity as part of a broader human diversity. This has been aimed at legitimising trans experiences and identities and through the process empowered individuals and groups to work beyond their differences.

The spaces of support, the context of support, and the way that support is practiced are all central to t & gnc young people's wellbeing in Aotearoa New Zealand. Attention to these areas and the stories which constitute them highlights their changing status, how the collective diversity of t & gnc young people in New Zealand requires ongoing development and consideration. The current support context is twisted and stretched, working in a range of ways to try to keep up with what it means to be t & gnc and young in a very varied and changing Aotearoa New Zealand.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

This project has explored trans and queer community based support as the site of inquiry in responding to the research question: What support is currently available to/for young trans people coming out in Aotearoa New Zealand, and how does this inform the (re)production and shifting nature of transgendered subjectivities and embodiments? The stories/narratives of participants enabled an exploration of the ways in which the subjective and embodied knowledges of t & gnc young people both inform and respond to their support seeking/experiences. As Ken Plummer (1995) indicates, 'telling stories' is a political act and this thesis, through its analysis of participants' stories, contributes to the broader project of Transgender Studies. In particular, the focus is on working to desubjugate knowledges about transgender and gender non-conforming (t & gnc) young people and prioritise their ways of knowing the world. This involved critical reflection on dominant constructions of support for t & gnc young people and a consideration of support practices as informed by experiences and understandings of transgender, peers and community.

Chapter one explored the broader context of support for t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. It considered the growth and development of more specific 'trans youth' support, particularly within or alongside *queer* transformations of former LGBT community based support groups. It also looked at how community based approaches have strategically employed frameworks to inclusively respond to the needs of both gender and sexuality diverse young people as a specific site of growth. These queer youth development and human rights projects provide New Zealand wide engagement in challenging dominant gender and sexuality 'norms', and inform and build communities of action to combat widespread discrimination and prejudices.

In addition to community-based action, dominant discourses which provide research and information about the support needs of t & gnc young people were also considered. In contrast, these showed little attention to research on young t & gnc people's perspectives of support experiences or the role of community based supports in promoting their wellbeing.

This highlights significant differences in approaches to support for t & gnc young people. In approaches that are *about* or *for* them, t & gnc young people are frequently represented as ‘at risk’, vulnerable and requiring ‘expert’ guidance. In contrast, community approaches are more commonly framed around working *with* young people to respond to their needs and, in particular, providing support that is provided by those considered ‘peers’ or members of the wider queer or trans community. The incoherencies between queer and trans community-based support provision and dominant discourses of psycho-medical, therapeutic and LGBT youth approaches to t & gnc young people are significant, and demonstrate the ways a range of discourses frame t & gnc young people. Significant areas of concern were identified including the continued disregard for non-binary considerations of gender in many ‘expert’ constructions which produce inequalities for young t & gnc people looking to access medical technologies. Also discussed as a concern was the ongoing invisibility of t & gnc young people within LGB(T) literature which continues to leave the ‘T’ silent, along with specific attention to the experiences of gender for t & gnc young people in research that claims to include them. With the exception of a few notable examples, the absence of young t & gnc people’s experiences within research about them, perpetuates the invisibility/silence of their perspectives about their support needs.

Chapter two explored developments in theorising *transgender* and the rise of queer and trans activism in countering adult ‘expert’ knowledges as the only site of legitimate support knowledge constituting t & gnc young people. This developed the theoretical framework for engaging with t & gnc young people utilising critical ‘transgender’, ‘queer’ and post-structuralist feminist theorising, locating the project within a queer and poststructuralist context that has become important for ‘Transgender Studies’. These frameworks demonstrate a deconstructive approach to the way social ‘problems’ and ‘norms’ relating to gender and sexuality are understood as (re)produced, interpreted, framed and embodied within a range of discourses. A queer/trans deconstructive approach emphasises the importance of exploring a wide range of representations of transgendered or gender non-conforming (t & gnc) young people, and supports as practices, rather than objects. The approach offers possibilities for understanding not only *what* support for them is (or ‘should be’) provided, but the importance of considering ways of framing support, who can provide this, and spaces of possible support. The approach problematised ‘knowledges’ *about* t & gnc young people, highlighting the importance of the negotiation of diverse discourses in the local provision of New Zealand’s peer-based community support. In particular it focussed on how *difference* itself has become

central to enacting support for t & gnc young people in a trans and queer community context, and highlighted developments in the language which is used to talk about this support.

Chapter Two also discussed the value of a Queer Phenomenological approach to examining experiences of t & gnc young people's experiences of support in Aotearoa New Zealand. It considered the ways sensations of *disorientation*, focussing on people experiencing themselves as in some way 'different' or 'out of place' (in relation to dominant discourses of sex-gender and the spaces these are reproduced within), do not simply correspond to people 'lacking' a legitimate or authentic sensation of their sex-gender. Instead it provides an exploration of the ways subjects talk about their experiences of feeling disorientated as part of a process of renegotiating becoming sex-gendered subjects in other ways. The approach includes considering how disorientation may be an important part of individuals' journeys of finding supports, and the ways trans and queer support spaces, peers and communities may offer as sites of direction.

Chapter Three described the research methodology for the project designed to enable an exploration of support for t & gnc young people that engaged with queer and trans community/peer perspectives. This focussed on the stories young people, and those who support them, told about the kinds of support they provided and received. It discussed why exploring alternative/additional perspectives to expert narratives requires research strategies that enable the recognition of a wider range of discourses informing support, a greater diversity of gender identities and expressions, and an engagement which privileged young people's stories about their experiences. This chapter outlined important methodological considerations in engaging with t & gnc young people and those who work to support them in local New Zealand spaces of trans and queer community based support.

It includes recognising that the telling of stories is a political act, connected with giving voice to those marginalised or silenced – in this case 'Making Space' for a focus on t & gnc young people's experiences of trans and queer community based support in New Zealand. This also established the need to consider participant's roles in the co-constitution of community based-support, recognising the ways in which their actions are informed and invested in a range of queer directions.

Chapter Four explored the ways t & gnc young people talked about not conforming to gender and sexuality ‘norms’ or expectations, describing the ways they felt ‘out of place’ or disorientated. It employed a Queer Phenomenological frame to consider the significance of different spaces, objects and others, the proximities of these, and different directions people follow in negotiating gender. Sara Ahmed’s (2006) conceptualisation of ‘disorientation’ offered the opportunity to think about the ways it might usefully inform support practices, including what and how support is provided and young people’s involvement in support. Participants’ stories highlighted how the experience of gender is not just defined by how people think, or what they know, it is also about how bodies feel and how they are interpreted and valued by others. They also highlighted how gender non-conformity and the experiences of disorientation offer opportunities for actively disrupting binary gender and opening up embodiments to alternative productions. I argue for the need to move beyond viewing gender non-conformity as ‘failing’ to reproduce dualistic gender norms and how central this is to a consideration of support for young people.

In relation to support specifically, Chapter Four demonstrates how barriers to locating or accessing support can create significant challenges for young people. Many participants indicated the importance of finding spaces of support that offered alternatives to the heteronorms young people frequently grow up with. It highlighted that, within alternative productions, these can be presented/available in a range of forms and accomplished in different ways. The stories shared in this chapter suggest that normative gender and sexuality discourses, and particularly binary understandings of these, are a huge barrier to many young people being able to move beyond feeling ‘different’ or ‘out of place’. In particular, being constrained by binary constructions negated other ways of understanding and expressing themselves. Participants’ ongoing negotiation of disorientation and redefinition of gender highlights the importance of not only access to support, but a prioritisation of subjectivity and embodiment in approaches to support.

Chapter Five explored key issues, barriers and challenges in the development, provision and accessibility of trans and queer community based support identified by research participants. It highlighted ways in which providers and developers of trans and queer community based support are engaged in actively transforming support spaces to respond to the changing needs of t & gnc young people. The chapter considered how different locations and media of community and peer based support can shape practices and possibilities. Changing media

technologies and increasing media attention were shown to be significant in informing support offered in local contexts. Of special interest to participants was developing inclusivity in support through an increased focus and critical attention to alternative gender expressions and identities (ranging from binary to queer understandings of gender) through the enactment of *trans* or *queer* spaces.

Attention to the development of trans and queer community spaces of support highlighted them as collectively diverse and individually specific, maintaining the significance of constructions of both *communities* and *peers* within the trans and queer perspectives. It demonstrated a dual action in support, where both collective and individual level support practices are viewed as simultaneously important to t & gnc young people, support providers and developers. This includes responding to meeting individual's support needs through peer-based support relationships with people who have similar t & gnc experiences. It also includes engaging in community building in order to develop collective spaces and actions aimed at improving the wellbeing and rights of t & gnc young people, through the recognition of commonalities and shared goals amongst diverse participants.

Lastly from Chapter Five, the involvement of t & gnc young people in the (re)production of their own support is discussed. It highlights how support practices in trans and queer spaces are the extension of embodied experiences in action. Through their relationships with their *peers*, and in negotiating changing constructions of *trans* or *queer* community, I argue that t & gnc young people are engaged in support a site of activism. Their activism is informed by their embodied experiences, by the objects/others which have given them direction, and by spaces which have provided them directions to follow that they felt comfortable with. It is also informed by the limitations and challenges they have faced and the desire to help others through similar times, or avoid them. Their activism is informed by being prepared to walk beside others, learn with them and not tell them who they should become, or what gender should look like. This is what makes it unique to other forms of 'expert' guidance.

As an exploratory project, this thesis worked largely to open up a conversation and 'make space' for thinking and talking about trans and community based support for t & gnc young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. In doing so, it has raised many more questions than it has answered, and barely touched on numerous areas where research and information is still lacking or requires significant development. Even in its relatively small scale, the research

suggests particular areas which would benefit from more in-depth research attention. These include: exploring 'peer' relationships between t & gnc young people as the basis of support and links to other peer-support movements; considering t & gnc young people's use of the internet as a site of support (that might engage in discussions about online embodiment); examining the relationships/tensions between trans and queer communities, especially within the production of youth spaces where these are actively being negotiated; and lastly, with growing attention and awareness of transgender children, exploring the experiences of t & gnc children and their families. Each of these is a significant area in itself and would offer valuable contributions to the people involved.

In closing this thesis I hope that its focus and themes are of interest beyond academic circles and may contribute to the communities in which the research is born. Prioritising and including t & gnc people in research relating to their lives is a powerful process, and demands quality relationships to be built between communities of participants and researchers. Crucial to this process is sharing stories, and providing spaces where people can contribute to knowledges which shape their lives. I hope this beginning provides opportunities for more conversations, directions and spaces to open.

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Appendix

INFORMATION SHEET

Making Space: Supporting transgender and gender diverse young people coming out in the changing context of Aotearoa, New Zealand' (M.A. Research Project)

Thankyou for your interest in this project which is being undertaken as a MA research thesis in Sociology at the University of Canterbury. Most importantly this project is about 'Making Space' as the title suggests, to focus attention on the experiences and wellbeing of transgender and gender diverse young people directly, and those involved in supporting them, or informing and developing this support here in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is about getting out into our communities and talking about what it can be like to be young and transgendered or gender diverse in New Zealand today, and what that means for those involved in providing and developing support. This research comes at an important time, with the recent release of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission's Transgender Inquiry Report '*To Be Who I Am*', and a growing global awareness and activism shaping transgender and gender diverse peoples lives. This project is motivated by my own experiences of being involved in developing and providing community support to queer, transgender and gender diverse young people in Canterbury over the last 10 years, networking with others in this field nationally and globally, and academically exploring queer and trans subjectivities, lives and politics throughout my time at university. The following information provides further details specifically about the project and participation in it. If you have any other questions or queries feel free to contact me.

What is the purpose of the project?

- The purpose of the project is to explore the supports currently available and provided to transgender and gender diverse young people (30 years and under) around Aotearoa New Zealand;
- To explore how these supports relate and are relevant to the range of identities and expressions of transgender and gender diversity;
- To explore how the Human Rights Commission's Transgender Inquiry, and other developments occurring locally are shaping the current New Zealand context for transgender and gender diverse young people throughout their processes of coming out;
- To explore how this support, and the current changes informing it, can be located within a global context of change;
- To explore what supports young people are using and their experiences of them.

What will be gained from the project?

- The project aims to provide an overview of community and peer support for transgender and gender diverse young people currently available in New Zealand;
- To locate this support in a changing social, political and historical context in order to provide greater awareness of how things are developing;
- To develop a greater understanding of the support needs of transgender and gender diverse young people in Aotearoa, their use of supports, and how different gendered subjectivities and embodiments relate to different supports and support needs.
- Ultimately this information will be able to be used to inform support providers, develop more effective support systems, and help educate around gender diversity to provide safer and more supportive environments for young transgender and gender diverse people.

Who can participate?

Participants in this project include:

- Transgender and gender diverse young people (aged 16-30years) living in New Zealand, inclusive of a range of gender identities and expressions, including those who do not wish to identify. These participants will need to be willing to talk about how their gender, or experience of gender is/ or has undergone a period of change (their coming out process), and their use of supports through this time.
- Those involved in the direct support of transgender and gender diverse young people. This may include (but is not limited to): transgender and queer youth organisations and groups (both formal and informal), individuals (providing peer support), online list moderators, and newsletter and other information producers.
- Those involved in the development of support for transgender and gender diverse young people. This may include (but is not limited to) individuals, groups and organisations working to inform or advocate for changes to policy and law effecting transgender and gender diverse young people; those involved in developing support programmes, initiatives and education in that is directed at or inclusive of transgender and gender diverse young people.

What is involved in being a participant?

As a participant you will be involved in telling your story in relation to the research area.

- For transgender and gender diverse young people, this will involve meeting with the researcher to do an audio-taped in-depth interview (which will take one to two hours). This will focus on your experiences of being gender diverse or transgendered throughout your process of coming out, and how this relates to your use and experiences of support throughout this time. A second follow-up interview may also be necessary to fully develop the narrative.
- For those involved in directly supporting transgender and gender diverse young people, participation will involve being interviewed by the researcher, either in person, by phone, or by email (depending on your location, preference and feasibility). The amount of time this will take is flexible, acknowledging that largely this support is provided on a voluntary basis and people have other commitments. Any information you can provide will be a valuable contribution to this project. These interviews will focus on your experiences of providing or informing support for transgender and gender diverse young people in New Zealand. You will not be asked about specific individuals, and will be asked to ensure that you do not disclose information about any individual known to you which could conceivably permit their identity to be determined.

For all participants in this project: Interviews will be audio-taped, and once completed you will be given a transcript (written version) of the interview that you will need to read and make changes to where relevant. This is so that you have the opportunity to check that what is written is correct and represents you accurately, and that you are happy for the information you have supplied to be used in this research project. As a participant you will need to be contacted for this purpose. After this is complete you will have the option to receive a copy of the information you have provided for your own use, and will be asked whether you want to be kept updated on the research progress. Other than this final version of the interview (that has been checked and edited) all other versions of your interview (including audio tapes) will be returned to you on completion or destroyed.

What are my rights as a participant?

- As a participant you will be treated in a respectful and culturally safe manner and your confidentiality will be maintained at all times.
- You will be consulted as to whether you want your real name/pseudonym used, and to the inclusion/exclusion/disguising of any other identifying information.
- Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the research at any time.
- Any future use of your final edited interview transcription (or any part of it), beyond this project and the subsequent publication of results, will require your informed consent specifically for that purpose.

Potential participants should be aware that this research is of a personal nature (relating to personal experiences of being transgendered or gender diverse or supporting those who are) and that it may involve talking about life experiences that could be painful, difficult or unresolved which may be upsetting for some people. It will be possible to stop interviews at any time, and participants will receive a list of current community support services that are relevant to the research area, which may offer additional support.

This research is being undertaken for the completion of a M.A. thesis in Sociology at the University of Canterbury, by Evan Matthews under the supervision of Dr Ruth McManus (Department of Sociology and Anthropology) and Dr Kathleen Quinlivan (Department of Education) at the University of Canterbury.

This project has been reviewed *and approved* by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

If you agree to participate in this project I hope it will be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. Feel free to contact me, or either of my supervisors if you have any questions.

Yours Sincerely,

Evan Matthews
Principal Researcher
Ph/Txt: xxxxxxxxxxxx
Email: xxxxxxxxxxxx

Dr Ruth McManus
Senior Research Supervisor
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Dr Kathleen Quinlivan
Co-supervisor
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

C/O Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Canterbury, P.O. Box 4800, Christchurch.

CONSENT FORM

‘Making Space: Supporting transgender and gender diverse young people coming out in the changing context of Aotearoa New Zealand’ (M.A. Research Project)

I have had the opportunity to read the information sheet regarding the above named research project. I have also had the opportunity to discuss what will be involved in participating in this project.

I agree to participate in this project understanding that:

1. I will be consulted as to the inclusion/exclusion/disguising of my real name/pseudonym and any other identifying information (and that of my group/organisation if applicable);
2. I will have the opportunity to read and change the information I provide to the researcher before it is used in any part;
3. The research is confidential and the researcher will not communicate any specific details about me (or my group/organisation if applicable) to anyone other than those supervising this research other than the information I have agreed to provide having had the opportunity to read and make changes to it, or unless agreed to by me;
4. My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the project at any time. In this case all information I have provided in existence will be returned to me or destroyed;
5. I will have the option to receive at the completion of the project a copy of the information I have provided which I may retain for my personal use;
6. The data produced as a result of discussion and interview between the researcher and myself will be kept confidential and in a secure environment for the duration of the project;
7. Audio tapes from the interviews will be returned to me or destroyed at the completion of the project, along with any original transcripts;
8. Information included in the final edited interview transcript may be used by this researcher for the completion of the above named M.A. research project, and the subsequent publication of the findings of the research. This information may also be used to develop further research, analysis and education in this area, but any further use of my particular information beyond this project and the subsequent publication of its findings will require my informed consent;
9. Any questions or queries I have concerning this project will be answered by the researcher or those supervising it.
10. **(Applicable only to support providers)** I will not disclose information about any individual known to me which could conceivably permit their identity to be determined.

Signed:

.....(name of participant)

.....(signature of participant)

Date:

.....(signature of researcher)

Contact details:

Email address:

Phone number:

Street address:

.....

.....

Please sign two copies of this consent form. One is for you to keep, the other will be retained by the researcher.

INTERVIEW SHEET

(for support providers and developers of support for transgender and gender diverse young people)

**‘Making Space: Supporting transgender and gender diverse young people coming out in the changing context of Aotearoa New Zealand’
(M.A. Research Project)**

The interviews for this section of the project will take a semi-structured approach and will be based on exploring the following research questions and topics for discussion (listed below)

There will also be space in the interviews where support providers/ developers will be encourage to articulate and talk about their own identities and expressions of gender and how they came to be involved in support for transgender and gender diverse young people. This is an important part of the project, to acknowledge how the subjectivities of those providing/ developing support shapes how and what support is provided to trans young people.

1. What is the current context of support for young trans people in New Zealand?

Where is support available to young trans people coming out?

What supports and support systems are available to young trans people?

What are the different discourses or models of support being used?

How are these supports provided/accessible to young people, and who provides them?

2. How do young trans people use the support context?

How do young trans people (through their coming out process) use the supports available?

Where do they go for support/ what supports are they using?

What types of support are most relevant to them?

3. What are support providers perceptions of trans young people’s support needs and their usages of the supports available to them through their coming out process?

What do support providers see young trans people need in the way of support in coming out?

What do support providers identify as the specific support needs that relate to being both young and trans in New Zealand?

In what ways is diversity or a range of transgender and gender diverse subject positions recognised and incorporated into the provision of support for young trans people in New Zealand, and how is this achieved?

What are the perceived/real barriers to providing and accessing support?

How does a young trans person’s subjectivity and embodiment relate to the support they access and how they use it (from a providers perspective)?

4. How are supports being shaped by current discourses around gender, transgender and gender diversity?

What shapes the context of support for trans young people in New Zealand – what do those providing support draw on/utilise to develop it for trans young people?

How is the support of young trans people located/positioned within the broader context of New Zealand?

What affect is the New Zealand Human Rights Commission’s Transgender Inquiry and it’s reports having on the support context for trans young people?

In what ways can the New Zealand context of support for young trans people coming out be located within broader global changes that relate to the theoretical and political changes occurring internationally around gender, transgender and activism?

- how are these being taken up/applied in a New Zealand context?

5. How do supports (and the discourses informing them) enable/disable the (re)production of the diversity of transgender and gender diverse subjectivities and embodiments?

- How is support for trans young people understood/constructed?
 - what are it's aims/ ideal outcomes for trans young people?
- How are trans young people understood by those supporting them?
 - what does it mean to be a trans young person in New Zealand and what experiences are associated with this subject position(s)?
- In what ways are particular subjectivities and embodiments supported?
- Are all trans subjectivities and embodiments supported equally?
- Does a young person's gender identity and/or expression affect the providing, receiving or availability of support?
- How does location effect the support available and provided to young trans people?

INTERVIEW SHEET

(for transgender and gender diverse young people)

**'Making Space: Supporting transgender and gender diverse young people coming out in the changing context of Aotearoa New Zealand'
(M.A. Research Project)**

The interviews for this section of the project will take a semi-structured approach and will be based on exploring the following research question:

6. How are young trans people in New Zealand experiencing this context of support?

- How do young trans people experience support in the current context, in relation to their process of coming out, and their diverse subjectivities and embodiments?

This question will be examined on a small scale using 2-3 examples of trans young people's experiences of support through their coming process in New Zealand, to provide evidence of the material affects of support, and it's relationship to trans young people's subjectivity, embodiment and wellbeing.

These interviews will involve the following topics/areas of discussion:

- self description, identification and expression
- self-understanding of their own (trans)gender or gender diverse subjectivity and embodiment
- their personal experience of what has been involved in the process of coming out - This may include (but is not limited to discussions in the following areas)
 - identifying with a particular subjectivity or embodiment; feeling 'different', resistant to or 'outside' of socially expected gender/sex categories, with a need to transgress these in some way (whether temporary or permanent);
 - finding out information and accessing support - talking to/meeting other people, sharing 'stories', joining support groups/ networks;
 - telling others (the action of 'coming out')- acknowledging the many different social spheres in which any individual is engaged (e.g. family, friends, relationships, school/workplaces, sports/social/interest groups, etc.) This is a life-long activity which must be negotiated in order to be socially recognised/acknowledged in particular ways other than what is taken-for-granted;
 - accessing technologies (including medical technologies, gender crossing/passing/ resisting aids);
 - accessing legal recognition, documentation, and citizenship rights.
- Their experience of support - including the types of supports they used or accessed, how they found them, why they used particular supports, the value/usefulness of the supports, and also what wasn't available that would have been useful.

Community support and resources

New Zealand Aids Foundation

Offers sexual health and HIV information, advice and testing for those of all ages as well as counselling.

Contact Information

National website: www.nzaf.org.nz/

Auckland : Burnett Centre

35 Hargreaves St, College Hill, Ponsonby, Auckland

Phone: (09) 309 5560 **Fax:** (09) 302 2338

Email: contact.burnett@nzaf.org.nz

Wellington : Awhina Centre

Level 1, 187 Willis Street, Wellington

Phone: (04) 381 6640 **Fax:** (04) 381 6641

Email: contact.awhina@nzaf.org.nz

Hamilton : Te Puawaitanga o te Ora

11 Ohaupo Rd, P O Box 41, Hamilton

Phone: (07) 838 3557 **Fax:** (07) 838 3514

Email: contact.hamilton@nzaf.org.nz

Christchurch : NZAF South / Te Toka

269 Hereford St, PO Box 13-618, Christchurch

Phone: (03) 379 1953 **Fax:** (03) 365 2477

Email: contact.tetoka@nzaf.org.nz

◆ **Rainbow Youth**

Rainbow Youth is an Auckland-based organisation providing support, contact, information, advocacy and education for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Takataapui and Fa'afafine young people and their families/whanau.

Contact Information:

Website: <http://www.rainbowyouth.org.nz>

GenderQuest

One of Rainbow Youth's groups, GenderQuest is a social support group for youth questioning their gender identity or those who are not sure but like to be in a supportive environment that affirms them regardless of how they identify

◆ **Genderbridge**

Provides help and support to transgendered people, their family, partners and professional caregivers.

Contact Information:

Ph. 0800 TG HELP (0800 844 357)

Website: www.genderbridge.org

Email: info@genderbridge.org

◆ **Agender New Zealand**

Agender New Zealand provides support throughout New Zealand for the Transgendered Community.

Contact Information:

Website: <http://www.agender.org.nz/>

Phone: 0800 agender or 0800 2436337 or 027 457 5094

◆ **FTM Aotearoa**

Wellington based, providing 'as required' support and contact to those who are FTM or think they might be.

Contact Information:

Website: [Ftmaotearoa.tripod.com](http://ftmaotearoa.tripod.com)

Email: F2maotearoa@hotmail.com

Post: P.O. Box 19008, Courtney Place, Wellington

◆ **Out There**

Out There is a Joint National *Queer Youth Development Project between the New Zealand AIDS Foundation and Rainbow Youth. The aim of Out There is to enhance the wellbeing of Queer youth within Aotearoa, New Zealand. Their website offers up-to-date information about local initiatives, activities and information for queer and transgendered youth, as well as a range of New Zealand and international resources and recent publications relevant to queer youth and those supporting them.

Contact information

Website: <http://www.outthere.org.nz>

◆ **NZTransGuys**

New Zealand Transguys is an email discussion, support and contact group for people born or living in New Zealand, assigned 'female' or 'intersex' at birth, but who identify outside of that in a masculine way.

Contact Information:

Website: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/nztransguys>

◆ **New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC)**

Offers a wide range of support and advocacy services for those thinking about working in prostitution, those working within prostitution and those who have worked within prostitution in the past and their allies.

Contact Information:

Website: <http://www.nzpc.org.nz>

Email: info@nzpc.org.nz

UniQ

UniQ is a social and support group for queer and transgender past and present students and staff at local Universities.

Contact Information:

UniQ National – Website: <http://www.uniq.org.nz>

Local contacts:

UniQ Auckland	email: uniq.auckland@gmail.com
Out@AUT (Auckland)	website: www.aut.ac.nz/about/partners/out@aut/
UniQtec (Auckland)	email: uniqtec@gmail.com
ASKEW (Waikato University)	email: askew.waikato@gmail.com
Massey UniQ (Palmeston North)	email: uniq@musa.org.nz
UniQ Victoria (Wellington)	email: uniq@vuwsa.org.nz
UniQ Massey (Wellington)	email: uniq-masseywellington@hotmail.com
UniQ Canterbury:	email: uniq_canterbury@hotmail.com
UniQ Otago:	email: uniq@ousa.org.nz

◆ **Q-topia Inc.**

Christchurch's queer youth group, offering social support for youth in Christchurch and Canterbury, that is inclusive of both gender and sexual diversity. Q-topia hold regular social meetings supported by trained facilitators, and occasional workshops for participants.

Contact Information

Email: q_topia@hotmail.com

Phone: 021 175 3631

Post: P.O. Box. 17727, Sumner, Christchurch.

◆ **198 Youth Health Centre (Christchurch)**

Offers a full range of free health services to those aged 25 years and under, including counselling, GP, Registered Nurse, and advice from peer youth workers regarding a range of issues affecting youth including issues around gender and sexuality.

Contact Information

Post : 198 Hereford Street, Christchurch.

Phone: (03) 379 4800

Website: <http://canterbury.cyberplace.org.nz/community/198.html>