Finding Teresias: The Transgender and the Symbol

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction ................................................................. 4
How and Where
Ethnographic locations
Semi-structured interviews
The participants
Locations

Chapter 1: The Constructed Body ........................................ 10
Medical Protocols
Reflections on Sexual Reassignment Surgeries

Chapter 2: The Body as Subject ........................................... 18
Passing
Ethnographic Considerations on Passing
The Collective Body
The Symbolic Exchange

Chapter 3: The Located Body .............................................. 29
The Located Body
Ethnographies of Locations

Conclusion and Results .................................................... 49
Appendix 1
Abstract

I construct myself continually and I construct you, and you do the same. And the construction lasts as long as the material of our feelings doesn't crumble and as long as the cement of our will lasts. -Parandello

This research focuses on the transgender experience, as a combination of positive and negative factors toward successful gender transformations. Specifically, this paper explores various medical expectations for addressing gender dysphoria in contrast to the personal experience of gender transitioning. However, the choice of presenting as something, other than the gender assigned at birth or of sex is a multi-layered experience for the individual. The layering of the transgender experience is nuanced by the physical, personal and social expectations based on cultural constructions. However, this paper attempts to privilege the perspective of the transgender, as they identify themselves and define themselves.

The research became an exploration of symbolic representations of mainstream cultures and the personal experiences of the transgender. Specifically, in the research, one wanted to know the symbolism and meaning behind a combination of physical alterations.

Introduction

The research consisted of transsexuals both MTF and FTM, inter-sexed, gay, lesbian and the ‘straight’ community of the San Francisco Bay area. Some of the people were professional entertainers, prostitutes, transgender counselors, HIV counselors, legal representatives, ex-lovers and random gender-variant people. The who of my research would be better explained by the ethnographies; some individuals supersede simple labels and reductions to sexual re-assignment surgery.

The research was an exploratory and qualitative study concerned with representations for the transgender and surgical outcomes. I chose the exploratory form for the research because the literature failed to address the symbolic significance of sexual re-assignment surgery. I had hoped that this study would clarify the choice for certain surgical procedures and their attendant symbolism.
My interest in the transgender started when I, unwittingly, had an affair with just such a person. The understanding of a woman for me was, qualitatively, different than what was presented by Carrie. In retrospect, her surgical alteration was 99% perfect in its presentation, but the 1% imperfection had become an obsession with me. The romantic interlude quickly ended. The person was discovered to be a male to female/ trans-woman. This gave me, quite a shock and was the bases for extraordinary reflection. The physical attraction was no longer there; but, we were determined to remain friends. A lot of questions and impressions were unanswered for me. But, my experience of her was that of a woman, until I became more circumspective about her physical alterations. After my discovery, I had considered her sexual re-assigmnent surgery as deception on her part, and the gender as that not fitting the ‘proper’ body! I had rejected, absolutely, her representation for the breast, vagina and other feminized features.

But, what changed my mind about her was the discovery of surgical manipulations that over-determined her presentation of the female/feminine. Once when her original sex was recognized, I experienced her as a male. I was confused by her flawless competency of the feminine in contrast to her genetic composition. This was a moment of gender dysphoria for me. But, was this dysphoria based on the feeling that it was the ‘wrong’ gender in the ‘wrong’ body? Perhaps, my dysphoric moment arose from some unarticulated cognitive dissonance, not yet realized. It was the combination of the character and the physicality of the person that went undetected. This lapse, in my judgment, could not be accounted for. The deception on her part was forgiven and understandable. To this day, I look at the gender and the sex of a person with uncertainty.

However, I had generalized the site for dysphoria to include the public domain and as not, exclusively, experienced by the transgender. I wanted to find the relationship between gender dysphoria and cultural gender expectations. I had a notion that there would operate a kind of cognitive dissonance as a function of competing narrations. At this time, I had not formulated ideas about symbolic exchanges or symbolic representations for surgeries.
I had considered the fact that had lived in San Francisco for some time and was exposed to a continuum of gender identities and presentations. But, until my relationship with Carrie, my experience of gender was never disassociated from a biological base. Thus, I found the surgical alterations of Carrie as radical and artificial. It was, only, after some reflection that I interpreted her transition as conscientious and not a form of betrayal or deception. Her body and behavior served as a *trophe* for me, alluding to some inner aspect of her self.

It came to mind, that I was too focused on my emotions, perspective and confusion. Perhaps, my self reflections were too egocentric. One should, at least, take the point of view of Carrie. In, subsequent, conversations, I had become sympathetic to what she thought was the core of her being. As I pondered her response for a need to go through hormonal therapy and surgery, I wondered how much of the core was culturally derived or inculcated.

What did the surgical alterations had symbolized for her? The question was left unanswered; because before I could ask her, she had relocated for another job. I wanted to know, if she was discursive on the symbolism excised and placed on her body. Had she intended, to re-define womanhood, femininity or masculinity? Was she rebelling against societal norms or was it, simply, social experimentation. There was a need to excavate the compelling reasons for her radical decommissioning and sculpting of the body. Surgical alterations are expensive and sometimes irreversible; I assumed that she spent a considerable amount of time contemplating her decision to transition. She must have been aware of the risk for decreased sexual pleasure, tissue necrosis and infections of the neo-vagina –which is to list a few complications.

There were social consequences, as well. After Carrie's decision to transition, she had reported of conflicts with her children and ex-wife. Her children had disassociated from her, and were embarrassed to be seen with her. She was no longer invited to family functions or events. Her wife felt that she had failed as a wife and was guilty for some
overlooked, undefined flaw in her character. There were, also, risks of violence and brutality, if she were discovered to be a transgender. But, she was compelled to complete her sex reassignment, despite formidable social prohibitions.

I had speculated that her social problems continued to shape and inform her considerations for womanhood. Not all of her behavioral and visual cues had elicited positive responses. On the outset, my response to her was, mildly negative.

My response was based on cultural expectations that I learned since I was child. The idea of gender rigidity and its strict dimorphism along with sex based prohibitions and privileges have come under criticism. Mostly, the criticism emanates from feminist and gender variant social critique, who, instead, find a continuum of gender expressions for both sexes. Some individuals would like to see gender and gender associated categories, completely, eradicated and replaced with gender neutral categories. I remember having spoken to a female friend about my experience with Carrie. My friend stated that she knew of a married friend who had, “decided to become a woman.” The conversation continued; until at one point, she stated that she would, “not like him, if he would, surgically, alter himself.” She thought, it was enough that he remained a feminized male in appearance and affect, but not to the point of surgical intervention.

The social, cultural aspects of her engendering did shape and inform personal symbolic representations for womanhood. But one wonders, if Carrie’s transitioning as a female was a process of adaptation concomitant with an evolving societal tolerance for the sexually reassigned.

I had to adapt to her idea of a woman and the feminine, this adaptation was initiated by a need to tolerate and experience new things. I was motivated not to become this atrophied, atavistic cultural dinosaur and keep a youthful open mind. Besides, it was too exhausting, at the time, to laboriously justify and excuse her existence. It was not that she needed my highest approbations. I took the easy way out and concluded that, if she talks and walks like a female then she is. However, my acceptance was not complete. I could not imagine her as a female, who is romantically involved. Upon this sentiment, and
within the margins of my reluctance to consider her sexual, I decided to investigate the feminine transgender.

I had hoped for a language that would explore the different perspectives for gender performance and representation. I thought of the term: gender performance, even though in my subsequent readings, I found this term to be common currency. I would have thought gender performance, because it involved the: creative; improvisational and innovative. The performance of gender is mindful of shifting cultural contexts and the transgender as the choreographer.

Were gender transformations negotiated with society for acceptance and recognized as a human right. Perhaps, it was a, ‘will to engender’ within a larger social, cultural order as the body offered up for assimilation and legitimacy. The symbolic understanding of exchanging gender could be understood, as the relinquishing the rights and provisions of the previous held body.

My focus was to investigate how the social and cultural milieu of the transgender the quality of the symbol (surgical sexual reassignment). I had thought that the symbol would give structure to the embodiment and interpretation the feminine/masculine.

If one were to explore the symbol and the transgender, one wanted to privilege the insights of those researched. In this thesis, the perspectives of the transgender speaks for the theory which exams my question of the representational and body.

This paper intends explore how discursive the transgender is, with his/her symbolic representations collectively or individually. Mostly, one wanted know the importance of surgical alterations in facilitating the representations for gender identity.
The How and Where

a. Ethnographic Observation

In order to explore the question of symbolism and body, many known transgender social sites were visited. The strength, versatility, mutability of gender expressions would be observed at bars, cafes, supports groups and rallies, etc. The locations were a sample, of the many places, listed on the internet, newspapers and pamphlets. Most of the places that were found came from word of mouth. There were reports, of underground transgender hangouts, but these were sporadic events and not accessed during the course of the study. The sites for the study were decided on by the purpose and intent of the location matching that of the study.

b. Semi-structured interviews

Although the observations were revealing, there was still the question of the symbolic aspects of surgery. At the time, interviewing transgenders was thought appropriate. Several people were interviewed with mixed results. It was necessary to interview several the non-transgender to get a more complete view of my questions.

c. The Participants

Some of the participants were told my research project and purpose and were asked to be interviewed. They all agreed to the interview and some of them wanted their names changed. It was decided to change all names for the protection of everyone from, unintended, negative outcomes. The subject sample consisted of gay, lesbian, transgender and ‘straight’ people. Some people were, solely, observed at various locals.

d. Location

The locations of interviews and observations were best understood within individual observations and interviews. The where in the ethnography was considered to be, best revealed in a ethnography of locations, which is descriptive.
The Constructed Body

Throughout the literature, the medical perspectives on gender were based on the biophysical determinants. The biophysical model, had located gender within various morphological taxonomies and physiological processes of the male and female body.

Gender was not seen as, socially, constructed but as a constellation of behaviors, mannerisms and perceptions as a function of a biological prerogative. This model conceptualized sex as, mutually exclusive, sites for the masculine and feminine. This perspective of exclusivity, promoted a strict dimorphism for the sexes and gender. Hence the term *gender binaryism*, was a reflection of a strict categorization of the relationship between gender and sex.

One official source, which had *pathologized* gender, was the Standards of Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association (1998). These standards have developed into the, most, preferred protocol for care. They serve as a manual for healthcare professionals, when counseling and medically treating transsexuals. The Standards of Care considers any deviation from the *gender binary* construct as *gender dysphoria*; classified under the DSM-IV, as a gender disorder.

Ekins (2006), stated that, “Medicine has provided us with a language through which the activities of such men (transgender) are apprehended as pathologies which can be diagnosed, treated and, perhaps ultimately prevented.”

Carroll (2002:131), further, exemplifies the reification of these pathologies based on a binary construction, stating: “These standards dictated that hormonal and surgical candidates receive counseling and obtain official letters of recommendation by qualified mental health professionals. Those interested in surgical reassignment were also
mandated to live as their desired gender for approximately 1 year (called "the real life experience") prior to surgery."

Excluded from medical considerations, were the individual/social variations for gender expression, which may constitute a continuum or combination of gender domains. A continuum of gender domains may include: bisexuality; ambivalent sexual orientation; simultaneous, heterogeneous attributions and performance of the feminine/masculine.

Ekins (2006) states: "However, in the mid 1990's, it appears that more people are experiencing transgendering in new ways and are devising new forms of identity. In contrast to the transsexual and transvestite identities, what is increasingly seen as the 'transgender identity' breaks down the gender dichotomy by mixing and matching its characteristics in various combinations. It is also a more 'open' identity insofar as transgenderists may be perceived as neither men nor women."

"Many now seek to "define themselves rather than asking or allowing themselves to be defined by helping professionals, and thereby do as little or as much as they wish to their bodies. For example in 1993, at the Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, the International Bill of Gender Rights had specifically included the right to, freedom from psychiatric diagnosis and treatment. It reflected the desire, by many, not to have to conform to a prescribed regimen dictated by the medical and psychiatric establishment" (Ekins 2006).

Pre-SRS requirements may have had a, profound, deleterious effect on how the personal experience of the transgender is formed. There were indications, that the presentation of gender, visibly, incongruent with sex may be a source of internal conflict. The incongruence may have caused a psychic dissonance within the transitioning candidate. The source of the internal psychic conflict precipitates from the exclusivity of gender borders. If the transgender is not intellectually invested in the biomedical perspective, then the requirement to perform as the opposite sex is experienced as transgression of these borders. The American Educational Gender Information Services (AEGIS), an advocacy organization, states that: "...since 1991, it has condemned the
practice of requiring individuals to live as their gender before surgical intervention, citing this practice as disruptive and dangerous for clients, making them vulnerable to hate crimes and social ostracism” (Carroll 2006:3).

**Medical Protocols**

Within the introductory pages of the Standards of Care (1998:2) are pre-sexual reassignment surgical requirements for various surgeries and below are the medical protocols for the transsexual:

“One Letter if Required for Instituting Hormone Therapy, or for Breast Surgery:
One letter from a mental health professional, including the above seven points, written to the physician who will be responsible for the patient’s medical treatment, is sufficient for instituting hormone therapy or for a referral for breast surgery (e.g., mastectomy, chest reconstruction, or augmentation mammoplasty).

Two Letters are Generally Required for Genital Surgery: Genital surgery for biologic males may include orchiectomy, penectomy, clitoroplasty, labiaplasty or creation of a neovagina; for biologic females it may include hysterectomy, salpingo-oophorectomy, vaginectomy, metoidioplasty, scrotoplasty, urethroplasty, placement of testicular to prosthesis, or creation of a neophallus.”

Listed below are some considerations for sexual reassignment surgery (Wikipedia, 2006).

**Male to Female (MTF):**

1. Facial feminization

2. Rhinoplasty / seiptoplasty: the re-shaping of the nose.
3. Facial hair removal.

4. Maxillary surgery- chin and jaw bone sculpturing

5. Feminizing brow lift.

6. Forehead height and temporal re-sculpturing

7. Tracheal shave: reduction of the adams apple


10. Body Re-definition: procedures performed with ultra sound liposuction

11. Inverting the penis: The surrounding erectile connective tissue, nerves and vascular system is removed and inverted to form a cavity: the flap is inserted into the pelvic cavity. The glans of the penis, is used to fashion a clitoris, the urethra is shortened to be connected with the base of the penile inversion. There are non-surgical techniques to penile inversion. This involves gripping the base of the penis and inverting it towards the pelvic cavity, thereby the inversion functions to create a pelvic cavity. In the same process, the scrotum can be inverted with the testicles in retraction. This procedure can only be done with a flaccid penis: therefore, stimulation of the penis should be avoided. This must be done manually, and comes out when tension is released. One should note, that this procedure may cause pain from vascular engorgement secondary to sexual excitation. The less painful alternate is the tucking of the penis and scrotum between the legs.

12. Colovaginoplasty:

A colovaginoplasty is the construction of a vagina, which is created by using a section of the sigmoid colon for a vaginal lining. Colovaginoplasty is performed after the surgically manufactured penile inversion. This procedure is contraindicated because of
the high susceptibility of the vaginal lining to E. coli infection and various other pathogens.

13. Hormonal therapy: anti-androgen hormones and estrogen

Female to Male (FTM):

1. Facial masculinization: Chin and cheek augmentation. Note that the testosterone derivative adds bone mass to the female face. Hormone therapy, also, facilitates the receding of the hairline and facial hair; little surgical intervention is needed. Also, the voice becomes masculine.

2. Mastectomy: breast reduction or removal

3. Hysterectomy and bilateral salpingo, oophorectomy: the removal of female reproductive organs. Phalloplasty: the construction of a penis and its functioning. The urethra is extended, by the addition of the saphenous vein (the vein that extends along the shin). The vein is surgically added to end or the base of the constructed penis. The labia are combined to form the scrotum; afterwards, prosthetic testicles are inserted. An erectile prosthesis consisting of a pneumatic system can be a part of the phalloplasty: replacing the erectile tissue; enabling sexual penetration.

A skin graft is an essential part of phalloplasty. The graft would come from the donor site of a arm or leg. Specifically, the skin graft comes from the lateral side of the forearm or the upper arm or the leg. This tissue is removed from its original place and rolled to form the penile shaft and connected to the appropriate site for a penis. The inner labia form the transmen. The clitoris can be stimulated by placing it at the base of the penis. Stimulation would present with the pressure of the erectile penis or deep manual manipulation. Large nerves from the graft are connected to the clitoral nerves, to facilitate sexual and protective functions.
Reflections on Sexual Reassignment Surgeries:

Jason, a transman, grew up rejecting her gender assignment, "When I was 5 yrs old, this was known as the window incident. So when I was 5 yrs old, I threw all my dresses out the window and screamed no more dresses through out the neighborhood. The last time, I wore a dress, ever, was at a wedding. I took off my lavender dress and threw it on the ground and then stood in my underwear. Lucky my parents were hippies, they were not like, into forming me. Jason goes on to state, "everything about my physical self, contribute totally to my well being. I can look in the mirror and see what I feel. I certain matching of reality and self image has contributed to a well being that I had never experienced. I feel whole. I am so much more relaxed as a person. I could give a shit what people think....I have become so out going and friendly. I really made the right decision. My self confidence and self worth went from off the chart low to off the chart high. Every aspect of my life has shown improvement....jobs, lovers, health (I lost 150lbs), friends, which reflected some of the things, I missed. My mind and my body have become friends not enemies....I was starting to dabble in hard drugs right before I went for help....I really think I might not be alive right now if I had not mustered the courage to deal head on with my gender issues."

Outside the psychological risk, there are also concerns about the outcomes of the sexual reassignment surgeries. These concerns were expressed by the various people that I have interviewed:

Paula (a lesbian) had thought the reassignment surgeries as a form of body mutilation, "You know sometimes I am concerned about my physical flaws and physical details that I do not like. In general, not all things are gender based. Sometimes I think my feet are too big. Do you know what I mean? If the transgender has love for the body, than they would not consider mutilating themselves. If you are able to love yourself, then you would not submit your body to such trauma. To scar your body to such lengths is Wow!"
Isabella (Latina transwoman), speaking about her breast implants stated, “I wanted the operation for such a long time. The operation was fine. I heard of a horror story, where the boobs exploded on an airplane. This is an example of when your body doesn’t want the implants, it rejects it somehow. When your body does not want the implants there can be some other consequences. People sometimes go blind for a period of time because they do not want to see this shit on their bodies … until the implants on their bodies are healed. Today I went to see my doctor this was my last appointment and I will see him in two more months. Generally having the implants was a scary experience.”

Jason (a Euro-American transman).
“I am on hormone treatments and that made me from being a boy into a man. I believe stem cells will address some of the issues of transgender. You know body parts, you just paste them on. We had a joke that we were going to make a transgender home kit for the HMOs (health management organizations). No! They won’t even make transplants; they should have a body part exchange program.”

Allison (a Asian American transman and transgender counselor).
a) “For her breast meant sensitivity: a direct link to an explosive orgasmic feeling in the pelvis. Her breast are growing, even as I interviewed her. She stated that her mother will give her a good indication on her future breast size. Perhaps, she would have a cup size smaller but, eventually, massive breast. She would like to be able to breast feed her future children. She is certain, she will be able to lactate within the course of the hormonal treatment.”

b) “She states that some do not option for the penile inversion because the Doctor could have a bad day combined with medical complications. These may present as problems, rendering the neo-vagina/phallus incapable of sexual stimulation. She fears of not being able to have an orgasm.”

Castro (a San Francisco Street Rally Speaker).
a) “I want to stop diagnosis, discrimination of transpeople, intersexed people.
People who use drugs and mentally ill people can not get medical treatment that they deserve, because of the ignorance and prejudice of doctors. Instead, of finding genetic markers for homosexuality or transsexuality or intersexuality, in order to cure or eliminate us. I want technology that seeks to makes us happier, healthier and more ourselves.

A Gay Pride Podium Speaker “...these doctors told me that I had 47 XY sex chromosomes and no sperm. They said that I had 10% of which was considered normal sperm production in my undescended gonads. I was referred to as an endocrine disorder, that needed to be cured; that I was a mutation and a eunuch. My gender identity was never discussed and I was put on massive doses of testosterone, without being told what would happen. My only complaint was a low sex drive. I was not offered counseling or emotional support, and was told that I would have take testosterone injections for the rest of my life. They offered breast reduction surgery and testicular implants, but I declined. I went thru an unanticipated puberty in my thirties and dealt with my emerging body changes alone.”

“I did know, I was intersexed until I discover the intersex society of north America, in 1995. I am a proud intersexed, intergendered individual... and don’t recommend medical sex related interventions on anyone without their informed consent {applause}. I think its time to emphasize our humanity over any of our attributes. I am a person first, not a disorder. For me, my sex chromosomal variation effects my sense of gender. But, being manipulated into taking testosterone violated my body integrity.”
The Body as Subject

Passing

*Passing* denotes: the desire to function, behave and appear as the opposite sex. However, the passing body is nuanced. The transgender becomes the body not as representational of a third gender category, but as a site for a covert identity; where the transsexual or transvestite seek to pass in public (Ekins 2006). This concealment of biological origins may signify a mixture of an agreement on societal gender based expectations, by the transgender. It might, also, reflect the coercion of the transgender to comply. Milliken (2006:49) states that the medical establishment had, “…viewed a successful transsexual candidate, as one who avoided other transsexuals and transsexual lobbying and adjusted to his/her reassignment as a passing and participating member of the heterosexual community.” Some of those, who had wished to pass, may have, heavily, invested in the dimorphism of gender.

Much of it may have to do with body image. Scheper-Hughes (1998:356) imagines the body as constituted of, “collective and idiosyncratic representations that the individual entertains about the body in relationship to environment, including internal and external perceptions, memories, affects, cognitions, and cognitions and actions.”

The symbolism of the transformed body would not reflect, only, specific body parts, but of clothing, manner and physical presentations, solely, within a binary construct.

Milliken (1997:50), in quoting Hausman, states that: “Passing means a denial of mixture. One and the same of passing is effacement of the prior gender role or construction of a plausible history, considering most transsexuals choose reassignment in the third or fourth decade of their life. This erases a considerable portion of their personal history. In this process, both the transsexual and medical/ psychological are complicit, foreclosing a possibility of a life grounded in *intertextual* possibilities of the transgender body.”
The intertextuality presupposes interpretations and experiences for behaviors, dress and manner. The body serves as a text, but there is not one reading for body and gender. The intertextualities promotes different and varying discursive perspectives for visualizing and experiencing the body/gender. Some texts for the body are involved in pathologies. For example, the medical establishment and some aspects of society read the transgender as a person afflicted with pathological cultural incompetence.

To avoid the consequences of being misread as transsexual, passing, involves the active, amnesia of the pre-transformative past, the past become creations of fictitious histories and a concealment of the transformation (Ramet, 1996:2).

A speaker of a transgender rally had stated, “Even though there is no scientific basis for generalizing that LGBT people are diseased, medical people have practiced for decades to transform these people into social norms of the heterosexual gender binary. They use, what ever, techniques that are normal or fashionable. Medical practice has aimed to treat people for diseases that do not exist, thereby violating the Hippocratic oath and abusing the rights of a diverse people. If we survive long enough through our physical and emotional traumas to become intersexed/ transgendered adults, shame and secrecy are still the name of the game. Binary sex terms continue to reinforce the idea, that there are only two sexes. But for the intersexed, what does same or opposite mean? Peter and I appear to be the same sex and gender, but that is an assumption. What defines us as women female and male? Intesexed people are discriminated against because there is no legal sex classification.”

Passing as woman or man is now considered in LBGT community as a sign of ignorance or passivity. It behooves the transsexual or transvestite to educate/ instruct the community about the possibility of diverging gender criterion, which criticizes mainstream gender cultural constructs.
Ethnographical Reflections on Passing

We will begin from an assumption of the body as simultaneously a physical and symbolic artifact, as both naturally and culturally produced, and securely anchored in a particular historical moment.

-Nancy Scheper-Hughes

Bart (an Afro-American firefighter):

“We have two (transmen) in our department, who are firefighters that decided to become men. They were, initially, lesbian lovers. Everyone in the department knew that they were lesbian and no one seemed to mind. Then one of them decided to have surgery to become a man and she had a breast reduction. I was there, when she started the transition to a man. Afterwards, she stated that it was a big mistake. She stated, that she did not need to do this, it was not necessary to bother with taking the hormones and all that is involved to become a male. She thought that becoming a male would give her what she needed. This was not true, she could have continued to remain in the female body and still be butch…”

Isabella (a recent Mexican-American naturalized citizen):

“I was in a three and half year relationship, before I decided to partition for SRS. My partner was gay and attracted to males. I was a very […] guy, but I was unhappy. It was a bunch of things. I decided to… well, this was my life partner. There were a bunch of things to take into consideration. It was beyond that. I was very attracted to him. But he can not see a man any more! He knew of all the things I wanted done on me and he could not…! We knew it was a matter of time. There was no room for compromise. If we compromise that would be only good for one or two months.”

Isabella goes on to add, an instance of not being able to pass, “I am happy. But, there are a lot of Charlie chasers (transgenderphiles), who look at you sexually and are not interested in who you are.”
Jason, (European-American transman):

a) “I never had a single regret in becoming a man. The thing about T (transexuality), that is permanent is the voice. But, that’s no reason to be in a tizzy (upset). There is weight redistribution and no, more, ass. I never had one, anyhow.”

b) “I jive (get along) better with straight women, they don’t treat me as a transgender like guys. They don’t know at work, even though I have no adams apple It is the training that women have, culturally.”

c) “Lesbians try to put you into a lesbian category. Some lesbians say that there were and are great lesbians. Why can’t you just be butch? I think they are confused. Don’t you not think, that a lot of these butches, that are worshipped, would have been on it. This is very new history being made. Gertrude Stein, the classic butch, would have taken testosterone, if she was alive today.”

T- Rally Speaker (transwoman):

“I am sure, in this audience those of you who know transwomen, if you have to say anything: its [expletive] fierce;[expletive] standing up to everybody else being stubborn and relentless (applause)...OK! Secondly, the media hypersexualizes us, by constantly depicting transwomen as being sex workers and sexual deceivers. And insisting, that we transition for primarily sexual reasons,for example to prey on ordinary straight men or to fulfill some kind of bizarre sex fantasy.

This sexualization of our motives for transitioning, not only belittles our sexual identity, but belittles women. They believe that women have no other worth, than to be sexualized. Thirdly, the media objectifies us by sensationalizing sexual re-assignment surgery and by obsessing over our man made vaginas, with out any of the discretion reserved for non transsexual genitals. And those of us that did not have surgery are constantly reduced to our body parts, whether they be by the makers of tranny porn. Who over emphasize our penises, thus we become chicks with dicks. Consider everyday people, who have been so brainwashed by phallocentrism that they believe the mere
presence of a penis can trump the femaleness, our identities, our personalities and the rest of our bodies."

**Allison** (Phillipino Transgender counselor):

a) "Allison speaks about heterosexual women which come into the clinic after their partners want to transition. The San Francisco Transgender Association provides counseling for the significant others. Heterosexual partners are concerned that they will appear as gay couples in public."

b) "She considers the sexual aspects of those having a transpartner, who are some what afraid of the newly acquired genitalia of their partners. She states that not all transpeople want to undergo a full feminization or masculization. There may be some intersexuality or in betweeness of the partner. However, the fact that people seek counseling makes obvious a strong emotional attachment between partners."

**Tisha** (African American HIV Counselor):

a) "What this church does is that it does not point a finger at people because their different. It does not condemn people because their different, it lends to support people. You can come here and be safe, you can come here and not be laughed at, you come here and not be ridiculed, this a place where you can come and get some nurturing. When you are on the streets, you don’t get nurturing. And being a victim of violence, I had my throat slashed. This morning I was on the bus with clients (transgender) from another program. There were a group of people, that called us fags and talked about wanting to jump( beat) on us and wanting to cut( stab) us. That was just this morning. Because they were black, is what bothers me about the African American community. They do awful things to transgender and some times I wonder: do you forget where you (African Americans) came from. One statement was made by my mother, “fags that come out of the closet should stay in the closet.” I said that is the same thing the white man would mean, when he would say, “niggers should stay in their chains.”"
**Toby** (African American ex-lover of a Transman):

a) “I put on very feminine apparel and make up. You would think that I was married and had 3 kids. So I am safe. If there is any vestige of gay hating or violence it is going to zero in on the butch lesbian. If she is dressed like a dude, not wear earrings or lipstick, then anything can happen. Women have been murdered on the streets. I know of a woman that was brutally beaten on the streets, at Mission and 24th, because she walked into some taqueria with her femmy (feminine) girlfriend. Some of the dudes(men) on the street did not like it, and commenced to beat the [expletive] out of her -particularly the butch one. Maybe it was because one the men, had a woman who left for another woman and he felt confused or threaten.”

b) “Well, just because this is queer central for the entire world. Generally speaking, people who fall in the LGBT will have a ok time, here. Except for parts of the mission, transgenders would be accepted, such as the Castro, the height, Noe valley. In these places, there are large numbers of white middle class people, who would not try to beat your ass. But the suburbs are a, whole, different thing, where you do not get beat down.”

c) “I think they need collectives in San Francisco. In New York, they have support groups. For instance her family had struggled with her being a lesbian, now they struggle with her transition into a man. This had caused the family to go into shock. Her older sisters are looking at her with a blank stare. The younger sister, just does not accept gender transformation and but still treats her as a sister. The mother is going back and forth, trying to figure a way to include her in the family. The immediate family was not supportive. They did not get a warning. They did not accept her as lesbian in the beginning, so why would they accept her now. Her aunt did invite her and was cordial to her.”

**Eve** (owner of a transgender transformation business):

“I try not to be cookie cutter and tailor the makeup to individuals. Basically, everyone has got the idea what a woman or man looks like. People are concerned with looking
passable. I get calls out the blue, from potential clients asking me to make them passable; they want to look causal and normal on the streets. It is sort of like the P.T. Barnum. You can fool some of the people some of the time but not all the time. I try to go for 80-100% for making people look passable. The 100% will never happen all the time for every body... there is more to passing then simply make over. There is also body language in consideration such as the voice, and behavior, the style of speaking.”

**The Collective Body**

The social aspects of the transsexual body may be a process of adaptation/assimilation for the individual. Bolin (1996:24) states, “Gender identity incorporates the private experience of personal identity or self concept, while social identity refers to the socio-cultural recognition or categorization of gendered identities. It includes status or position in society as a gender that is, as a woman, man, girl or boy, and role concomitants such as appearance, demeanor, and behavior. In Western culture, this includes social concepts of femininity and masculinity. Gender identity and social identity may or may not converge in the individual’s life or in a particular interaction.”

Moreover, Carroll (2002:131) had postulated that in the term *transgender* emanated from a desire to signify something other than transvestism. Carroll states that, “The term transgender was coined in the late 1980s by men who did not find the label transvestite adequate enough to describe their desire to live as women. Alterately, the term transsexual was deemed inappropriate because many nontraditionally gender-identified persons did not necessarily want to reconfigure their bodies surgically and hormonally and did not share the desire to "pass," or to fit into normative gender categories of male and female. Included in the full spectrum of people with nontraditional gender identities are pre- and postoperative transsexuals,
cross-dressers or transvestites, intersex persons, and those who are disinterested in passing. Among the many terms used interchangeably to describe this community are transgendered persons, gender-variant persons, and trans persons. For consistency in this article, we use transgendered persons and its variations. The emergent transgender consciousness and political activism emanating from this community have important implications for the field of counseling. Treatment issues no longer center on assisting "gender dysphoric" persons in their adjustment to their new gender but include the possibility of affirming a unique transgender identity. In this paradigm shift, the focus is not on transforming transgendered clients but rather transforming the cultural context in which they live.”

Kessler (2000:29) would, again, argue that appearances, characteristics are socially derivative, and that female and male body parts are, also, susceptible to this derivation. Therefore, gender attribution should not have a direct link to genitalia. The spectrum of gender identity which seeks to transform the cultural and political landscape, introduces the concept of gender fluidity, and an advocacy for transgender rights.

Lisker (1969), reports on one political landscape, in reflection of the Stonewall Riots, “According to reports, the Stonewall Inn, a two-story structure with a sand painted brick and opaque glass facade, was a mecca for the homosexual element in the village who wanted nothing but a private little place where they could congregate, drink, dance and do whatever little girls do when they get together.” The Stonewall riots evolved after the police raided and brutalized homosexuals, who frequented the Stonewall bar. The Stonewall riots became a watershed for the LGBT to demand equal rights and societal recognition.

However, the social unrest and protest of the LGBT communities across America, also gave rise to a cultural critique of gender domains and their limitations. The gender perspectives of LGBT community had evolved during this period of social unrest. Formed were associations that sprung up to support LGBT issues and provided a residence for collective identities. Gould (2002:3), an ACT UP activist, questions, “How
do you confront a society that you want to be part of it but you simultaneously reject it? How do you make demands of state and society when you simultaneously feel proud and ashamed of your homosexual identity and practices?” But, he goes on to answer the question with a focus on identity, outside that of gender and within a common LGBT purpose.

Gould (2006:1) had postulated that, “Factors like a collective identity or an activist community help to sustain movements only because of the strong emotions that imbue and that are evoked by that collective identity or activist community.”

The Symbolic Exchange

I had visualized surgical procedures as representative of physical symbolic exchanges: a de-commissioning of previous, congenitally acquired, structures of the body and functionality of the sex organs. Not, only the body parts were de-commissioned, but also were the gender assigned to them. The corollary would be the acquisition of certain body parts for the performance of a new gender. I had, originally, considered a view of gender collective representations (the male and female, the feminine and masculine) as structural and discursive of homogeneous symbolic connotations. The collective representations for engendering, was thought to function as a social contract. And, in turn, this charter would be the negotiated, fought over and ignored by those who sought to supersede it. The trajectory of this research, had considered, that (Windschuttle, 2002) culture is experienced as shared, public, collective, and inhabited. The symbolic exchange, as I had envisioned, was the replacement of one cultural category/artifact for another.

What I had found in the literature, were many references to the psychological and medical aspects of transitioning to a FTM/MTF. A paucity of literature, had expounded on the symbolism of body in relation to masculine or feminine. Within medical discourse, the symbolic content of the body was, mostly, mindful of the figurative composition. It, also, became clear, that none
of the transgenders mentioned publicly or privately the symbolic anatomical, attributions for the male or female.

This glaring omission, made me reflect on the data collected. It was found, that intuition informed cultural categories for gender. These intuitions were inaccessible, irrational and unconscious of the true motivations for transgendering. These intuitions could only inform us, truthfully, to the emotional disposition of the individual. Some inarticulate factors of intuition may consist, largely, of perceptions of body image. Schep-Hughes (1998:356) imagines the body as consisting of, “collective and idiosyncratic representations that the individual entertains about the body in relationship to environment, including internal and external perceptions, memories, affects, cognitions, and cognitions and actions.”

The formation, cultivation and strength of gender identities are made up of individual histories and perceptions along with cultural factors. The decisions made for gender identity and performance are, both products of an existential agency and cultural prescriptions. But, the agency of the transgender may be enhanced or deterred depending on the social context. However, it was with the social context, the ethnographical evidence was unsustainable for the specific symbolism of various body parts.

The research required the examination of the culture of exchange, itself, the subject as manufactured. Milliken (2006: 49) states that through technological development, the transgender is able to ‘engineer one’s self as subject’. She states that, “In this respect, gender is merely a cover-up, working to consolidate a sense of cohesiveness for a subjectivity constantly under the threat of destruction or erasure.” In other words, while a transsexual might become an effective representative of the other sex, an opposition between physical and sexual signifiers remains as a reminder of his/her crossing over.” The culture of exchange, still, incorporated symbolic inferences, but the texture of the symbolism changed. The symbolism reserved for the body, became the social symbolic representations of the body. The body alone with its attendant symbolism meant little compared to the spectacle of the body within the bar, with friends or collective organizations.
The agency became hermeneutical for the transgender, who deconstructs gender binaryism and replaces it with uncharted gender domains. But, the social consequences would have to be weighed with the personal satisfaction for engendering a chosen sex. Much of the empowerment for gender variant choice comes from the support of collective groups, social functions and personal courage.

Again Milliken (2006:49) is discursive about empowerment: “Along side the rise of the gay and lesbian movement, a growing number of cross-dressers and transsexuals began to turn to a more public political arena in an attempt to improve conditions for themselves and their communities. Since the late sixties, however, transgender activism has begun to develop around such issues as existing laws that forbade female impersonation (policies that made it difficult for transsexuals to obtain identification papers and change existing records so they could conform to their gender of preference), as well as lobbying for greater accessibility to sex reassignment, educating the general public about transvestism and transsexuality, and doing outreach so that people troubled by gender dysphoria could more easily locate resources they needed to cope with their problem” (Milliken, 2006:49).

The hermeneutics of the transgender, often, shifted from instances of the unencumbered self to the, truncated, reformulation of one’s person coerced by societal demands. Gender performance, was observed to be the, constant, re-construction of the subject. The transgender, at this point, may not be complete in his/her knowledge of safe, mainstream, narrations for gender. Often these sanctioned narrations for gender are reified, negatively, when an intolerant public perceives that the transgender symbolizes perversion or anti-social sentiments.

The manufacture of the subject, the psyche and its discontents, the interstitial alterations, the individual and social consummation of the body are, synergistically, constructing the symbol. The symbol of the body, in turn, informs the affect and fluidity of the performance of the transgender. Sometimes the body transcends cultural, social inscriptions and is expressed existentially. At point, the body is no longer tense with conflicting personal experiences and an incomplete knowledge of its social acceptance.
The Located Body

According to Scheper-Hughes (1998:347), my exploration should, "... begin from an assumption of the body as being, simultaneously, a physical and symbolic artifact as well as culturally and naturally produced, and securely anchored in a particular historical moment."

It would be disingenuous to reduce a person's gender to, mere, representational body parts. The focus on the physicality of the transgender without referring to loci, would filter against the architectonic which constitutes a choice to engender. The paradigm should consist of conscious deliberations, location and architectonic representations for constructing the gestalt of engendering.

Conboy, (1993: 236) discourages this paradigmatic reductionism in her observation of the mestiza (mixed race) within Latin America, "This assembly is not one where severed or separated pieces merely come together. Nor is it a balancing of opposing powers. In attempting to work out a synthesis, the self has added a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts. That third element is a new consciousness--a mestiza consciousness--and though it is a source of intense pain, its energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm."

The third element, transcends cultural categories, and privileges the deliberations of the transgender. Conboy (1993:236) offers up useful insights for the eradication of an univocal, coherent' cultural competency for the individual. The transgender must negotiate dualities or multiplicities of identities, cultures and insights.

But, one might consider a fourth element that would function as symbolism for a location. The representations of a public space would consider history, function and form.
The transgender locations, that I have visited, formed a, very basic, charter, cueing for patron civility. Transgender locales were known to be places, where the patronage is respected. I believe because of this sentiment, I never witnessed anti-social behavior within transgender social gatherings. Perhaps, for this reason the transgender locations are not prescriptive for the stylization of gender performance or presentation.

The creative deliberations of the gender-variant, re-invent, deconstruct and bend gender paradigms or its culturally related categories. The creative conscious manipulation of the body with the public space explodes the ‘mainstream’ paradigms for gender. This demolition, eradicates sanctioned social interactions and encourages the invention of self, others and public space.

The form and function of the gender/ non gender, are, also, the form and function for location. The locations can be viewed as the extension of the body, and the body as an artifact of location. In point, the gender, body and location inter-constitute dynamic factors for shaping, influencing gender presentation.

For example, a LGBT or restaurant may present as: campy or ultra chic; with LBGT posters; with a dance or performance space; with security guards; with LBGT bartenders/ wait staff; located in a well known LBGT community; with a socially and politically active history; with unisex bathrooms; offering free condoms for safe sex, a haven for the illuminati; a location to meet romantic partners; a place for support and validation for lifestyle choice; a place to premiere wardrobe and behavior;

The bars, rallies, social groups and public places cue the body, according to charter; and the transgender body, in its idiosyncratic fashion, informs and historicizes the location.

The location and the patrons coalesce into one symbolic form, inseparable, as the historic, collective moment. The symbol, at transgender places, reflects the composition of the collective and its disassociation from the dimorphism of gender. By embracing gender variance, there is a repudiation of the ‘mainstream’ intent and usage of this public space. Locations were not just architectonic in scope, but transformative and emotive.
The location, itself, “is a language that is expressive because it is so inextricably connected to what it prompts the [transgenders] to do with their bodies… the [transgenders] engage a whole complex of gestures, signs, postures, and sonorities” (Thornton 1997:98). The experiences of these sites are not restricted to pedagogical, pedantic interpellations for: the state of the body; the validation of the gender. But, rather it can serve as a womb, a fictive sympathetic family or an accessory for the adorned body. Sometimes, the place or building may take on a more somber characteristic of a nurturing, embracing hallowed ground. Thus the body becomes anew and the gender reformed by the gestalt of physical structures, collective sharing and personal experience.

The power to shape and express the body has not always been under the conscious agency of the transgender. However, there were testimonies of radical departures from old friends, family and address, in order, to facilitate a personal revision of life history. Thus, not unlike the body, there was the commissioning and decommissioning of locations

The Ethnography of Locations

San Francisco host many transbars, and some of them serve as venues for female impersonation. Many of the transbars are underground. These underground bars allow for confidentiality and safety from the outside world. One reason for the confidentiality is not to be seen by a relative or co-worker, and be revealed as transgender.

Some well known and public T-bars (transbars) are: Este Noche’s; Marlena’s; Aunt Charlie’s Lounge; Diva’s; Rendez-Vous and TrannyShack. At these venues, a transgender may find a supportive and celebratory environment. The transbars, also function for the transgender to learn, from others, about transitioning and gender presentation. Often, one would over hear conversations about wardrobe, makeup and love affairs. One may think, at first, these over heard conversations are frivolous; but, a more astute listening would reveal practical advice for gender transitioning.
Within San Francisco, female impersonations are performed, mostly, by the LGBT community. The first public *T-bar* was Finochios, it had been open for 63 years then closed in 1999. Suzanne Stryker (2006) had reported, “The club's history actually began back in the roaring ’20s, when founder Joe Finocchio opened up a *speakeasy* on Stockton Street, on the edge of the seedy Tenderloin District.

Finochio’s was, initially, an *underground* bar featuring female impersonations since its inception. Stryker (2006) states that “The bar went above ground with the repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and moved to the trendy North Beach nightclub district in 1936. Most gay men and lesbians today don’t think of professional female impersonator clubs as being particularly queer, but in the days before gay liberation they provided valuable semi-public social spaces for sexual minorities to congregate.” Stryker (2006), gives us an impression of the bar, “At one point, Eve Finocchio motioned for me to come to her. "Here, honey, why don’t you take this, too," she said, handing me an exquisite ermine stole. "I once gave it to a *queen* who worked here, but he doesn’t need it now. He’s a Catholic priest. Anyway, I might as well donate it to history -- you just can’t get away with wearing fur these days.”

My impressions of Finochio’s, was of a location that ensured safety and collegiality for LGBT culture, without police harassment and the danger of *gaybashing*. As soon one enters a transbar, one would see many partners coupled up as heterosexuals. Some of the patrons are gay and are interspersed with solitary gender variant people. One would observe the unwanted caresses and unspeakable invitations from the patronage, but for the most part, people were respectful of body and space.

These performances shatter the certainty of the audience, as for the sex of the individual performer, though the drag show is not made up, exclusively, of males. The performances were experience to explode and denaturalize gender domains. There were
moments, when biology and gender no longer converge, where biology was rendered irrelevant.

Female impersonation within San Francisco, were known to be safe outlets for gender expression. The *closed* gay or transgender person could be given an opportunity to experiment with gender within a non-judgmental environment. These venues have embraced a kind proactive gender culture, which have decisive political roots in the San Francisco LGBT social activism. These clubs are proactive, because they have displaced the rigid and invariant practice of American mainstream gender roles, and replaced them with imaginative and creative ways to engender.

Yorburg (1994:2), states that *gender culture* arises out of a set of forms for individual and collective behavior. She goes on to state that societies inform, generate and enforce expectations for gender related presentation and behavior.

One club that generates these gender based creativity is called *TrannyShack*. TrannyShack was conceived, years ago, to memorialize the ex-lover of Helinka, who had died of aids. According to promoter, D'arcy Dollinger (2006), the club was, “Conceived by drag queen Heklina a decade ago as a way to honor friends lost to AIDS, Trannyshack has become an institution for its city and a fertile testing ground of creativity where performers combat tired old ideas of *drag* with outrageous acts of art…”

This San Francisco (S.F.) club is located on South of Market. Usually, the venue serves as a *mixed* club, during most of the week and is called the Stud; but, on Tuesday nights it becomes crowded with intersexed, straight, lesbian, gay and transgender patrons. There one could experience the transformation of the ordinary into the full regalia and performance of the transgender/transvestite. The audience would, also, reflect in
wardrobe, surgery and affect in the same manner as the performers. Thus, gender bending was as prevalent in the audience as is on stage.

This night, was packed with a cross-cultural representation of straight, bisexuals, gays and with, some, republicans thrown into a space meant for a 100 people. Approximately, 400 hundred people were corralled and pressing as, one amorphous, throng toward the stage. The air was rarified and electric in anticipation of the show. This anticipation had transformed into a frenzy of cat calls as the performance was about to begin. Helinka opened the ceremony. For those who were vertically challenged, graciously, live-feed video screens were placed about strategically. The show began with local announcements concerning other upcoming shows and LGBT activist events.

The stage was raised and located just left the bar, and as in a theatrical production: there were lighting, microphones and props and wardrobes. As I scrutinized the crowd, I had noticed a collective euphoria for the events that were about to transpire.

No one seemed, the least, concerned about being seen or caught by inconvenience at this club. Heterosexual couples, often, exchanged roles, dressing in clothing and adopting the manner of the opposite sex. The show begins with what appears to be mature and more reflective Madonna, older and wiser. Her back up group: improvised, lip synched, sweated choreography, fawned and feigned over the audience.

This Madonna impersonator was not, obviously, feminine in attire. As a matter of fact, the style of dress was somewhat androgynous. She wore a tight fitting pair of jet black pants with a blue striped navy shirt and military boots. The hair was cut short and streak black contrasted with her, unnaturally, blue eyes. The face was made up to appear as androgynous, marionette-like and sculptural. This was Madonna night, with a variety of impersonations ranging from her early, middle and late periods.
I had noted that during the performance, there were instances of symbolic references to feminism. The androgyny of the wardrobe and the choice of choreography which was masculine in manner and strong gave me this impression. The performance, in effect, reflected the many types of women in the real world - off the stage. Nataf (1996:56) reminds us that, "Genders/sexes could function more like language, motivated by arbitrary signs carrying desire as words do meaning but remaining only signs for our manipulation, not essential realities in themselves... This introduces us to the spectacle of transvestism, as a performance of negation."

Thus, the drag show was not entirely made up of picture perfect MTFs/FTMs, some performers were decidedly male or female. One would witness opposite sex and same sex impersonations with an, appreciably, amount of intersexed people as performers. This did not detract from the audience’s appreciation of the impersonations. The show was in fact, an illusion of feminine and masculine. However, the illusion did not stop at the wardrobe, make-up or surgery; one had a sense the performance of Madonna superceded physical representations of her and incorporated the power of the symbol. It was enough for the metonym of Madonna to be, competently, arranged. The metonym for Madonna was discursive on her feminist, counter-cultural, gender bending history.

During the course of the performance, the audience would place, sporadically, dollar bills into the intimate parts of their wardrobes. The show was cut short by the fire marshal. He came in, investigating a complaint that too many people were occupying the space - posing a risk to life and limb. I had left with the impression, one’s ability to pass as the opposite sex did not depend, entirely on physical alterations. One had to consider the collective social context as well for the reception of one’s body and gender.

**Este Noche** and Asia S.F.

Este Noche is located in the Mission district of San Francisco; it is the oldest and most popular of clubs for Latino gay queens. Tonight was eighties night: there were a selection of 80’s songs interspersed with famous Latina
ranchera singers. The drag queens vary in appearance from ultra-modern chic to old school Mexican. All the songs were lip synched by female impersonators. The bar was long and narrow and opened up to a spacious room at the end. As one enters the club, one would notice an, inordinate, amount of beefy security guards stationed throughout the club. This was, also, the case with Asia S.F. Both of these clubs, were located in areas known for high crime rates. But once inside Este Noche, one would notice an immediate difference in the constitution of the patrons. The patrons were Mexican-Americans. The club was mixed. The ages ranged from 21 to 40+. There was a palpable rawness/hardness about the ambience, Genet like, sophisticated but working class. One had the distinct impression, that you should be secure in your sexuality. The patrons appear to be genteel, but hardened by constant harassment. This area of town is considered risqué because of gang activity, murder and robbery It was not unlike what Consuelo encapsulated, when she said, “they are still men, latino men, and they will throw down if they have to.” I felt it was a proviso to come with an open mind and be selective in my choice of words. A lot of these patrons not, only, suffered abuse from being from a lower social caste, but the choice to be gay or intersexual, transgender compounds the incidence of abuse.

One does not grow up timid here. The LGBT community must acquire a certain machismo about them when they engage in the Latino community. Even though a person may be butch or femme, that person will hide it and act tough when not in the gay community to avoid insults and provocations. Toby (an interviewee) recounted her story, “When I put on my very feminine apparel and make up, you would think that I was married and had 3 kids. So I am safe. If there is any vestige of gay hating or violence, it is going to zero in on the butch lesbian because she is dressed like a dude. If she is not wearing earrings or lipstick, anything can happen to her. I know of women that have been murdered on the streets. I know of a woman that was brutally beaten on 24th, because she walked into some taquería with her girlfriend, who was femmy. Some of the dudes on the street did not like it, and commenced to beat the shit out of her-particularly the butch one. If you are a man, who has been with a woman and then that woman left you for another woman; then that could trigger your violent response to
seeing lesbians together. Perhaps, some men are confused by gender or they feel threatened.”

The Latino and African-American communities have higher instances of antagonism against LGBTs, than in other ethnic communities. This antagonism may arise out of the perspective that homosexuality/ transgendering are considered weakness in the face of racial and class oppression. Homosexuality and gender variance are viewed as antisocial towards group cohesions and collective identity. Violence is, especially, reserved for the ‘minority’ LBGT male, because it signifies an identification to the oppressive elements of society, who have had a history of emasculating minority men. However, there is a growing trend for black and latino families to accept their LBGT members and re-evaluate their worth as valuable.

The female impersonators would start on the floor; they would pass a gauntlet of admirers sometimes, stopping to take complements and flirt with the crowd. In contrast to Asia S.F., the female impersonators, also, function as waitresses, they transform into divas when dancing on the bar. When the show starts at Asia S.F., the bar is cleared as a runway for the impersonators. What I had noticed was that Asian MTFs were much more feminine than that of other ethnicities.

Eve, (left) owner of Adam and Eve Transformations, had stated that, “Well, I have done hundreds of faces and every facial type that’s imaginable. It is about creating a nice even skin tone. It is about erasing the face first, then one adds make up, on top it. The easiest transformations are those with baby faces. Because the faces are androgynous and have round features. The younger the clients are the better for me. In terms of ethnicity, the Asians are easy, especially. When they are young, I have nothing to make up, basically.” In Este Noche there were a combination of transvestites and transsexuals; where at Asia S.F., the performers were, strictly, transsexual MTFs. The female impersonators at Asia S.F., Eve states, “represent the cream of the crop.” However, this cream of the crop, consist of a huge flux of transgender and transsexual
immigration to the U.S. from mostly Southeast Asia. Where the cream of the crop, may have had a more supportive environment for experience at being transgender.

Toby had stated, concerning her observations of transwomen “Certain men are very suited to becoming women, in terms of physical appearance, some men are gorgeous and physically, look very womanly.” The question of the symbolism of the feminine/masculine with surgical alterations came to mind. Certainly, there was no evidence of a conscious choice of specific surgeries with symbolism witnessed at these clubs. No one was screaming.” My tits signify the return of the vestal virgin.” No one in my research could articulate any symbolic association of male/female outside physical attributes. I was not convinced that the cream of the crop was not, more, a matter of expectation of gender based roles and behavior. Was the transsexual impersonation more than the summation of body parts?

Both Este Noche and Asia S.F., promoted performances that were gender conservative and sanctioned by mainstream society. Milliken (1998:54) ponders the implication of hormonal and surgical transformation as an indication of the individual’s view of gender. She is discursive of the process for physical transformation which encourages a subscription to the medical establishment’s binary view of gender. The performers in, both, clubs were hyper-sexualized their female impersonations; I mean, the shows were full of the voyeuristic appellations of a strip show. Trannyschack had a more profound appreciation for females and gender variance. Perhaps, Helinka had become sensitive to male privilege and male constructions of femininity. Milliken, discursive about Janice’s Raymond’s The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male, stated, “As the title of the book suggests, Raymond reads the transsexual phenomenon as characterized by female impersonation, or "male-to constructed-female" transsexualism, as she derogatorily refers to it. FTM transsexuality, in Raymond’s view, is merely a form of
tokenism, providing a smokescreen for the "truth" of the transsexual phenomenon, which does nothing more than serve the interests of the patriarchal establishment.

The S.F. Asia impersonators did not consider themselves as gender-variant; they had, fully, subscribed to the binary construct and did not wished to be viewed as transgender -- but uber-feminine.

Interestingly, Asia S.F., caters to, mostly, straight people. It is a Pacific Rim restaurant with a reputation of having very good food and cocktails to accompany the entertainment. Milliken coins, ‘the spectacle of the transsexual’; did the straight people go there to see, if the transsexual can operate or perform as a female? There were a copious amount of straight men fawning over the transgender performers. And the transgenders, consciously, constructed themselves as the subject of desire. The transsexual must construct the feminine in a way that mirrors the audience’s experience. However, the transgender performers did not appear to experience gender dysphoria but relished in the cultural expectations.

Diva’s

Divas, is a club located, just, on the edge of the Tenderloin district in San Francisco. Richard Tate (2006) in his review of Divas states it is, “A titillating Tenderloin club where transgendered performers wow adoring locals.” He describes Divas as:

“The Scene: This four-story nightspot has a warehouse-turned-strip-club look, and the stages--complete with mirrors and shiny dance poles--are the focal points. There's plenty of bar stool and cocktail-table seating, so patrons can sip drinks while they ogle the glamorous transgendered clientele. The third floor features a dance floor and the fourth floor is a comfy, relatively quiet video lounge, where club performers and admirers mingle. Folks are very friendly--and forward--which makes any night an adventure.

“The Draw: The "girls" are the main attraction. Gender-bending locals, trannie chasers and adventurous visitors flock to this unique nightclub to admire beautiful she-males as
they primp, pose and perform. An admission charge is in place most nights and drinks are reasonably priced.

I had entered Divas at around midnight, I was struck by the ambience; it was not a clean, well lit place. I walked into a narrow corridor of the bar, where the chairs and tables were squeezed to the opposite wall. The bar was, noticeably, dim; perhaps, purposely, under lit. The lighting enhanced the illusion of being with a beautiful woman.

In fact, the bar was a facilitator of prostitution. Divas had become a, well known, place for straight men wanting to experience sex with a transsexual. In a discussion I had with patrons, the sexual orientation of the clientele was called into question. John John and Rachel (patrons) were indecisive about sexual orientation of the clientele. John John stated, “There are a lot of straight men that go in there to hook up (to get together), You will see a lot of men that go in there that are into Ts. I think they are straight men. Rachel said, “no, they are bisexual men- honey.” John John, “no they are straight!” “These are straight men that want to try the experience of being with a shemale.”

Just down the street and around the corner, starts the Tenderloin on Larkin street, a known area for prostitution. In passing this area, you would find the prostitutes are 95% Asian, transsexuals. The prostitutes had advertised their sexual prowess by wearing sheer, transparent fabrics and revealing wardrobes. Potential clients would drive by and negotiate a price for sex within their cars and quickly left the area with the prostitute. The whole process did not take more than a half hour, until the prostitute was found back on the street. Within Divas, the potential client could take his time to, better, select his transwoman. Inside, There were several couples partnered up and the men offering drinks. Prostitution is illegal in San Francisco, this bar provided clients safety from arrest. But, it also function to give the clients of an impression of a legitimate date. The clients and prostitutes behaved and conversed as if no money would be exchanged for sex. There were some patrons that were frequent flyers to the bar, and who were known on a first name bases. Some of them had a regular date or transgender, whom they have become socially intimate with. For the most part, the bar facilitated an intimate environment to simulate the first time date. I was there for, only, for 45 minutes, before I
thought it would be wise to leave. I felt, that some people were nervous around me and thought that I was a police officer?

Police officers were and are considered notorious for vehement and abusive behavior towards transsexual prostitution. But I was not certain that, verbal and physical abuses were reserved, solely, for transgender prostitution. These behaviors perpetrated by police officers could be applied, universally, for anyone not perceived as being a part of respectable, mainstream America?

Rachel Gorden (2006:1), reports of a civil law being filed by a MTF transgender, within San Francisco, and accuses sexual assault from the S.F. sheriffs department. The series of allegations by the plaintiff included a desire by a sheriff for a transgender: “...to strip naked, masturbate, to show him her body and dance for his arousal.” Gorden goes on to state that, “The treatment of transgender inmates has been a concern to community activists and members of police watchdog groups, who say abuse against transgender people by law enforcement person rampant. A recent report by a transgender task force commissioned by the Board of Supervisors says the problem is real and needs to be addressed.”

Tisha, a HIV counselor at The City of Refuge shared that, “I have worked in LA. The cops, that patrol the area, said that, “...if I did not have sex with them or do whatever they wanted me to do, then they would arrest me. I believe they can get away with this, because my word has no merit in court. When you are arrested on a charge of prostitution – your character is defrauded. And if anything were to come up before the court, they were to see my record. If it were your word against mine, then they would choose yours. So, my word has no weight. I would really like to go to school and become a lawyer. But, once, you are charged with prostitution, you are not allowed to become a lawyer. It’s a battle that is rarely won. There is a transgender case in New York, where a transgender wants to become a lawyer. She took the bar and a battery of tests. Now, she is battling for her right to be a lawyer and they are refusing her.”

One of my research themes involved the social/environmental context. How does the transgender experience antagonism/acceptance as a result of historic, cultural, societal representations?
It was found that the cultural, social were more convincing as factors for gender dysphoria than specific surgical outcomes. Some gender dysphoria, were rooted in the self conscious realization of having had fantasized the other. The dysphoria may stem from the fantasy of a gender with out a complete appreciation of the nuances for engendering. The transitioning transgender experiences, at times, a dissonance between his/her model for gender and the actual experience of the chosen gender. Though one may feel womanly or manly, there are moments, in the performance of gender/sex roles, that it would feel fragmentary. The transgender must take into account, the agency of the people and social institutions that he/she comes in contact with. The performance of gender includes unwanted and confused social interactions which are based on contradictory perceptions and expectations. Experiences may come up that the transgender has no understanding or language for. This may be a cathartic for the transgender to call into question personal views of gender and for the re-examination of all the physical and emotional preparations for transitioning. Some would chose, in light of self reflection, to reject all gender constructs and become gender neutral, even after surgical alterations.

In the case of the prostitute, one must consider that she/he may not be 100% ‘passable’. Certainly, the police officers might find the transgender objectionable. Some clients may know of the transition from male to female and may be attracted by this. The attraction of the potential client for a trans-prostitute may have nothing to do with the passable, but with the spectacle of the body. The surgical outcomes for transsexual may function not, only, as considerations for but considerations of. That is to mean:

a). Sexual reassignments are based on considerations for the medical binary gender model in constructing and manipulating the body and behavior.
b). Considerations of surgical outcomes may function as the personal, political and social derived from the perceptions and expectations of others, outside the control of the transgender.

There are times, when there is an internal conflict of the considerations for hormones or surgery and considerations of the outcome of such decisions. Bart, a firefighter from the San Francisco Fire Department, had spoke of a co-worker and said, “I was there when she started her transition to a man. Afterwards, she stated that it was a big mistake. She said that she did not need to do that. It was not necessary to bother with taking hormones, and everything that is involved to become a male.”

City of Refuge, San Francisco

The City Of Refuge, is located, immediately south of Market. The refuge is situated in the most notorious area for crack (processed cocaine) dealing. Also, the street is located within the, most, commercial part of downtown San Francisco, amid high-end department stores. Many of the stores and buildings along a 3 block corridor of 6th street are boarded up and empty. The homeless congregate and sleep at various niches of vacant premises. Many are living with grocery carts, in between park cars, with all their worldly processions -some of the transgenders live here too. The people are poor and destitute and some are newly released from prison and inhabit some of the poorly maintained residence hotels. Tisha, a HIV counselor stated because of a poor job opportunities and appalling conditions on the street, many of her transgender clients try to find a way to be infected with HIV. At least, a mixture of city and federal subsidies would be available for them, such as: housing, money and, even, healthcare!

The City of Refuge, which is of a predominant African American congregation, has a large percentage of gay and transgender parishioners. The Pastor Yvette Flunder, extolled about the ‘inclusiveness’ of the church and tolerance toward the poor and those of different sexual orientations. Pastor Flunder, initiated many programs and protested
for/against on several issues, that mainstream America would consider activist. In 2006, Flunder had chaired a National Black Justice Coalition, which was supportive of same-sex marriage, homophobia and LGBT rights. Flunder stated (S.F. Chronicle, 2006), “We need to rally our forces, as African Americans, around things that impact our community.” “We need a strategy that is aggressive and determined and brings people to conversation on human sexuality, without preconceived answers about things they have no experience with.” Seconding, her opinion was Bokin, the president of the coalition, "You could have a brother strung out on crack, an unmarried sister pregnant with her third child and a cousin getting out of jail, but the gay person with a good job is the one who is unacceptable in the black church.” Bokin again, at this conference had stated, "Religion is the biggest obstacle for black gays and lesbians in accepting themselves, a good number of people who are black and Christian and straight feel homosexuality is bad and have tried to preach me out of it.”

Previously, Gates (1993) indicated that the sentiment for homosexuality or the LBGT in the black community was that, they usurped the rhetoric of the civil rights movement. Many had viewed the gay rights movement as unearned opportunism, which led to a backlash (reversal of opinion) by blacks and black pastors not to be associated with homosexuals.

Gates (1993) describes the gay civil rights discourse as models of oppression that gays have adopted, that have made some blacks unhappy and that blacks have felt that there is no comparison to their legacy of hardship and victimhood.

However, as a cultural analysis Gates adds, “How do gays fit into this scheme? Uneasily. Take that hard-ridden analogy between blacks and gays. Much of the ongoing debate over gay rights has fixated, and foundered, on the vexed distinction between "status" and "behavior." The paradox here can be formulated as follows: Most people think of racial identity as a matter of (racial) status, but they respond to it as behavior. Most people think of sexual identity as a matter of (sexual) behavior, but they respond to it as status. Accordingly, people who fear and dislike blacks are typically preoccupied with the threat that they think blacks’ aggressive behavior poses to them. Hence they’re inclined to make
exceptions for the kindly, "civilized" blacks: that's why "The Cosby Show" could be so popular among white South Africans. By contrast, the repugnance that many people feel toward gays concerns, in the first instance, the status ascribed to them. Disapproval of a sexual practice is transmuted into the demonization of a sexual species.”

The collective body offered up for assimilation; but, the body represents a set of behaviors and actions. Its status had symbolized disenfranchisement from the mainstream cultural order. However, the body took on a status of misunderstood martyr for the African American LGBT congregation. Most of the congregation are victims of violence, discrimination and depression. The Church transmutes the status of the individual LGBT body to incorporate it into its own dialogue for the body of Christ, which was beaten, spat upon and humiliated. The transgender no longer feels alone and harassed, but feels aligned to a more powerful symbol of self -the suffering body of Christ. The transgender body is encouraged to transform into the symbolic representations for the body on the cross. The body and the cross symbolized proactive forms of protest to inequality and oppression. When the congregation takes part in hymns, prayers, religious ceremonies the personal body is momentarily suspended. City of Refugee did not judge them body and gender as the site for the expurgation of sin, but focused on the ecumenical which included the LGBT. The city of refuge offers the transgender body as a legitimate entity. This church does not preach a dualistic view for sexual orientation and the person as most churches do. Most churches, in view of homosexuality admonish to, "to hate homosexuality and not the person." The City of Refugee embraces the whole of the LGBT.

The City of Refuge provides much needed support and assistance; food, shelter and counseling are offered. This place inflects and assimilates the body to serve a larger discourse. The body is no longer subsumed under the micro-symbolic preoccupations of gender appearance and acceptance. It is expected to congregate as a one, symbolizing a foreboding and increasing mass of power, resolve and agenda. Tisha, a parishioner and
HIV counselor relates her experience of both church and congregation: The City of Refuge provides much needed support and assistance; food, shelter and counseling are offered. This place inflects and assimilates the body to serve a larger discourse. The body is no longer subsumed under the micro-symbolic preoccupations of gender appearance and acceptance. It is expected to congregate as a one, symbolizing a foreboding and increasing mass of power, resolve and agenda.

Tisha, a parishioner and HIV counselor relates her experience of both church and congregation:

a) “I know Bishop Flunders embraces anybody who is different, regardless of their race and sexual orientation. She lets people come in and be themselves, and gives them the freedom to grow. The church provides programs, testing for them. One program is called Transcending, which is geared toward transgenders that: work the streets; have low self esteem and pressing personal issues. We offer support with referrals to different programs, in order to, re-channel their different energies in a positive way. We support them and let them know that they matter.”

b) “I get my idealism is in the book of John. At the end the book, it said that one should not be concerned about the actions of another. It is where Jesus said, do not worry about him just worry about you. I will take care of things (Jesus). I believe the bible does have a perspective on homosexuality. I do not know, who put it there; but, I operate on assumption that God judges my heart. If I do some thing bad or intend evil in my heart, he knows it. He knows what he has put on me. He knows who I am and that I would not chose to be transgender in this world.

Sha’Ar Zahav

The, recently built, synagogue, is located on Dolores street San Francisco. Rabbi Camille Shira Angel (2006) writes about the synagogue as a place where, “We are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual Jews, together with partners, family and friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish. We come from a wide range of religious, ethnic, class and cultural backgrounds to worship God with egalitarian, feminist and gay-
positive Jewish liturgy. Together we celebrate Shabbat, festivals and life cycle events with Simcha (joy), song, laughter and compassion. We number about 500 adult members, and more than 150 children.

The congregation is enlisted into the Union of Reformed Judaism and the World congress of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender Jews. Here, two prohibitions are considered:

a) "Do not lie with a male as one lies with a woman; it is an abhorrence [to’evah]" (Lev. 18:22); "If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing [to’evah]; they shall be put to death--their bloodguilt is upon them" (Lev. 20:13).

b) “A man shall not wear women’s clothing and a woman shall not do like wise.” (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Clearly, a good source for the duality of sex with gender in the West, came from a religious bases. The symbol for the sexes, though not complete, were delineated within texts of prohibitions. The symbol for the genders, were shaped along the lines of appearance and sexuality. There appeared to be a symbolic conflict between mainstream Judaism and the practice of the congregation. I had asked Andrew a parishioner of Sha’Ar ZaHav, how was it possible to, deftly, negotiate between strongly worded caveats and the actual practice of Judaism for an LBGT at his synagogue.

Andrew, a parishioner:

a) “The way that Jews read Hebrew scripture, is the mediation of two thousand years of interpretation. The same goes for the passages (verses). There is a verse that says that: if there is a wayward defiant son, they can take him to the elders and have him stoned to death. And that is convenient. I remember attending a work shop with an Australian..."
aborigine, at a very new age gathering and there was an aboriginal teacher. One participant had talked about her son taking drugs: he did not come home and was really defiant and horrible. She asked, how do they (the aborigine) take care of this in your culture? The aborigine teacher said we kill them. People were put off by her comment, especially coming from this enlightened person. This passage (Judaic) to kill your gluttonous and wayward son was re-interpreted to be: there never was a defiant, wayward son and there will never be one. So it was narrowed, narrowed and narrowed down in its scope, until the passage was eliminated.

b) “…so reading the texts by bending it around, makes the text other than how it appears on the page.”

c) “One of the pieces of Judaism is when Moses went to the top of Mount Sinai; God gave him two things: written and oral torah. There is nothing you can do with written Torah. I mean you could argue that ancient versions of them are not the same, as we have argued now. If you believe the written torah came from God, then you would have to believe that: it is in the same world view that the oral interpretive torah came from. That gives the room to turn around anything you want; if you can find away do it. Consider the torah a written document that’s been written between 400-600 years. It is being shaped and formed now. It is an evolving document. A hundred years from now, I think there will be very clear arguments for things today.

d) “A lot of people are raving about the categories the rabbis are watching the diversity, human diversity. A thousand years ago, the rabbis were looking at the place of the eunuch with in Jewish culture. There was a notion of the transgender in a different way, this was the beginning of a culture where men were surgically altered. There, they played a different role. The bible makes it, very, clear that it is dualistic: there are men and there are women. But it is much more complicated, there are babies that are born with all kinds of genitalia differences that we can not assign to one or the other. It is more complicated than that document, so there are way more categories then the primary written text.
allows. So we are going to keep building on that. I think, now, the tradition exist to keep changing the tradition. We do not have a pope or counsel of elders; we do have the authorities and consensus among rabbis for interpretation of the texts. And that is a fluid tradition.”

e) “Jesus never did question slavery which is problematic. On the other hand, in Victorian times, there were non patriarchal peoples. Now, you can build an argument from the Torah that you should not have two laws for you and the people that live with. You should have to treat strangers the same way. So you can build a whole argument with the text for the support of LBGT and other, different, kinds of relationships.”

Conclusion and Results:

The focus of research was on the symbolism/values for various physical alterations and the acceptance of these procedures. The results did not reveal an association for shared symbolic meaning for a specific anatomical part. Nor was it shown, that there was a discursive understanding of the transgender for the symbolism of the body, outside that ‘mainstream’ America. There were symbolic references for the genitalia, but the metaphors were few and did not address specific surgical procedures. The research did not support the question for a conscious symbolic exchange/decommissioning of, specific, body parts.

The predominant cultural understanding for the role and presentation of gender, was presumed to be, invariably, anchored to an assigned birth sex. The fallacy of the research question was that it had predicated the symbolic contents for surgery on a gender binary paradigm. This paradigm was in contention with many in the transgender community and the mainstream population, itself. The symbolic exchange, as a means to discover symbolic meaning, could function because of the false presumption that symbolic categories were mutually exclusive and articulated. There were no articulated symbolic categories fixed to a surgical site.

The exploratory study had intended to exam gender dysphoria, based on symbolic conflicts. Symbolic conflict was thought to manifest as a difference between the public
and private experiences and representations for gender/sex. A symbolic registry of body parts was thought to serve as a template for varying representations.

But, question posed in my research proposal was absurd and ridiculous for anchoring the discursive aspects of symbolism to a specific body part. It was found, that the symbol had escaped the confines of the body and expanded to incorporate social, collective and environmental factors. It was, also found that the symbols for the body were not discursively understood, but visually.

The question posed in this research was not necessary, but only sufficient. The presupposition of the symbol, as being, somewhat, associated to a part of the body was sufficient for inquiry. However, a necessary question was to consider the fluidity of the symbol: the multiplicity of influences for the symbol’s accretion. The fluidity/rigidity of the representations for the body were influenced by social context/environments. The transgender would be cued to the representation of his/her body by a combination of location, social composition and idiosyncratic expectations.

The transgender re-constructed him/her self as the subject, after a careful reading of the social environment. The agency of the transgender was manifested in the creative choice for composition and transformation for the body. Within a gender binary culture, the transgender had rendered the visible and affective aspects of the feminine/masculine. However, to competently perform gender within a dimorphic construct depended on emotional investment. Some transgenders had chosen to oppose mainstream representations. Some rebelled by behaving and personifying discordant gender expectations.

The transgenders, for the most part, had, consciously, manipulated by symbolic representations and were manipulated by them. The physical, social and idiosyncratic shaped and gave structure to the manner, affect and physicality of the trans-gendered body. For example, a transbar legitimizes the body and instructs the appearance of the body. The lighting, the stage, the music, the social composition of a place facilitates the transformation. The transgender behaves and appears differently outside the bar. The body (i.e. surgical alterations) represents something another kind of engendering; the
body may appear as solemn, matronly, patriarchal or frivolous depending on environmental context.

The representations for the body become interspersed and indistinguishable from the physical, social and individual factors constituting the body. When the transgender is stopped, midstream, in performing/actualizing gender, the phenomena of gender and the intention of the body becomes distorted. This distortion may function as problem for a reductionistic inquiry; the transgender is asked to truncate his/her experience to fit a question. The transgender, in an Artaudian fashion,” has become incapable of reading his [own] thoughts....no matter what thought occurs to him, he can no longer give it external form, that is, translate it into appropriate gestures and words.” The holistic experience of transitioning and engendering becomes fragmented, in the division and isolation of the phenomenon. The discursive elements for engendering were spoken of, by the transgender, as a gestalt with irreducible and irrational qualities.

The critique of the anthropological projections did not go unnoticed, by transgenders, and it was discursive on the function of the agency. Conboy (1993:236) elucidates the scope of this agency: “I highlight, as agency, conduct or competencies that may not have been recognized as agency in the past.(2) However, because I understand agency to emerge in a context of group-based oppressions, I focus on examples of agency that have been obscured by liberal analysis: those aimed at resistance to subordination or oppression. Moreover, in contrast to liberal accounts, I describe such agency as emerging through collective action as well as individual self-reflection, and being directed toward cultural and political, as well as individual targets.”

Much of the thesis, includes the perspectives of the transgender in their own words, It was my intention to privilege the voice of the transgender, the voice of the transgender was used to generate the theory for representations of the body. Finally, the transgender may be, nothing more than, what Milliken states, “The way in which transsexuality is described here is less as a surgical "product" than a kind of social text or cultural zone. This allies with Sandy Stone's rereading of the transsexual body as a text or screen "on
which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within academic and medical communities. In this respect, transsexuality may be read as toying with biology and gender as destiny narratives to suggest a way of reworking those laws. In the words of one activist, "There are probably as many genders as there are people. Conceived in this way, gender may be nothing more than a personal matrix of personality traits, a genre of sorts, which is anything but pure" (Milliken, 2006: 58).

T-rally speaker: Sometimes, transgenders are ridiculed for being different or an atypical or unmasculine boy, which has nothing reserved for those who act, down right, feminine.

Now, as for being an outright transgender woman and for people who want to dismiss me, they don’t simply take me task for failing to conform to gender norms. Instead, more often than not, they mock my femininity. And the vast majority of anti transgender sentiment, I have heard, is better described as misogyny. The fact that transgendered woman are singled out to bear the brunt, fascination and the demonization of transgenderism, is an issue ripe for feminist critique -for over a half century now. Unfortunately, this has not happened; instead, feminist have chosen to be apathetic or antagonistic towards transwomen. In order to rectify this oversight, I am, currently, working on a book, called The Feminine Wilds: which is on transsexual woman, gender and the future of feminism. Rather, than making transgender women my research subject, as so many non-transgenders writers have done, I have turned the tables on the rest of the world. I have asked, why have so many facets of our mainstream culture set out to demonize our culture? And what I found was, that we’re marginalized not because we transgress binary gender norms; but, because we are perceived by others. Because of the fact, that we embrace our femaleness and femininity, despite of having been born male and inheriting male privilege, which challenges our society. It challenges hose who wish to glorify masculinity, maleness, as well as those who wish to frame the struggle, staged by women and queers, in terms of heterosexual privilege. We are seen as a direct threat to male supremacy. Our culture, primarily, via the media, uses every tactic in its arsenal of traditional sexism to delegitimize us. First, the media hyper feminizes us. The media does
so: by portrayal of their stories of us; by showing, only, images of us putting on make-up, skirts and heels. It is an attempt, to highlight or accentuate the supposed frivolousness of our femaleness. The media portrays transwomen as having derogatory feminine character traits such as: being weak; confused; passive or mousey -frankly,

I am sure in this audience, those of you who know transwomen: if you have to say anything, its [expletive] fierce to stand up to everybody be stubborn and relentless. OK!(applause).

Secondly, the media hyper sexualizes us by, constantly, depicting transwomen as being sex workers and sexual deceivers, and insisting that we transition for, primarily sexual, reasons. For example, we prey on ordinary straight men or to fulfill some kind of bizarre sex fantasy. This sexualization of our motives for transitioning, not only belittles our sexual identity. But, it belittles women by meaning that women have no other worth than to be sexualized.

Thirdly, the media objectifies us by sensationalizing sexual re-assignment surgery, and by obsessing over our man made vaginas -with out any of the discretion reserved for non transsexual genitals. And those of us that did not have surgery are constantly reduced to our body parts, by the makers of tranny porn. The media, over-emphasizes our penises, thus we become chicks with dicks. There are, everyday, people who have been so brainwashed by phallocentrism, that they believe the mere presence of a penis can trump our femaleness, our identities, our personalities and the rest of our bodies. It is important to keep in mind that these three tactics are not only found in the media. But, they form the bases of most medical and psychiatric accounts, sociological and feminist post- modern critiques of transwomen.

Examining this society’s disdain for transwomen, also brings to light an overlooked aspect of traditional sexism. That it not only targets people for their femaleness but for their expressions of femininity, whether they are male female or transgender.

These days while it is considered ill to be, openly, prejudice against females, discriminating against someone who displays femininity is considered fair game.
Masculinity, is strong tough and natural the idea, while femininity is weak vulnerable and passive, continues to proliferate even among those who consider men and females are equals. And this holds equally for those self described feminist and queers. Instead, masculine and feminine aspects should be considered natural, which precede socialization and supercede biological sex. Other wise, there wouldn’t be masculine girls and feminine boys. For this reason, I believe it is negative that feminist only talk about those who are born female or live as women or the transgender activist who only talk about binary gender norms. The truth is no gender equity will happen unless we learn to empower femininity in all its wonderous forms- thank you.

APPENDIX A. (Glossary)

There are many words for describing gender variations which are intended to embrace or debase perceived lifestyles. The intention to support or afflict gender differences of expression depends on the perception of those who would utter these words. Often they appear in casual conversation, whispered behind close doors or spoken out of range; perhaps, they are muttered a hedge distance of the surveyed target. But the expletives are never uttered as an affront to the person, and are always in the context of genteel civility or yesterday’s equivalent of political correctness. Sometimes, people intend to do’ good by the person’, who is talked about. Causal nods accompanied by well placed, inoffensive colloquial terms would seem to, innocently, shade or color one’s sexual or gender orientation; perhaps, it has no other function than give themselves a pat on the back for how far they have come within their circle of friends. Well enough!, we let one them into the Cumberland Head Yacht Club. Charles! could you pass me a scotch with a splash of water- please. In this instance, one might say,” little harm done, they let a fag into the fold.”

There are terms which outline and inform us about the character of the people, who have so little discretion as to hide their infirmity, especially the transgender. But there are times, when there is no room for ambiguity, a display of virulent distain for
individuals and their life-choices. The choice for sexual re-assignment surgery, dress or manner may be the focus of derision. During my research, I have heard of many situations where life and limb are at stake. Often, there are epithets screamed out matched with crushing blows and a feeling abject humiliation.

However, there are some words for gender, sexual variations that nestle, nurture, situate the individual into the embrace of a community. There are words that confer power, enablement and embrace the discovery of self, which have curative powers. There are strength to words, that restores the individual’s wholeness instead of bringing about dissolution or fragmentation. A community may wait to embrace an individual and expect their participation to strengthen community aspirations.

**Glossary**

These are some of the terms/phrases that I have encountered during my field work:

- **Androgeny**: a state of neutrality when it comes to gender representations, usually in behavior and dress. The person may identify as male and female simultaneously. Androgeny may present as a display of bi-gender behavioral traits and no preference for the sex of a lover.

- **Butch**: a very masculine acting gay or lesbian.

- **Channeling**: the belief, one has the ability to be in procession of a person’s spirit.

- **Closet/Closeted**: a metaphor referring to hiding one’s homosexuality from public knowledge.

- **Cross Dresser**: A person who dresses for the opposite gender/sex in order to experience the culture of that sex/gender. This person maintains the behavior and appearance of its biological sex normally. They do not elect or sexual re-assignment surgery or hormones.

- **Dick**: a penis; a derogatory term for a contemptible person.

- **Drag**: to dress, behave as of the opposite sex.

- **Drag Kings/ Drag Queens**: People cross dress for public entertainment and ‘push the envelope’ for the stereotype representations for gender.
Dysphoria/ Gender Dysphoria: Unhappiness or discomfort with one’s biological sex. Felt as disharmony between the apparent biological sex and inner feelings of belonging to the opposite sex.

Femme: a feminine acting gay or lesbian.

Fag: A derogatory term for a homosexual.

Gay Bashing: violent physical attacks on those consider gay by straight people.

Gender Bender: An ambiguous gender presentation in dress, manner, and behavior.

Gender Identity: A graded consideration of one’s belonging to the feminine or masculine domain. This would include the presentation of the individual in manner, speech, dress and movement of the body.

Gender Variant: Anyone who does not appear as, practice or accepts normal gender or sex presentations.

Gender Queer: a person who identifies as neither male or female.

Hang out: to relax or patronize a place for long periods of time.

Inter-sexed: A person who has the medical and hormonal attributes of both sexes.

Lip synching: moving ones lips as to sing the recorded song

LGBT: acronym for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender

MTF and FTM: Acronyms for ‘male to female’ and ‘female to male’ respectively. These acronyms refer to a feeling of belonging to the opposite then their assign birth sex based on the inspection of genitalia.

Mixed: where there are straight and gender variant people.

Old School: an adjective of admiration for the original/classic

Pacific Rim: Asian and American Fusion of food

Partner: usually code for I am gay/lesbian and it refers to their lover.

Shemale: a MTF

Straight: a person who identifies a heterosexual female/male as assigned at birth or such a term is applied to such a person or persons.

T: A self referential term to designate one self/ others as transgender.

Teresias:

Throw down: to fight Transbar: a bar where trannies hang out

Trannie/s: A self referential term to designate one self/ others as transgender.
**Transgender:** Anyone who does not appear, practice or accepts normal gender or sex presentations. Who, also, have a presentation and affect of the opposite sex

**Transexual:** A person who experiences a longing to be the opposite sex and undergoes either hormonal therapy or surgery/ a combination of both.

**Transvestite:** a person who dresses and acts as the opposite sex

**Queer:** a derogatory term for a homosexual.

**Queen:** usually a gay person who is over the top effeminate.
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