

The Ladies of Long: How a group of non-gender normative youth construct their identity and perform gender?

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

This body of text is the product of an ethnographic study, conducted on (or more appropriately, *with*) a particular group of non-gender normative persons, interrogating the question of *how they construct their own identity and perform gender*? I argue that one could not effectively take on this project without simultaneously interrogating the category it purports to describe, and thus this piece proves to be as much an ethnography on *gender* as an ethnography on *doing gender ethnography*. Therefore, what is presented here is a demonstration of the value of this ethnography to contribute to a greater body of knowledge as it generates a nuanced and practical relational understanding of these otherwise seemingly intangible and highly ideational concepts, ambiguously termed *gender* and *identity*. This work also interrogates and engages deeply with notions of *sexuality*, *subjectivity*, *agency*, and *personhood*, examining the relationship and validity between abstract theory and reality, as it is revealed through an analysis of the articulations and observations of these unique individuals. Furthermore, as this offers more than a nuanced understanding of gender and identity in these people's lives, but an understanding of gender that extends beyond the specific scope of this question, the findings presented here, offer monumental insight and opportunity to sift through the leading contemporary theories foregrounding gender studies specifically that of Judith Butler's, Performativity Theory. And finally, as this work is built on the foundation of a feminist objective epistemology, it will prove also to be an articulation of the importance of methodology, demonstrating the significance of a study's methodology to be parallel to its findings. But most importantly this text will provide an in-depth description and analysis of the meanings and makings of gender, sexuality, and personhood in the context of a very particular social world, demonstrating the surprisingly profound agency these persons creatively practice in the constitution of their selves.

"Never make him see what you want him to see unless he has an eye to see. Don't be scared of the unknown and don't be afraid to let the world know about the unknown."-

Lee

My gratitude and dedication of this work is to all of those I have affectionately come to refer to as the 'Ladies of Long,' specifically, Coco, Lolly, Donnazita, Nikita, Jennifer and Lee.

A special thank you also goes to my academic supervisor, Divine Fuh, not only for his knowledge, but for his encouragement and compassion.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction to Research

Overview

The objective of this ethnographic study was to interrogate how this group of non-gender normative individuals *construct their own identity and perform gender*. What is offered is a demonstration of the value of this ethnography to contribute to a greater body of knowledge as it generates a nuanced and practical relational understanding of these otherwise seemingly intangible and highly ideational concepts, ambiguously termed *gender* and *identity*. I argue that one could not effectively take on this project without simultaneously interrogating the category it purports to describe, and thus this piece proves to be as much an ethnography on *gender* as an ethnography on *doing gender ethnography*. Furthermore, because this offers more than a nuanced understanding of gender and identity in these people's lives, but an understanding of gender that extends beyond the specific context of this question, the findings of this ethnographic work, offer monumental insight and opportunity to sift through Judith Butler's epic theory Performativity Theory, as well as presenting an in-depth exploration of the profound agency these persons creatively practice in the constitution of their selves.

Introduction

As a young American who had recently moved to Cape Town to pursue my masters in anthropology, I spent a lot of time pursuing extra-curricular activities outside of the field of academia that led to the frequent night-time social outings that placed me on Long Street more than I care to admit. But more than a night owl that enjoys a cold Black Label¹ and an evening of dancing to kwaito², as a social scientist it is no surprise that I would be drawn to this particular area of the city.

¹ Black label is a popular beer brand in South Africa that is notorious for having a .5% increase in alcohol level compared to its competitors. Also familiarly known as Zamalek or Soweto Pepsi, at one time its advertising slogan was (appropriately), "only hard working students deserve an extra 0.5 percent." It has also historically been a symbol of 'black pride' and today is stereotypically associated as the drink of mineworkers, or otherwise, brut people.

Centered smack-dab in the area of Cape Town often referred to as the City Bowl or simply, *Town*, this urban landscape is the home of Parliament, the municipal courthouses, museums, businesses, craft-markets, historical 'coloured' Muslim neighborhoods bordered by bourgeoisie expensive 'white areas' at the foot of table mountain, and it is of course the bed of notorious Long Street -if it could ever be thought to sleep.³ This area is not simply its own world, but more precisely a world of worlds.⁴ In fact if you are familiar with the many facets and faces of this area, you would be aware of the upscale designer dress-shops, wealthy-Jewish owned clubs, resident German ex-pats, semester abroad American students, the local 'born-free'⁵ artsy hipster-kid hang-outs, as well as the expensive hotels catering to European entrepreneurs and investors and South African politicians. But you would *also* notice that this area is dotted equally with establishments, foreigners, and entrepreneurs of a *different* kind, such as the poverty-stricken immigrants (squatting in the condemned Senator Park⁶), the small Somali owned tuck-shops⁷, West African craftsmen and women, Zimbabwean taxi drivers, as well as the organized crime bosses, drug lords, pimps, prostitutes, and brothels.

While this seems to paint a picture of stereotypes, this partial description is not an exaggeration of how starkly extreme the distinctions are in the social stratifications among race, nationality, and class that are present in this area.⁸ The center of town is a place where people of such diverse backgrounds, traverse, work, inhabit, and share the same physical spaces daily, and this alone would be enough to intrigue an anthropologist, as it is many theorists have argued that the very essence of

² Kwaito is a popular South African musical genre that is an infusion of house and hip-hop instrumental and vocal influences, and emerged in the 1990's as part of Black township culture.

³ The City Bowl is an area of Cape Town in the shape of a giant amphitheatre framed by the mountains of Lion's Head, Devil's Peak, Table Mountain, and Signal Hill. It includes the central business district of Cape Town as well, but not limited to the areas of District Six, Company Gardens, Walmer Estate, Woodstock, Tamboerskloof, and Bo Kaap. (all the areas that comprised the majority of my field-site).

⁴ Echoing the words of Mbembe and Nuttall in their article concerning writing from and of an African metropolis: it is important to note that this piece is, and is not about Africa. It is, and is not, about Cape Town.

⁵ A term used to refer to the generation of those born after the official demise of apartheid and the democratic elections in 1994.

⁶ A large block of run down flats that prior to being condemned and now in the process of upscale renovations, was the over-populated home to impoverished immigrants and illegal activities.

⁷ Small semi-permanent shops that sell cheap goods and snack products.

⁸ This is of course not a unique phenomenon and certainly not in the city of Cape Town (or any other city in South Africa), which continues to feel the legacy of apartheid.

anthropology is actually about the everyday, the ordinary experience.⁹ And my anthropological curiosity began with my ordinary everyday life experiences in these spaces, which led to the formation of an unlikely friendship, that facilitated my sight of not only the obvious extreme economic, racial, ethnic, and cultural heterogeneity of these people and places, but something that was slightly more insidious.

I gradually and precisely began to take note of the way in which these peoples of such vastly different social spheres seemed to co-exist in a matrix of parallel worlds. Where, yes, they traversed, worked, inhabited, and shared the same physical spaces, *but little more*. Where the citizens of each of these worlds, divided along the lines of privilege, are so socially disconnected from one another (although capitalistically co-dependent and interconnected), to the degree that 'the Other' seems to appear as *unreal*. Not unreal in the literal sense as students and locals certainly know to clutch their purses and pockets in these areas, for fear that they will be pick-pocketed by those who are not *them*.¹⁰ However, what is meant is how these beings essentially encompass a social *unreality*, in which the Other, in this case the privileged Other, is entirely unconscious, unaware, and uninterested in said people as actual *Persons*. And it is those said people who comprise that parallel world, the *Underworld*¹¹, which the informants of this study proved to be both partly relegated to and partly proud citizens of.

It was this ethnographic endeavor which exposed me to that world where one's existence and survival had to be strongly fought for and carefully maintained. But just as the previous discussion foreshadows, this fight for survival and livelihood would prove to extend beyond the physical realm, reflecting also these citizens dire need to also assert and creatively maintain their social existence as *Persons*.

Although not a conventional setting for higher-learning, it was in these places, specifically the areas of Long Street, Bo Kaap, Company Gardens, and parts of Woodstock, that I found my school, my teachers, and my field site. In pursuit of this

⁹ For more on this particular perspective of Anthropology, we can look to the discussions of Malinowski and Marcus (1922, 2008).

¹⁰ South Africa is well known for its high-levels of poverty and crime.

¹¹ It became apparent that this notion of parallel worlds was far more tangible than ideational, as it was even granted a name, the *Underworld*, by the subjects themselves in referring to the distinctly segregated social space they inhabit.

project, I was brought into a world that I had never known, but was beginning to see; one that would teach me not only about the subjects of this study, but about myself, as well as those fundamental aspects of human life that prior to this study, I found so ubiquitous that I had hardly ever thought to question.

I would now like to take you on a rhetorical journey which will weave the subjects' own profound articulations with a side by side analysis of contemporary gender theory, in an effort to establish what relevance these anthropological findings have on the greater debates of gender; but more importantly to share with you the beginnings of an understanding of the unassumingly agentively profound lives that these people create. The trajectory of this text will pursue two interrelated questions that have been posed, concerning how these participants self-construct their own identity and how they perform gender.

A Note on Terminology

Although a more detailed discussion of this will be granted throughout the remaining chapters, it is important to understand the meaning of the terminology used in this question. *Non-normatively gendered* refers to the way in which the participants identify and are identified as performing a notion of gender that is different than what is standard in such society, -specifically here as male-bodied persons who do not adhere to the imposed conventional norms of masculinity (that which society assigns to male-sexed persons). *Youth* refers to the age and life phases of the primary participants who range from eighteen years of age to twenty-one years of age. The oldest participant who was technically a 'partial informant'¹² as she was not present for the entire study (as she lived and worked elsewhere) was in her thirties. Her presence highlighted in many ways, the youthfulness of the other participants as it demonstrated their transitioning phase from teenagers unsure about their future, to where Lee stood as someone quite grounded in how she saw her life. *Construct* refers specifically to how the informants create, build, make, inform, articulate, and constitute their identities. *Gender* and *identity* are not easily defined here, as that is precisely one of the primary objectives of this project in its entirety, and rather will be

¹² Her contribution was invaluable, nonetheless, and this is only a mere technicality.

explored and unfolded throughout. The notion of *perform*, as it is referred to in this question, is not to be mistaken for its general connotation, which may refer to a sort of deliberate acting, but is in reference to what is meant in regards to the perspective known as gender Performativity Theory. For it is this leading contemporary perspective on gender identity attributed to the philosopher and leading feminist queer theorist, Judith Butler, that is interrogated throughout this work. Spawned out of my dual interest in wanting to also speak to the wider debates in gender theory, concerning the very essence of 'gender,' I assigned myself the task of interrogating whether Judith Butler's highly regarded, but also highly abstract position is as practically applicable as it is theoretical, and what resolves is an ethnographic response to the debates concerning the relevance of this theory in the every day world outside of philosophy and theory. In order to address these questions, the following chapters are outlined as such.

Chapter Outline

Chapter II will continue providing background context into the development of this research question, introducing how I first formed a relationship, and then a research relationship with these people, discussing the ethical and methodological design and considerations that went into this project, as well as my perspective as a researcher with a feminist objective. Chapter III will offer a contextualization of the socio-political and academic climate within which this research question is located. Chapter IV will introduce the reader to the subjectivities of the informants, as they articulate them, as well as conceptualizing the themes and questions of this study and this text's approach to writing about them. In Chapter V, ethnographic narratives about sex will form the centre of our analysis, for the purposes of becoming intimately acquainted and engaged with the participants' own identity-making and signifying practices, allowing us not only to then apply this working-knowledge to contextualizing Butler's theoretical position as it relates to 'reality', but to address the integral question of how these individuals agentively self-construct said '*identity*' and perform said '*gender*'. In Chapter VI, we will begin with an in-depth theoretical analysis of the language of the Other that is often used to situate the subjects, so as to shed light on how the informants articulate and convey a notion of self and personhood that is in contrast to this imposed identity, only to then understand that it is these very forms of oppression

for which the subjects reformulate into their own regimes of resistance and agentive identificatory practices. And finally, Chapter VII will offer concluding remarks.

CHAPTER II: The Ladies of Long

How We Met!

Almost anyone who regularly frequents these particular areas in town will tell you that they have encountered the participants of this study. In fact I have personally come to think of them as mobile fixtures of these spaces, or for lack of a better term, as local 'celebrities'. However, in terms of today's popular celebrity culture of reality television and international new sources like *Facebook*, which demonstrate just how conflicted society views celebrities as that which to adore and to deplore, to envy and to pity, to always see but never actually *know*, to desire yet dehumanize, and to be entertained and infatuated by all the while condemning of, perhaps this description is more fitting than not (Couldry & Markham, 2007).

Coco, Lolly, Donnazita, Nikita and their friends, the 'Ladies of Long,' as I have always affectionately referred to them, are known to travel in a group up and down Long Street and the surrounding areas, *skarrelling*¹³ for money. While *skarrelling* is generally associated with the activities of poor people or *bergies*¹⁴ and can refer to the desperate means of just trying to get-by, stealing, or begging, one must be mindful because to understand it only in terms of its inglorious connotations does not do it justice here. Rather here the notion more appropriately refers to these individuals' way of brazenly parading up and down the streets of town in their outrageously fashionable outfits, wigs, make-up, and high-heels, attracting attention to themselves and asking passer-bys for loose change. In an intentionally ostentatious, witty, vivacious, charming, and often comedic manner, they engage with both strangers and familiar faces, usually showering the women that pass with sincere compliments about their clothing or looks.¹⁵ All the while, their strategy with men is to mockingly harass, flirt, and make loud sexual commentary about them as they pass, often arguing over them as boyfriends, which more times than not elicits a positive reaction either in

¹³ *Skarrelling* is an Afrikaans term, which the participants use to refer to their daily responsibilities.

¹⁴ *Bergie* originates from the Afrikaans word for mountain ('*berg*'), and is commonly used to refer to homeless people in Cape Town, especially those who reside around the foot of Table Mountain.

¹⁵ Socializing with all as they do, they have come to know the faces, names, and stories of a lot of people and frequenters of the area.

the form of a laugh, smile, returned playful banter, or some loose change. This is not simply *begging*, this is an art form.¹⁶ But it is more than that, it is how they *live*, it is how they keep from going hungry, and it is part of how they afford their drug habits, but beyond this one could argue that it is also how they affirm their visibility, recognition, and social existence.¹⁷

My relationship with them also began in this way. I met Coco many years ago, although I cannot remember the first time we crossed paths, I do distinctly remember when I first inquired her name, and perhaps that began the foundation of our friendship. She was selling earrings that she had 'made', and I bought a pair for next to nothing, (I was sold much less on the actual earrings, than I was on her ambition to sell them to me.)¹⁸ She was an unlikely person to forget, as anyone that spends extended time on Long Street will attest. With her petite stature, short sun-kissed dreadlocks, fast-talking yet soft raspy voice, and energetic personality, she was always dressed in something feminine, that was playful, creative, and different than the time you saw her last (even if it *last* was only a mere few hours ago!) Just as I was getting into a cab and she was walking away I yelled out to her, 'Wait! What's your name?' "Coco, the Queen of Long, darling!" she rapidly quipped with a huge smile, while cocking her head back and sashaying away. From that day forward every time we would see one another in the streets, which was quite frequent as I also lived in the area, we would stop and talk and sometimes she would join me for a walk in whichever direction I was headed. Although, I would generally offer her whatever loose change I had if it was available, she would often decline, which I believe was her way of establishing that her interest was sincere and not some sort of hustle.

As Coco became enmeshed in my world and to know and recognize my friends, I also came to recognize and know hers. Although Coco had been the only one I had actually

¹⁶ This also speaks to Fiona Ross's ethnographic work, which illustrates that even in the most impoverished circumstances, humans are never truly without art (2005).

¹⁷ In his work on masculinity-making among urban Cameroonian youth, Divine Fuh refers to a similar observation in his own study, to which he describes this performing and (fashionably) fashioning of the body as "a conspicuous quest for recognition as *competition for attention* (Fuh 2009), where accumulating prestige through performative acts becomes a replacement for 'old predictabilities' (Furlong 2000), and traditional fulfillments of personhood such as those offered by school-to-work transitions" (2012:506). While I feel this statement definitively speaks to my own sentiments about what I have observed among the participants of this study, unfortunately this is a topic that would have to be explored in a future text, as space was not permitted here.

¹⁸ In retrospect she had more than likely found those earrings or was gifted them.

officially met, her other companions in the area would greet me whenever they saw me, even from afar, and even those whom I had never seen before. Blocks away they would see me and shriek 'Oh my groceries!! You look *fabulous* darling!!!!' as their wigs bounced up and down while they waved ferociously. I remember once commenting to a friend that was with me on one of these early days, 'but how do they all know me?' to which she sarcastically replied, 'maybe because they think you are one of them?' Although it was intended to be humorous, the irony is that in many ways I *was like them*. In terms of how she meant, no I was not a homeless, atypically gendered, effeminate male-bodied, habitual drug-user, *per se*. I did not smoke tik.¹⁹ I did not come from a Muslim Coloured²⁰ community in South Africa. I did not come from South Africa at all. Afrikaans was not my first, or in any particular order, language I could speak. I did not partake in transactional sex. And the streets were not my house and home. However, this imagedisplays only a partial picture of who they are as persons, as individuals, as sentient bodies with feelings, interests, and personalities; and once I actually came to *see* them as such, we were, in fact, certainly more alike than not.

We laughed at the same things, we knew the words to the same songs, even those obscure early-90's R&B songs that you could only know today having grown up to, and we had the same passion for style and fashion- even deliberately sporting similar haircuts at times. But that which deeply struck a cord with me was the similar dynamic we had developed within our intimate friend groups, and the way we related to those people we cared about. There were vast differences between us, due to life experiences and circumstances, but that is what made our connection so unlikely, and yet what I believe, also so remarkable.

Lolly

Lolly has the personality of a young alpha leader. Half tomboy, half diva, she is confident, assertive, sassy, clever, witty, occasionally moody and intimidating when

¹⁹ Tik is the common South African term for the drug methamphetamine.

²⁰ 'Coloured' is a racial category in South Africa that was created by the apartheid regime to define those people who were neither part of the 'white' or 'black' manufactured classifications; and this distinction still persists today. The heterogeneous peoples that comprise this category are generally said to be of Khoisan, Malay, and European descent, (and have an array of other diverse genetic influences.)

she wants to be, but also funny, loving, protective, and caring.²¹ She comes from an area of Mitchell's Plain²² marked with crime and violence, but also conviviality (which undoubtedly would explain parts of her personality). Her father held the position similar to an Imam in the community and although her parents divorced, they remained friends and neighbors until her mother passed away this year.²³ Around the age of eleven she ran away from home in search of her freedom, and was taken in by female prostitutes in Sea Point who mothered her, protected her, and 'taught her how to be a real woman'. She was one day befriended by Coco and other street kids, and it was then that she began sniffing glue, as most street kids eventually do, as it not only gets them high, but suppresses their appetites and the pain of their empty stomachs. From there they began to skarrell for money, which was a very profitable activity at that time, as they were just children and therefore sympathy and money was easy to attain. Lolly and I had a particularly interesting dynamic and connection, perhaps because she had a very strong personality, much like mine, and so I sometimes saw myself in her- as I did all of them. However, rather than clash, we connected.

Nikita

The first time I met Nikita her strikingly feminine, beautiful, and youthful face was hard not to be in awe of, and always wearing red lipstick and heels, she could easily pass for a 'natural' girl. The next time I would see Nikita, however, was with a large gash down her nose and across her face that her abusive 'boyfriend' at the time, had inflicted on her with a broken beer bottle.²⁴ She had come to the streets at the age of thirteen, after having met Lolly and the others, while she was working at a shop in town. Although they were all of around the same age, give or take a few years, which today places them in their early twenties, Nikita and Lolly reminisce about how Lolly

²¹As I take to the task of describing their individual personalities, I realize that on paper many of these adjectives can be said to describe all of the participants in a nut-shell, which is unsurprising as they have been the most intimate of friends for almost all of their lives. However, they are each very unique in character and personalities, although the real nuances and idiosyncrasies of their personalities may not come to life in these brief profiles.

²² Mitchell's Plain is a township that was created in the 1970's by the apartheid government for the forced relocation of people racially designated as 'coloured' under the regime. Today it is one of the largest of its kind, and like many other townships wrought with poverty, drug abuse, and gangsterism.

²³ An imam refers to a leadership position in the Muslim religion, a person who is well respected and provides guidance to the community.

²⁴ I would not go as far as to say that this relationship was consensual, but rather based out of fear and desperation.

first mistook Nikita as a girl, then recognized her as one of them, and swiftly took her under her wing. 'She was like my daughter' Lolly proudly reflects with an air of sentimentality, in the same way that a real mother would. Nikita's mischievous personality is like that you would associate with a certain stereotypical teenage girl, boy-crazy and undeniably cheeky, but perfectly loveable as she always maintained a balance of an adolescent-like sweetness. And as we would discover together, she also has an undeniable natural talent for the art of photography.

Donnazita

When I was first introduced to Donnazita from the others, I remember that I perceived her as standoffish and disinterested. That was my impression of her because while skatting she was one of the loudest and most boisterous, yelling out clever rhyming comebacks that she coined with such bravado, when I addressed her directly for the first time, she abruptly turned her body away and diverted eye-contact. Soon we became more familiar, and I realized that what I mistook for wariness was instead just an extreme shyness. Her timidity was genuine, but conditional. Because although to strangers she acted and appeared fearless and confident, if you were ever to look her in her eyes, you would most-likely be surprised to instead be met with a demure smile and blushing cheeks. Ironically, although Donna was certainly and by-far the coyest, she was also the most open and forth-coming when it came to sharing the depths of herself, unleashing her tears, while discussing her pain, sadness, regrets, and vulnerabilities. What hid behind her endearing smile was a very sensitive person.²⁵

Donna and Coco knew each other the longest, as they once lived in neighboring flats and grew up together in Elsies River²⁶ before coming to the streets. Today they share stories and happily reminisce over the days of playing House as very young children, when they were 'both the aunties waiting for our husbands to come home'. She was raised by her mother who was once lesbian, but converted to Christianity, denounced her own sexuality, and encouraged Donna to do the same. When asked about what fundamentally led her to being on the streets, Donna emotionally and remorsefully

²⁵ In truth this can be said of all of them.

²⁶ A suburb of Cape Town that was once the restricted area of those racially designated as coloured by the apartheid regime. The area of Elsies River which they came from is quite impoverished and wrought with crime, violence, and drug abuse.

reflects on what she believes was the defining factor and life-altering moment that set the stage for her reality as it is now. With tears streaming down her face, she regrets to this day that it all began with her asking her older friends to let her in on their game of smoking tik, so that she 'would not feel left out'. But says that she was too young to understand what effect that decision would have on the rest of her life.

Coco

It is interesting that while Coco was the common denominator in how I first came to know all of them, and I saw her as potentially the dominant ring leader of their circle, in actuality Coco was very different once I got to know her personality and group dynamic when she was not under the influence of drugs. She proved to be surprisingly much more reserved, and quiet than I had once thought, not particularly shy, but someone who appreciated being in the company of others, and listening to them share more than sharing about herself. I came to believe that perhaps, getting lost in the stories of others was her escapism from her own troubles and hardships that she rarely preferred to discuss, as she explained that she 'did not want to sadden or bring others down'. At the age of eight she and her younger brother were both left homeless to fend for themselves after losing their home due to the negligence of their severely alcoholic mother.²⁷ It was Coco who had been living on the streets the longest. And while like some of the others Coco never had a father, she was the only one in the group who never had a true mother figure, either. I imagined that the absence of a maternal figure in her life and the lack of motherly love is probably what separated Coco from the others in a lot of ways, and contributed to her often seeming very sad to see me go at the end of the days.

Lee and Jennifer

Lee and Jennifer were both partial informants as they were not consistently around, and therefore I saw them less than the others. However, their contributions were invaluable.

²⁷ Coco and her younger brother, Edwin, were very close growing up and caring for each other on the streets as young children. When I inquire as to why they appear to barely know each other anymore, Coco hints that it was his decision to allow himself to be exploited by older men that eventually drove them apart.

On a trip to visit Nikita's mother in Delft²⁸, we ran into Lee, a long-time friend of the other girls, who was on her way to attend a meeting at SWEAT.²⁹ Lee, who is thin and feminine in physique and in her mid 30's (thus older than the others who ranged from nineteen to twenty-one), is astoundingly wise beyond her years and incredibly street-smart, even for someone who spent her coming of age years in that environment. She will proudly tell you that she has been a sex worker for over seventeen years, and it is a lifestyle that *she* has chosen and loves doing.³⁰ Although Lee lived in a shack on a commune run by a female crime boss in Woodstock, she would still from time to time come to sleep on the streets in town in order to spend time and visit the other girls.

Jennifer, with her beautiful curly-haired mane that she is constantly dyeing, is the youngest of them all at eighteen years of age, although she looks and behaves very maturely. Jennifer has a very independent, and self-aware air about her, and is the least interested in any type of drama. At the time of meeting her and conducting this study, she was in a transitional phase, deciding whether to come to the streets full time or stay at home with her grandmother. At this time, Jennifer alternated between being at home with her family, to staying in Woodstock nearby Lee, and to sleeping on the street with the other girls. Today she has transitioned full time to living strictly on the streets.

How This Question Came To Be

While it was not novel for me to socialize with persons who express and identify with atypical genders or sexualities, one aspect that I did find 'unusual' about them relative to myself and others I have come to know in life, was that while they cosmetically fashioned themselves effeminately, adopted feminine names, referred to themselves and one another as 'girls,' 'ladies', 'women' or 'meisies', and expressed that they

²⁸ A Coloured township just outside of Cape Town.

²⁹ SWEAT or Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce is a human rights organization that works with sex workers in South Africa and advocating for their rights as well as the decriminalization of sex work.

³⁰ Lee has not only boldly traveled all over South Africa in pursuit of her career as a sex-worker, but she has also illegally and repeatedly crossed the border into Namibia, to also pursue this lifestyle, which she describes as liberating, but extremely dangerous.

prefer to be addressed by femininely gendered pronouns, they often maintained use of the masculine pronoun form, 'he', when referencing one another.³¹ This presented a particular curiosity to me as I recognized how it conflicted with my own socio-culturally constructed expectations of gender, and it left me with a desire to understand them specifically through their eyes rather than my own. It was from this insight that I came to propose an ethnographic research project that would explore how these four gender variant homeless youth self-construct their own identity and performgender.

The ethical and methodological implications that informed this research project

One afternoon while walking through Company Gardens, Coco shared with me her desire to one day have a chance to 'tell her story.' She shared of how she had recently seen a documentary, and how it really spoke to her as a potential medium for her to effectively express herself, and asked if I would be willing to help her achieve this. I told her that although I had no formal experience or training in filmmaking, I did have access to recording devices and cameras, and would be grateful to lend my time and resources. Shortly thereafter, we began to collaborate on experimental creative arts projects that incorporated video and photography (as I simultaneously taught them how to use each device), which led to the production of a short ethnographic film.³²³³

Although I had already agreed to their requests to employ my resources and time as a vehicle to have their voices heard, and although this presented a great prospect to carry out my own academic research, I was initially resistant to using this opportunity to serve any of my own interests. One could say that I have learned to be über-critical and sensitive to the idea of westerners, especially Americans like myself, conducting research in Africa, and playing into the stereotype of a poverty-voyeur, exploring those places and peoples of obvious or, at best, assumed lesser privilege, earning their

³¹ 'Meisie' is the Afrikaans word for 'girl.'

³² Coincidentally, I was enrolled in a course for visual anthropology and learning to experiment with ethnographic film.

³³ Although this was not a documentary that would reach mass audiences, the participants were aware of my limitations and this was only intended to be part of our experimental phase before co-creating something with the intention of exhibiting.

credentials and pats on the back for contributing to a field of academia that has little to no effect on the actual subjects they researched.³⁴

However, I gradually came to reflect on my hesitations, and reminded myself that while there are serious contentions involved in the politics of research and representation, concerning othering, objectification, exploitation, voyeurism, truths, and consent, research should not heavily focus on the desires or discomforts of the researcher, as it should privilege those topics that highlight the needs and desires of potential subjects. It has been said that “anthropologists may be able to overcome these power relations by framing research questions according to the desires of the oppressed group, by choosing to do work that "others" want and need, by being clear for whom they are writing, and by adopting a feminist political framework that is suspicious of relationships with "others" that include an honest scrutiny of the motivations for research” (Mascia –Less, Cohen, & Sharpe 1989:28). Thus I deliberately turned my attention from the non-viability of ethically approaching research of people on the peripheries by people in positions of power and privilege, to focusing on the possibilities, specifically by conducting research that collaborates with the needs of the subjects. I considered that the unique opportunity that inspired this potential project could "provide the kind of background context for the journey to begin the process of redressing the inequalities, prejudices and tensions that continue to stand in the way of meaningful research on agency in and on Africa and on African agency" (Nyamnjoh, 2007:4).³⁵

It is of great importance that I emphasize that these four persons in essence, chose me as much as I chose them. It is of great relevance because it was this serendipitous scenario marked by our mutual interests, which presented a distinct and valuable methodological opportunity to confront and respond to the criticisms concerning exploitation in research, offering a way that could potentially alleviate research

³⁴ Certainly it is true that this only paints a partial picture of who I really am, but it is relevant, nonetheless and must be acknowledge, disclosed, discussed, questioned, reflected on, if I intend to take my research and my research subjects seriously.

³⁵ Discussion and conceptualisation of agency will be woven throughout this work, and at great length in chapter four.

practices from some of the inherent power differentials present in studies of this kind, as well as others.³⁶

Methodology

As young people who are not only marginalized by society as a result of their subversion of fundamental social norms, i.e. gender and sexuality, but also for their extreme economic impoverishment, and their association with immoral acts like prostitution and stealing, this study proposes research on persons who lay at the most extreme fringes of society. Therefore, the ethical implications are monumental, and certainly require more due diligence than others. In approaching this daunting task, my major objectives were to create a methodology based on a feminist framework, which intended to emphasize, above all else, the autonomy and agency of the subjects.

I presented to the participants an idea of a study that would serve as a collaborative project outlined with these shared goals: a.) to work together to document the participants telling their story, while I collected data that informed my research question, b.) for me to then produce a dissertation for the requirements of my degree, c.) and separate from this assignment, an exhibition of their photography and a documentary that will depict their story as they see it fit to be told.³⁷³⁸

The methods consisted of collecting data primarily through the use of visual devices, incorporating film as the primary instrument of data collection in which the subjects themselves were equally in charge of the recording instruments, all the while engaging with the participants and the field in a non-traditional way by broadening the concept of 'the field' to that which also included the researcher's spaces. The

³⁶ It is important that not only academia or myself benefit from this study, but that the subjects benefit as well. At the same time, I have tended to the importance that participants be fully aware of my limitations and what my research can practically offer.

³⁷ Showcasing of their photography and the completion of the documentary were both set to take place after the submission of this text. I am currently enrolled in a college course for documentary photography to help assist me in this project of exhibiting their photography, combined with my photography of them.

³⁸ Prior to any commencement, in order to be pre-approved for research, a presentation and proposal was submitted by me to the Department of Anthropology for which I was then granted ethical clearance.

objectives of this methodology intended to disrupt the inherent position of power that the researcher generally holds in studies of this kind by creating a research environment characterized by a mutual power dynamic, and by enhancing my own opportunity for reflexivity, thereby hoping to reduce the risk of epistemological violence.

Collecting and recording all data through the instruments of film and photography proved successful in attending to these goals, as it placed the participants in a position to dictate what they felt valuable to document. Not only did this technique allow for greater agentic participation in the study, its primary objective, but it also proved to be a valuable tool for observation from my perspective as the researcher, as it lent insight *directly* from the eyes and perspective of the subjects. Furthermore, it enabled an opportunity to shift the direction of power between the researcher and participants, as it exposed myself, the researcher, in the same way as it did the subjects, giving new meaning to the notion of *participant observation*. I was no longer simply participating and observing *them*, but actually becoming a 'participant' or 'subject' of this study in a very similar way as they.

Furthermore, this proved to be a powerful tool as it involved the subjects in the production of their own image, and therefore challenged the hegemonies of documentation and representation, while enhancing my own opportunity for reflexivity. As the cameras were frequently turned towards me, I not only experienced this gaze reversal, but I was doubly able to re-experience it from a slightly different perspective while reviewing all of the collected visual data. It was through this avenue, having to watch and reflect on myself from the perspective of a third person observer, painfully stumbling over my words at time attempting to articulate myself in a way that others, them, myself, could understand, exposing my own researcher and personal vulnerabilities, tensions, and challenges (thus putting what the subjects must also be experiencing into greater perspective), was a profound exercise and lesson in researcher-reflexivity. One that certainly would not have been achieved through the use of only audio recordings or traditional methods of observation, or had I been in control of the research devices and tools alone.

Another way that I experimented with an innovative approach to methodology that proved successful in disrupting the researcher's position of power and in creating a mutual gaze, was by broadening the field(site) to one which also included my spaces, my social networks, and also my personal life. The methodology was specifically designed with the full intention that I would not only enter into their world, but that I would incorporate them into mine, as well. It would be a grave misconception to believe that I simply entered into their lives, observed them, their daily activities, friends, networks, and spaces frequented. Rather, as I was exposed to their friends and their networks they were also introduced into mine. I assisted them on their daily activities just as they often accommodated me on mine. They took me and showed me places that I otherwise never would have known, as I did the same. They learned about me and my world and my life just as I did theirs. This was intended by me, not as a charitable relationship, but as a result of me believing that as we were coming from drastically different worlds, each party had different things to offer the other.³⁹

Sharing with them my world as they were sharing with me theirs, blurred the distinction between the researcher-subject dichotomy, contributed to the fluidity of our roles as both participant-observers, objects-subjects, and once again, created more of a mutual gaze. Furthermore, this method of engaged anthropology proved especially valuable and successful to my position as a feminist researcher.⁴⁰ I enlisted this research dynamic in an attempt to redirect the unilateral objectifying gaze, to one in which the researcher offered herself up to scrutiny, as she naturally should, being that although I am 'the researcher' I embody something as curious as them, gender-normativity, and it too should not go unquestioned.⁴¹

I shall take this time to inform the reader of the manner in which I have deliberately chosen to engage with the participants of this study, and my way of sharing their

³⁹ Bennet and Pereira rightfully point out that "issues of research methodology in the field of sexuality and gender studies are as challenging and interesting as the findings and new theorisations themselves" (2013:10).

⁴⁰ For more discussion on 'engaged anthropology' and 'collaborative research' see Lassiter (2005) and Aiello (2010).

⁴¹ Certainly, our ethical considerations, challenges, and how we navigate them, as well as whether our strategies prove successful, deserves more than a brief mention in the introduction of our ethnographies. And in a larger dissertation there is much more that I would liked to have included here, however we will return to this subject throughout this piece, discussing topics pertaining to my own identity, preconceptions, discursive production, and reflexivity.

world with the world. The presentation of this text will prove to be a sort of conversation between 'the abstract' and 'the ethnography'. However, the people that I write about are not abstracts or theoretical ideas, and this work is not simply a social-scientific contribution to the ivory tower. This work is about real people, who are also my friends, and it is composed of very personal stories about them. And it is these personal *stories* that can be said to create *a* personal story. It is here that I want to warn the reader of the 'dangers of telling a single story,' as Chiamanda Adichie refers to, not simply as the danger of *telling* a single story, but more so in *hearing* reality in those singular stories told by others. I must warn against interpreting this 'single story', or at best, this multiplicitous 'single story' as *truth*. The only truth or reality here is that these stories that I tell about *them*, are as deeply about *me* than anyone or anything else. And perhaps what we refer to as 'reflexivity' in our field is to simply mean practicing your awareness of just that. Throughout this study I have strived to maintain a conversation not only between the abstract and the ethnography or between the subjects and myself, but between my self and myself. My first soliloquy began with that two-part question, 'Who am I? What am I?'

My Identity as a Sexual and Gendered Self

From the time that I first became acquainted with these persons, and throughout the stages of fieldwork, I was in a relationship with another woman who I lived with and who the participants also knew very well. I do not personally identify myself, however, as 'lesbian,' or 'bisexual,' or 'heterosexual.' It is not that I only *actively* resist putting these labels on myself (although I do), but they also simply and truly do not resonate with me and how I see myself in terms of my own identity. The reason being because I do not subscribe with the very notion of a 'sexuality' all together, in terms of how it defines peoples into categories, rendering them a particular *type* of person based on their arbitrary attraction or love for another person.

However, to personally *not identify*, in terms of this constructed subjective category, is a luxury and a privilege that I experience as a normatively gendered person. Because as I am normatively gendered, I am assumed to be part of the heterosexual class, the privileged standard. Thus, I can *choose* to 'not identify' with these social constructs,

just as a white person can *choose* to not see themselves or be defined in terms of their race, or arguably just as a man can choose not to be reduced to his gender.

As such, to say that I do not identify with the meanings of what I consider to be an arbitrary and oppressive discursive category, is not to say that I have conceived delusions that somehow I am a special *agent* (-pun intended) that is not shaped by these social forces, which certainly pre-exist me. Instead, what I am acknowledging is that I have spent my entire life benefiting from a system that rewards heterosexual normativity, and because I am gender-normative I am generally assumed, treated, and rewarded by the institutions of society as such, regardless of my actual sexual orientation (or lack thereof).⁴²

Discussion of my life experiences, privileged access to femininity, and personal life in connection to the informants is not supplementary, but essential, as "ethnographies and especially ethnographies on identity written from the perspective of a feminist anthropologist/researcher, not should, but must acknowledge the connection/relevance of the life experience of the researcher of the study."⁴³ Furthermore, this disclosure is relevant to our discussions, because it also highlights the unique way that I was able to relate to the participants of this study, and how they related to me. In some ways I was one of them, as I did not fit in neatly within the patriarchal heterosexual matrix. But as I choose not to define myself in these terms (of having a sexual identity), the subjects not only identify, but choose to proudly and publically proclaim that identity through their gendered performances -and vice versa. Thus, unlike myself, as you will hopefully come to understand from this text, their gendering is conversely an embodiment of their sexuality, and in particular, their homosexuality as they conceptualize it.

⁴² I would argue that same-sex attraction, despite one's gender identification, automatically positions one as non-gender normative by Western standards. And while, hetero-normative persons do not realistically only behave and act in ways that are indicative of their gender prescriptions, the defining question is not one of who does or does not act within the boundaries of their socially regulated gender, as those are ambiguous, subjective, and thus problematic distinctions. Rather, it is the degree to which one rejects the gendered norms assigned to their sex, while adopting via performance and identity a gender that is not socially assigned or associated with them at birth, which defines them as gender variant and separates the subjects of this study from other heterosexual and homosexual individuals.

⁴³ Bennet and Pereira posit the question, "How do we orient ourselves as 'researchers' in a field dominated by ideas about sexualities, which are generated in contexts very different than our own?" (2013:3)

Field Days

This dissertation is the product of knowledge I gathered during formal ethnographic fieldwork, as well as informal time spent with the participants prior to the consideration of any research endeavor. During my ten weeks of ethnographic fieldwork I explored how gender and its meanings were articulated, understood, and manifested in the lives of four very special people. Over the course of ten weeks during a Cape Town winter I conducted qualitative research in the form of participant observation and informal open-ended interviews. For those ten weeks and more, we spent mornings, days and evenings together, having lunch, sleeping in the grass, skarreling on the streets, visiting long-missed family members, celebrating holidays and birthdays, photographing people and places, dancing in their favorite juke-box joints, singing at my favorite 'karaoke bar'⁴⁴, playing dress-up, modeling, joyriding around the city in a borrowed car, provoking security guards, bantering with strangers, people watching, window shopping, visiting friends in jail, participating in street protests, and so on. We were often joined on our adventures by mutual friends we have met through one another, and mostly our days and time together were a combination of worlds shared.

Through them I was introduced to the subculture of the *Underworld*, the gritty-ness of drug dependency, crime, violence, pain, fear, sickness, struggle, sadness, but also the bright glimmer of friendships, kinships, conviviality, creativity, culture, humour, hope and survival. I was introduced to that parallel universe made up of those displaced non-citizens of 'my world,' who I would never have had the gift to truly see, otherwise. I am eternally grateful for what they have taught me about their selves and my self, for their camaraderie, their protection, their humour, their warmth and love, their compassion, their excitement and enthusiasm, their insights and wisdom, their efforts and dedication to this study, and their willingness to open their hearts and share their lives with me. What had begun as an unlikely friendship, evolved into my study, my (field-)work, and also my passion, and it forged into something I expect to be an everlasting bond. Our relationship began long before this epic journey, which

⁴⁴ Or a Korean brothel, as it turned out.

has drawn us much closer, and I predict it will continue long past.

Concluding this Chapter

Though I have fulfilled over ten weeks of field research which exceeds the requirements for a masters level thesis project, I by no means view this as an indicator that I have *finalized* or even *satisfied* research on this topic or with these people. Firstly, I recognize that no amount of time could ever be adequate, because, no subject(s) should be thought to represent something static rather than that which is forever evolving, becoming, and unraveling. Furthermore, the nature of this research pertains to the theme of gender as well as its highly complex and long-debated questions that one could only fantasize to have answered via means of such a relatively short field stay, and in such a relatively short word space. In fact the most notable challenge of writing and researching this project was the space constraints, as there are many sub-themes that I would liked to have explored and included in this piece, unfortunately time and word space not permitting, those will be reserved for another project and another day. Perhaps a return to this study, committed to additional months in the field would offer more insight into aspects that I do not have space, nor in my opinion, license to discuss in this first edition. However, what *is* offered is not an *answer* to all the obvious and general questions speculated and demanded of non-gender normative people, but rather a richer understanding of how these particular individuals are constituted by and simultaneously constituting of a gendered notion of personhood. This ethnographic study of how these specific people construct and perform their gender identity can be applied to and offer above all else, a seminal contribution to a greater debate of the relationship of gender, sexuality, and sex in different spaces, cultures, and lives.

CHAPTER III: Contextualizing Question

Throughout the following chapters you will find that there is a heavy emphasis and focus on the theoretics and work of Judith Butler and Michel Foucault. Before we begin to fully immerse ourselves in these works, I would like to acknowledge some of the contributions from those theorists and researchers who may not be as thoroughly or overtly discussed throughout this text, but nonetheless have played a crucial role, not only in foregrounding knowledge within and around these subjects, but also in structuring my approach towards this particular research endeavor. This discussion will also provide a backdrop of the state of affairs in South Africa in regards to the socio-political and academic climate pertaining to the topic of sexuality and gender, reminding us all that the findings of this study and the question itself originates from a larger context, even though we may find ourselves lost in what seems like a very personal and intimate world of a small network of people.

Those who know best the unique context of gender and sexuality studies within South Africa, would certainly be those theorists, researchers, anthropologists, feminist-activists, and ethnographers that have been operating from *this* very space, (and including many of those neighboring African countries and academic institutions). It is not simply due to sheer proximity for which they have earned and are deserving of acknowledgement as such, but because it is their personal work, knowledge, and experience that has taken into account the unique socio-political and historical climate that is South Africa, which could never be replicated or understood in the confines of a sterile laboratory that examines abstract theory under a microscope isolated from any culturally-nuanced context.

It is their work that focuses on issues and questions pertaining to, for example, the overwhelming amount of sexual violence that occurs within this space, and the theorized causes, documented effects, and potential socio-political reforms. It is their feminist objectives and activist agendas that have led some to take on research of these topics in an effort to diminish, if not eradicate, the rampancy of what has been

deemed an apparent 'rape culture.'⁴⁵ Across the continent and especially here in South Africa researchers have also been bombarded with questions concerning the high-rate of HIV and AIDS infection and transmission. This naturally is also often related to studies with a focus on sexuality and gender dynamics, whether pertaining to women's rights -to decline sex or demand use of a condom; sexual networking and mapping -to attempt to understand how and why the virus is spread so quickly, and deciphering the demographics of high-risk populations.⁴⁶

Because of the overwhelming demand and amount of research focused on the epidemic of HIV and the epidemic of sexual violence, research on sexuality and especially homosexuality has been dominated by questions that primarily pertain to these surrounding issues. While this has positively led to a plethora of research on queer populations with a focus on HIV prevention, it has also negatively led to an underrepresentation of studies on queer sexuality that do not pertain to these particular interests. As a result many African theorists (see Bennett, Pereira, and Parker) are hard at work today trying to bring awareness of the gaps and oversaturation of certain foci in regards to academic explorations of and on sexuality in South Africa, arguing for an emphasis on the importance of more research that tackles questions that extend beyond the confines of say HIV transmission. (Bennett & Pereira 2013: 4)

This project is not about AIDS and it is not about violence. However, the studies that have gone into researching these issues in the context of Africa have nonetheless informed this project and specifically the way in which the questions of this project were even necessary to ask.

Although great detail is paid throughout this written work, to the socio-cultural matrices of the participants for which *their* concepts of sex, sexuality, and gender are built around, these people were not created or exist in a vacuum made up of just their own intimate worlds, but in a space that culturally politically and socially is informed

⁴⁵ For additional work on this subject see: Posel 2005, Moffet 2002 & 2006, Stanton 1993, Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes 2008, Wood, Maforah, Jewkes 1996, Stanton, 1993, Jewkes, Dunkle, Koss, Levin, Nduna, Nwabisa & Sikweyiya 2006, Wood, 2005.

⁴⁶ For additional work on this subject see: Varga 1997, Harrison, Cleland, & Frohlich 2008, Stanton 1993, Ramin 2007, Wood, Lambert, & Jewkes 2008, Jewkes, Dunkle, Koss, Levin, Nduna, Nwabisa & Sikweyiya 2006, Kim, Martin, Denny 2003.

in ways that must also be accounted for. This question was formulated and this study was undertaken in the political atmosphere of a *new*, or at least, newly-democratic nation where the rights of people, and *especially* people like them⁴⁷, were grossly restricted and vigilantly policed.⁴⁸ However, with the new constitution promulgated by Nelson Mandela in 1996, South Africa became the first country in the world to constitutionally prohibit discrimination on account of sexual orientation. Also protecting people from discrimination on the basis of "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth," South Africa has been applauded (by some and denounced by others) all over the world for having one of the most progressive constitutions in place. Certainly it is said to be the most 'progressive' in Africa, but even comparatively to other developed nations, it shines as a leader in protecting social and minority rights and has been highly regarded as just what a democratic constitution should resemble.

However this paints only a partial picture of South Africa's state of affairs and actual position on the citizenship rights of queer people. Socially there is a conflicting interplay of attitudes towards the rights of women and queer populations. For instance, South Africa is becoming more and more known by the international public and media as a *sexually-charged* violent nation (or more precisely as a nation made up of sexually charged and violent *blackmen*.⁴⁹) At one point, South Africa depicted an image to the international public consumer of even 'non-sensationalized' media, of a place where baby-rapes were common.⁵⁰ Today it is known as a nation with the

⁴⁷ In terms of their race, class, sexual orientation, etc.

⁴⁸ These rights, or lack thereof, concerned the right to vote, the right to inhabit and move throughout certain areas, the right to marry and have sexual relations with whom one chooses. Not only were interracial relations criminalized, but unsurprisingly intrasex relations, as well.

⁴⁹ Moffett offers an insightful theoretical analysis of rape discourses in South Africa. Examining the politics of rape narratives she suggests that there are 'accepted' narratives, which circulate within South African public and private discourses, as opposed to those which are unaccepted and thus ignored. She discusses what she deems the three narrative models, which the media and private realm perpetuate concerning rape, and one of the common modes of discourse threading throughout these models, as one that implicitly, at best, constructs the phenomenon of rape as a politic of *race* rather than one of *gender*. (for more on this discussion see Moffett's article: "Rape, Race and Rhetoric: Constructing Narratives of Sexual Violence in South Africa")

⁵⁰ Posel argues that the explosion of discourse and media coverage of rape (especially the most shocking and grotesque forms of rape: i.e. baby-rape) since apartheid, is neither a result of feminist lobbying or an increase in this particular form of violence. Rather she equates this public pre-occupation and outrage to the way in which the nation perceived the problem as a reflection of the new state's overall moral compass and direction. (2005: 248).

highest rate of sexual violence for any nation not at war, and the public discourse within South Africa has also become more and more enmeshed in the consumption and circulation of false 'rape narratives.' (Moffett 2002). And today South Africa is also a place where especially lesbian women are regularly targeted for gang-rapes, brutal beatings, torture, and murder, all in what the public discourse has deemed 'corrective rape.'⁵¹

By the same token, Cape Town is considered the queer-capital of Africa and has a flourishing LGBT tourism economy. There is historical record of a strong gay subculture presence that was found and respected throughout the working-class Colouredmuslim and Christian communities, one that continue to exist today in different forms, and for which the participants of this study are also considered to be a part of (this will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). And even the countries most respected religious leader, the Archbishop Desmond Tutu, advocates for gay rights and gay marriage. Thus there are many sides and facets within South African society that speak to different colours of this spectrum that is the *Rainbow Nation*. I certainly could not begin to account for the infinite cultures, spaces, and contexts within South Africa for which the participants in this study, who do fall under the social and politicized umbrella category of *queer*, are produced within and also affecting of. However the acknowledgement and work that has been done on these issues that may not be directly addressed in this piece, is not irrelevant to my work here.

⁵¹ I take great issue with the circulation and application of this term 'corrective rape' as I feel its connotation and denotation is not only problematic but dangerous, and only perpetuates those rape myths that imply the victim to be at fault. I would argue that, this is reminiscent of Moffett's criticism of that rape narrative model which she coins the 'breast cancer' model, as it is a "metaphor for the way public narratives talk about rape as if it is not a crime, but something bad that happens to women's bodies, through either their own risk-taking behaviour, lack of vigilance, or sheer bad luck" (Moffett: 4) The common theme of each public narrative, as Moffett asserts, is how it deflects attention and fault from the rapist and displaces responsibility onto the victim. This undeniable trend is revealed by analyzing the syntax of rhetoric read and heard in public discussions and media reporting on rape. As Moffett points out, when rape is spoken of, it is done so in a way that positions the woman as the subject of the sentence and entirely excludes the rapist. For example, 'a woman was raped today' rather than 'a man raped a woman today' or 'a number of rapes were committed today' rather than 'a number of men committed rapes today' or 'a *lesbian* woman was the victim of 'corrective-rape' (or even worse 'curative rape' as it is also referred to) (Moffett, 2002:7). As if the perpetrator only had good intentions (to cure or to heal) rather than simply to punish. Which I would argue is what most rape is essentially about.

African theorists, Jane Bennett and Charmaine Pereira have co-authored work as well as co-edited a collection of writing by other African researchers speaking to the challenge of feminist qualitative research in Africa. What is repeatedly emphasized throughout is a call to demand and produce more and more research on gender and sexuality in Africa that tackles questions beyond the interest of HIV transmission, rape, violence, marginalization, victimhood, or what is pointed out to be a discourse of and on 'issues.' The suggestion is not that these questions and concerns should be disregarded or faded out, but that this restrictive focus counter-productively perpetuates the victimization of these minority groups by only framing their vast and infinite array of experiences and realities into these boxes constantly labeling them as victims or as perpetrators of social 'issues'. Thus it is not the questions themselves, but the restriction to them that is problematic and contributing to a widening gap in the literature. Also talk about putting discussions about the process of research on par with the findings of research. (Bennet& Pereira 2013).

Another crucial but generally ignored topic for discussion for which has inspired these African feminist writers to publish work on concerns specifically "the 'hows' of feminist engagements with methodology." And the need to start taking the way in which we conduct research, and discussions and theorizing of our research methodologies, as serious as the findings themselves. Bennet and Pereira quote Tamale to highlight and re-assert her argument that "a good sexuality research project does not view methodology as a mere appendage"...or a "way of carrying out an enquiry" (Tamale 2011: 29) and argues that researching and theorizing sexualities beyond the tired polemics of violence, disease and reproduction and exploring layered complexities beyond heterosexual normativity and moral boundaries will lead to fresh conceptual insights and paradigm shift." (Tamale 2011:30 as quoted in Bennet& Pereira 2013: 7)

It is primarily the works of these African feminist researchers and theorists that have inspired me to focus on the research question put forward in this project, one that draws attention to the power and authority of these persons to self-create, how *they* self-determine and construct an identity for themselves (although not without challenges); one that speaks to the demand for research to move away from discussions of victimhood, and focuses also on agency and choice, and perhaps

smiling rather than suffering. Furthermore, it is these African Feminist writing, ethnographers, activists who have inspired not only my topic of investigation and my knowledge of it, but also my process of investigating it, as I have assigned great significance to the process of developing and carrying out a feminist methodology. It is thus one that experiments and tweaks conventional approaches of conducting ethnographic research to one which broadens the concept of the fieldsite and essentially attempts to deconstruct the implied and assumed limits and boundaries in (feminist) research relationships. Where often times, the academic is also personal.⁵²⁵³

⁵² This is a reference to the often cited radical feminist slogan coined in the 1970's, which reiterated that 'the personal is political'.

⁵³ Some of the people mentioned here and recognized in the academic and feminist communities within South Africa as leading ethnographers, activists, and knowledge producers and/or my reference of their work (including that and those who I also did not have space to discuss), are also people I have come to know personally. Persons who have taught me, some who I have worked alongside, and some who I have since forged friendships with through the engagement of my academic work, as well as my activism outside academia. They and many more have all inspired this work either indirectly through the academic and/or activist work they have done, the knowledge they have produced and imparted on me, and the significant contributions they have made not only to the literature, the field, but the overall social political and academic climate and discussions of sexual and gender politics in South Africa. For this I am inspired, indebted, and grateful to them all. (Included among these are Jane Bennet, Zanele Muholi, Patricia Henderson, Divine Fuh, Francis Nyamnjoh, Fiona Ross, and many others who I have not mentioned.)

CHAPTER IV: The Subjectivities of the Informants

A: Did you always feel like a woman or a girl inside?

D: A little girl, ja. I always felt like it. Back in the days, I'd always put on fancy dresses, I will take that onion bags, the red onion bags, put them over my head and plait it like both sides here (motions to hair) for long hair. (Laughs) And I would dance in front of the flat where I live! It was always in me, when I was younger.

A: When did you first start to become like a girl?

D: When I was in my..last...in grade....in grade seven. My last year in primary school.

A: Did you know before that that you wanted to be a woman?

D: I wouldn't say so. But kinda like.

A: Did you experience sexual attraction for other boys before you realized you were really drawn to being a woman or being a girl?

D: Nope.

A: So you were drawn to being a woman before you were attracted to boys?

D: Uh huh.

A: In what way?

D: (Laughing) Hmm...I used to dress up in my mother's clothes when she wasn't home. And I would dress up and model in the house, up and down with her clothes and shoes.

A: How old were you?

D: I was say nine years old or eight years old. And in front of our flat we use to dance and parade on and on like aunties. I was always the mother and my other friend was the daddy and then we had kids. Then Coco...was the mother too. We were like two neighbours that lived next to each other, and then my husband comes home and her husband comes home from work. (laughs)

A: Do you think that even if you were straight would you still feel that way? Like a woman?

D: Yep.

C: (laughs) Remember when we use to play with the sand and make cakes, with the water and the sand and mix it, like frikadelles? We'd make frikadelles!

A: Did you ever play 'boy-games'?

D: What do you mean?

A: I dont know, what do boys do?

D: Like cars? No..Ididn't believe in that. I was too busy painting my nails.

C: I use to steal my sister's panties.

A: (laughs) Did she know?

C: Only when she wake up in the bed and I had pissed her panties! (Laughs).

(separate conversation)

A: Nikita, when did you start dressing like a woman?

N: Ever since I...how can I say? Ever since I realized that I am gay. And that happens to be when I was ten years old, and I decided to wear girl clothes. And when I use to be younger than ten, I use to model with my cousins and when I lose, I always throw them with stones. Because I always wanted to be the queen (everyone laughs) and if I can't be the queen, then *nobody's* gonna be a queen! Then I I'd throw them with stones and they use to go cry by their mothers, and say, 'Oooh this is gonna be a moffie!' This is a-this is a- *realmoffie!*' (laughs)

L: (interjects) My aunt use to said I'm gonna be moffie. My mother use to say, no don't say that! (Laughs).

N: From there..things worked out that I'm a real woman, you know. (smiles)

The questions that typically seemed to spark people's interests concerning my research of these gender -variant individuals revolve around the '*When, why, and how* did the actualization of a gender contrary to conventional norms develop in these people's lives?', whilst the assumption about the answer to these questions almost always revolved around their sexuality. Although it was never my objective to seek out an explanation or the causality for the subjects' alternate gendering, I did initially also feel curious about whether there were in fact 'answers' to some of these questions. I naturally took into account 'the obvious,' and questioned the possibility of a causal or correlative relationship between the informants' sexualities and the development of their atypical gendering. I based my ideas on the hypothesis that if male same-sex attraction socially positions one as effeminate (as it does in certain cultural spaces), while it certainly does not follow that every homosexual male is made or makes himself into a woman, the phenomenon of gender variance in such cases could reflect one of the many ways humans may come to internalize and negotiate their normative regulations. However, as I learned early on and as the

preceding conversations indicate, the informants maintained that 'we were born like this' or 'it's inside of us,' often describing their association with the feminine gender as occurring prior to the manifestation of their sexuality.⁵⁴

And thus furthermore, as these conversations suggest that the subjects' gendered identities manifested prior and distinctly to their sexual identities, the implication seems to be that the subjects were in fact '*born like this*' in relation to their gendered identities. This could lead us to conclude that the prevailing theoretical perspective that gender is socio-historically and culturally constructed is in fact false! But, before all contemporary gender theorists commit mass suicide and jump from a cliff of self-penned books and articles, let us consider that there are alternative readings of these narratives, not for the purposes of challenging or scrutinizing the informants' self-reflections as a way to uncover "truths," but for the purposes of drawing us to examine more closely how these experiences, that we have uncritically been referring to as "gender" and "sexuality," inform notions of identity.

One alternative interpretation of these narratives is to consider the possibility that individuals of a society are born *into* a gender, rather than *with* a gender—just as one may be born into a pre-existing system of religion or language, rather than possessing these. And while it is also known that individuals are born with genetically-inclined characteristics and personality attributes which could render one naturally better-suited for the norms and roles associated with constructed ideas of either gender, we could begin to understand how *alwayshaving 'felt like a woman,'* does not necessarily lead us to the conclusion that one was *born with* an innate association or sense of *Gender*.

But while we could speculate and theorize that the informants' social behaviour and the way they reflect on it may emically and etically diverge, the point is not to assign a meta-narrative as to how or why their gender came to be as it did. Firstly, even if there are 'answers' to these questions, this is an area that leaves something to be desired in terms of ethnographic evidence that could only be rendered through further

⁵⁴ Note that it is according to them that they are associated and identify with the feminine gender, and it is also how *they* define 'feminine', and hence this assertion is not to be mistaken as my third-party imposition.

research, *if* at all. There are in fact epistemic limits that may be beyond not only the researcher's capacity to understand but also the agents', as there is "always a dimension of ourselves and our relation to others that we cannot know, and this not-knowing persists with us as a condition of existence and, indeed, of survivability" (Butler, 2004:13). And secondly, this project does not pertain to the question of what caused or contributed to these individuals wanting to live as women (an assumption that must first be interrogated, lest we forget!) Rather the heart of this study pertains more precisely to the subjects' ways of self-seeing and self-fashioning.

Rather, in order to grapple with the question of this project, as well as expound on what these ethnographic findings may offer gender-theorizing beyond the specific context of this question, we must begin not by interrogating the "cause" or origin of the subjects' genders and sexualities, but by challenging the epistemological concepts embedded in those theoretical perspectives where a question of such a concern could even be formulated. Otherwise, in a theoretical sense, there is potential that the integral question of this project proves fundamentally paradoxical to its objective of deconstructing the phenomenon of gender. Attempting to draw conclusions about an assumed experience and its relationship to the self and to other categorical subjectivities, is prefaced on the assumption that a gendered identity is in fact an unimagined and distinct category of experience. And furthermore, that these other categories of subjectivity are in fact universal facets of human experience, which can be neatly compartmentalized and clarified along such seemingly -distinct but arbitrary lines rhetorically defined as 'sexuality,' 'gender,' and 'sex'.

The remainder of this chapter will serve to problematize trends in gender theorizing and researching with the intention of confronting and re-examining those discourses, circulated even by academic scholars, that perpetuate imaginary distinctions, universals, and categories of identification, in order to re-consider how particular focus on assumed facets of the social being's experience have affected theorizing of personhood and identity. This chapter will also introduce us to an analysis of the *meanings and makings* of 'gender' and 'sexuality,' within the context of this particular social world in which reside Donnazita, Nikita, Coco, Lolly, Lee, and Jennifer, so as to elucidate (in the following chapter) what can be deduced about the relationship of identity to performance. And finally this section of this text, will begin

to illuminate how these ethnographic findings offer not only a contextual perspective of these people's lives, but can be applied to our knowledge of the widely-debated intrinsic question of '*What is gender?*'

Let us begin with a brief synopsis of the evolution of gender studies and its theoretical perspectives, as a basis for understanding the discussions throughout this text of how gender theory informs and is informed by anthropological scholarship and methods.

An Abridged Overview of the History and Development of Gender Theory

In the late 1960s and throughout the early 1970s an anthropology of women evolved in accord with the 'women's movement' and in response to the literature void of ethnographies focusing on the experiences of women. Shortly thereafter came a development in feminist discourses, which firmly established the distinction between notions of 'sex' and 'gender' – or between those understood as biological differences and those now understood as simply socially-ascribed differences. From this moment, the anthropology of gender made its mark and in the 1970s and 1980s was dominated by questions concerning the universality and origin of patriarchy. The field quickly took on a *structuralist* approach, which was premised on the idea that the mind and society are organized into universal binary structures, and thus it was regarded that the division of people into sexed dichotomies was necessary for the functioning of society, and also, therefore, was natural and inevitable. By the early 1980s this position would fall out of use due to its problematic disregard for the agency and self-determination of individuals to autonomously interact and alter their environment, paving way for the next theoretical movement, *essentialism*, to take hold. The quintessential premise of this school is grounded in the belief that men and women have universally distinct and innate characteristics or essences that exist independent of social conditioning. And while essentialism, too, would come to be highly contested, it would not, however, be completely succeeded. But the following theoretical movement, known as *post-structuralism*, would become the essentialist's harshest opponent and would mark the most drastic shift in gender theory since its conception in the late 1960s. (Butler 1990, Foucault 1976, Mascia-Lees and Johnson Black 2000, Marini 1990, Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994).

Emerging as an anti-essentialist response to structuralism, the post-structuralist movement is characterized today, alongside post-modernism, as being the most advanced and contemporary development in gender theoretics. This particular school is noted for its incessant questioning of what it means to be a 'man' or a 'woman,' and even 'male' or 'female,' contesting the essentialist position of viewing these categories as pre-discursive facts, arguing that just as gender is not a pre-discursive category, neither is the sexed body! It is theorized that even sex difference is constructed as a function to create two sexual divisions, most likely as a means of organizing humans reproductively. And from this it is gender, which is said not to be the effect of sex. rather *the very notion of sex is said to be an ideological effect of gender.* (Butler 1990, Foucault 1976, Mascia-Lees and Johnson Black 2000, Marini 1990, Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994).⁵⁵

Aside from a radical inversion of the gender-sex distinction, post-structuralism contrasts earlier theoretical trends by positing gender as a processual, context-dependent relation or set of relations, rather than a fixed structure. It critiques the implicit point of analysis within feminism being that of the 'woman,' and thus renounces this approach as essentialist. It also transfers the focus of gender analysis from sameness and solidarity to differences within gender categories, emphasizing intra-cultural comparisons more than cross-cultural. This post-modern perspective also confronts our methods as researchers, questioning the ability to represent the 'Other' objectively and without violence, and even whether or not we can ontologically approach the phenomenon of 'gender identity', as though persons can be de-contextualized, and specific identities can be extracted from other subjective experiences and social forces (such as race, class, sexuality, and so on.) (Butler 1990, Foucault 1976, Mascia-Lees and Johnson Black 2000, Marini 1990, Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994).

⁵⁵ Though this position argues that the notion of biological sex is also the product of social constructioning, it is not denying that there are visible and tangible anatomical differences in genitalia among males and females. Rather the arguments center on how different body parts have been arbitrarily used to define categories of division and identification among humans.

In the train of post-modernism and post-structuralism, the theoretical material that I draw on throughout this text is primarily that of Foucauldian and Butlerian analytics. Although I do not consider it important to define and label my approach, it is important and rightful to acknowledge that I draw primarily from these positions, not because they represent the most fashionable theoretical fad or the most contemporary, but because the ethnographic findings gathered and interpreted from this study prove to pertain to these particular perspectives and debates of gender, sex, and sexuality in the most apropos way. Furthermore, it can be said that I enlist a characteristically post-modern and post-structuralist approach to identity-based gender research in that I aim relentlessly and continuously to deconstruct and challenge these concepts, to which I shall devote the remainder of this chapter.

Am I a gender after all? And do I "have" a sexuality?

"We try to speak in ordinary ways about these matters, stating our gender, disclosing our sexuality, but we are, quite inadvertently, caught up in ontological thickets and epistemological quandaries. Am I a gender after all? And do I "have" a sexuality?" (Butler, 2004: 16).

Drawing from the aforementioned post-structuralist perspectives, I would argue that if *gender* is seen as a way of organizing humans reproductively by constructing the notion of a dual *sex* division from what otherwise would be arbitrary body parts, then no concept of a *sexualidentity* could exist without this construction, as sexuality is based on the premise that there are categories of sex to which we belong and desire to belong. Thus, considering the complex and inter-subjective relationships of these phenomena according to this perspective, is it then beneficial to distinguish between the said categories in the realm of theorizing identity, as if to imply that social scientists do not also perpetuate the idea that these subjectivities are what they *appear* to be, ontologically distinct? Let us then consider the validity of these most current theoretical perspectives in the light of recent academic literature and the findings of this ethnographic project. We shall begin now with an introduction into our analysis and description of the informants' subjectivities, which will be further explored and elaborated in each chapter to come.

"We are gay...women."

K: Can you describe how an evening out on the streets, like to get clients...
Basically...how does it work.? What is the group dynamic? Do you move with a lot
of...?' (pauses before being interrupted).⁵⁶

Lee: .Gay people?

K: Gay people.

Lee: No, man..then the man is going to discover you as being a gay woman. Men
think I'm a lady. Can't you see?" (She grins mischievously)

If one were assigned as I am here, or more precisely as I have assigned myself to do
in this relatively compact space familiarly known as a thesis, to attempt to convey a
thick description and analysis, (but one that could nonetheless still only and always be
overly-simplistic), of the informants' modes of identifying in reference to ideas of
gender, sex, and sexuality as gathered in this study, it would begin as follows.

They are Gay(s). The subjects of this study identify and self-reference individually as
'gay'; this is not to be mistaken for a term denoting an ambiguously-sexed
homosexual, but specifically the male-assigned reference of a homosexual person.
They are homosexual and specifically *gay*, not because they have sex or an attraction
to those of the same sex, but primarily because they as individuals take on the
femininely -gendered role of being penetrated during sex, *whilst being male*. This role
inverts the expectations of what a 'straight' man is thought to enjoy and perform
during sex, and thus they are rendered and render themselves *gay*.

They are women, or 'like women'. The subjects *also* identify as 'women' or
'likewomen' because in terms of sexual behavior, while they are penetrated during
sex, this not only *inverts the role of aman* but simultaneously *fulfills the role of
thewoman*.⁵⁷ The subjects are situated as women not only for this particularly -

⁵⁶ 'K' represents Kieron Jina, a friend of mine who is a performance art lecturer and who is gay, but is not a gay woman. This conversation took place among all of us.

⁵⁷ As it is defined in this gender-sex-sexual identity paradigm, 'man' can only be equivalent to a *straight male*.

gendered sex role, but also for other ways they exemplify or perform gender scripts in terms of sexual desire, being that they only desire *straight* men (as the following section will demonstrate in full narrative form). Thus again, they fulfill the expectation and role of a 'woman'. (While they also become and fashion themselves into gay women via other means, this synopsis merely offers an introduction into what will be more thoroughly discussed in each chapter to come.)

They are Moffies. While I attempt to define the reality of these individuals in terms describing them as 'women who are also gays',⁵⁸ I acknowledge that perhaps there already exists semantically and socially an identity that encapsulates this reality more appropriately and affectively. Perhaps one that encompasses, but is also more adequate than the drawn out description of 'those male-bodied persons who behave and look pheno-typically feminine, and refer to themselves as 'girls,' but who can still acknowledge their subjectivity as 'gays', and may still employ the use of masculine pronouns to refer to one another;' and perhaps that translation, in the South African context, would be better termed '*Moffie*'.

Moffie

J: Moffie? I'd say... a man that dresses like women.

L: It means faggot, faggot means gay, gay means transves, transves means all the moffies!

'Moffie' is a slang Afrikaans word used to refer to a gay male that displays feminine tendencies. While it is generally considered derogatory, the connotation however, is not always offensive and is even bestowed and received honourably by those who have long since appropriated its use. Although the term is also used among those who identify as white South Africans, generally to refer to 'fags' or 'queers' of any racial distinction, its positive appropriation and the subculture that is said to have evolved through certain signifying characteristics of the original appropriators is generally

⁵⁸ The terms 'woman', 'gay', and 'moffie' are of course all problematic. Not only is there no universal meaning for these concepts, they are simultaneously loaded with pre-imbued meanings in almost any context. However, while often times the use of these ambiguous and problematic terms substitutes a definition of what is meant by them, conversely throughout this piece you will find that the labels themselves are not important. Rather the significance lies in what is meant by them, which is articulated in-depth.

associated with Afrikaans-speaking gay males within the working-class racially designated 'Coloured' communities' of the Western Cape. It was personally retold to me (by some of those who inhabited these socio-cultural spaces during these times), as well as documented from as far back as the mid-1950s, that a moffie subculture, known as *Moffiedom*, evolved into having a distinct cultural presence within these areas.⁵⁹ Described even today as a culture associated with those effeminate openly-gay males, who not only self-identify as 'moffies', but are characteristically style-oriented, flamboyant, 'funtabulous', proud, and even creators of their own argot language –once known as Moffital, and now more familiarly known as Gayle.⁶⁰⁶¹

Let me say that I have deliberately trod lightly here in this mention of a moffie subculture, as I recognize the problematics of attempting to describe the characteristics of a particular 'subculture' without first tending to the necessary task of interrogating what we can possibly mean when we define or label something as such. However, I do not tackle this question nor substantiate this notion of a moffie subculture or moffie identity, as the scope of this study aims only to represent these specific individuals and not a wider culture, if it so exists. Thus while I simply deem it relevant to acknowledge here the *possibility* that their identity *may* be reflective of something that fits into a broader understanding of a particular collective identity, one that already has an established social and semantic space, I must remind the reader that the objective of this thesis is to *describe* the complex ways the subjects see themselves and how they are the agents of this seeing, but it is not to *name* it, and certainly not to make generalizations of those who also subscribe to these labels. Furthermore, the intentions of this study would be contradicted by the assumption that

⁵⁹ 'Distinct' not in terms of *bounded*, as this notion of 'communities', 'societies', and 'cultures' is undoubtedly problematic, however what is meant here is in terms of its evident recognition and acknowledgement.

⁶⁰ 'Funtabulous' is Tamara's description; an informant and a friend of the subjects, who also identifies as 'moffie'.

⁶¹ A 'moffiedom' influence was especially prevalent in those culturally and historically rich areas of Cape Town such as District Six, (which interestingly is not far from where the participants currently roam and reside) where there is a well-documented history of the distinguished roles that these personalities played in the communities- as salon owners, artists, stylists, cosmeticians, dancers, and entertainers. And perhaps it is for these reasons, their prominent professional contributions, which were eminent to these working-class societies, that moffies were notably respected rather than shunned for their non-conformity. One could also speculate that their presence was doubly valued, because as they were often associated with different forms of artistry and entertainment, they undoubtedly contributed significantly to the conviviality necessary to surviving the hardships wrought by apartheid.

a 'moffie identity' does exist or should be tackled, before we have first sufficiently attempted to understand the specific nuanced identities of those that are said to belong to this supposed collectivity.

In either way, I would also be inclined to say that the actual concept of a *Moffie* as it has evolved and is mostly used among the Afrikaans-speaking 'Coloured' population, names that which cannot be simply or adequately translated into another language, unless that language also provides a thick cultural description of that discursive framework for which these meanings and persons are produced, just as this ethnography strives to do. To demonstrate what is meant by this, let us consider the obvious questions to be posed next: 'What is the gendering of a 'moffie'?' or more specifically, 'Is this notion of "moffie" designated to be a "he" or a "she"?' And while it would be overly simplistic to give any definitive answer to that question, I do recall an anecdote that I believe draws out a more fruitful discussion around this question, which also relates more precisely to the objective of this project.

"She cannot use the women's bathroom!"

When Coco took a stand in the shopping mall demanding to be able to use the women's bathroom, she was accosted by several security guards, brought to a back room, and threatened with arrest. On behalf of Coco's brave stance, as we attempted damage control only to dissuade them from carrying out their threats, it was explained to me repeatedly by one of several security guards that 'she cannot use the women's bathroom.' The striking implication of that statement, of course, was that while the explicit message was that this person was not entitled to use the gender-coded bathroom, the choice of gender-coded pronouns embedded within his statement contradicted the statement itself. It is also commonly known that if another does not perceive one in the same gendered terms as that which one perceives self, it takes considerable and conscious effort in order to shift the way in which to address and reference said person. For this reason, I am inclined to regard the guard's seemingly natural proclivity to default to the use of the feminine pronoun, as suggesting either that he actually held a view of Coco's personhood contradictory to the one he was expressing (claiming that she was not a woman, and therefore did not belong to the appropriate gender to use that particular bathroom, all the while simultaneously

affirming that 'she' did belong to the appropriate gender.) Or it could simply be a sense of incomprehension or confusion that is reflected in the Other's frequent inconsistent application or treatment of these individuals as sometimes a 'she,' sometimes a 'he' and sometimes both. And perhaps this stems from the fact that South Africa, like many other post-colonial inter-culturally diverse spaces, is composed of individuals and groups holding a multitude of beliefs and attitudes towards gender and sexuality, and less obviously, also different conceptions of what 'sexuality' and 'gender' means and how it is made.⁶²

However, on the other hand, we know that while the subjects also prefer to be addressed with feminine pronouns, they too inconsistently refer to one another with the use of masculine pronouns. But yet again, maybe it is that very interplay of such diverse cultural perspectives embedded within one society, and specifically South African society, which may also be responsible for the inconsistent, "conflicting" narratives and unfixed identities expressed by these very persons and those alike, who do not fulfill the requirements of being represented in the dominant sector of society, but rather are considered abnormal and thus disengaged from those privileges of being legitimated, recognizable, and understood.

Or let us imagine, rather, that these seeming 'contradictions' of adopting feminine names and self-referencing as girls, while also employing inconsistent gendered terms like 'he', does *not* inevitably suggest contradiction, confusion, dishonesty, or disillusionment on account of the subjects, or on the part of those such as the security guard (who in all fairness may not have had much choice if he wanted to keep his job). Let us consider that these 'inconsistencies' may illustrate instead just how notions of gender are not as black and white as we assume them to be, and more nuanced and culturally contingent than even anthropologists claim to understand. It just might be that the only contradiction lies in *our*, or the Other's (and even the

⁶² This theme is also depicted by Don Kulick in his ethnography, *Travesti: Sex, Gender, and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes* when he speaks about the influences of Western constructions of gender and sexuality on Brazilian cultural understandings of gender and sexuality, which were signified not by the *biological sex* of the sexing persons, but by the *role* individuals play during those sexual acts; and how this combination has now created a contradictory reality where the boyfriends of Travestis (Brazilian transgender prostitutes) are *not gay*, yet *are gay*.

anthropologist's), concept of what it means to be a coherently gendered person. And this is where a different discourse, *our* discourse, the intellectual and academic discourse, must come under scrutiny.

'Transgender' and 'Third Gender' Discourses

'A transgender is a man transformed into a woman. But a transgender goes for a straight man and gays go for other gays' - Donnazita

The field of anthropology is continuing to make headway in gathering information concerning a population that has been historically misunderstood and under-represented, and as this project strives to add to that contribution, it would not be likely to do so if this ethnography did not also challenge those problematic trends in gender theorizing and ethnographing, which prove antithetical to the cause. In doing so, I would like to bring into question whether it is valuable or valid to categorize identities or to define certain phenomena distinctly, yet ambiguously, within the ideological terms of "gender" and/or "sexuality," or within de-contextualized umbrella categories, presupposing that these collectivities do in fact pre-exist prior to the effects of their discursive creation.

Evidence of these very trends in formulating academic thought of gender variance is noted in Don Kulick's study of 'transgendered' Brazilian prostitutes, otherwise known as *travestis*. He states that 'in an academic context where ideas about thirdness are increasingly popular, it is interesting to note that such language appears to be absent among Salvadoreantravestis' (1999: 226). He continues explaining that 'the suggestion that they might constitute a third gender or third sex is not something I have ever heard any of them speculate about amongst themselves' (1999: 226). Kulick's assertion parallels the findings of this study as well, in that the subjects never articulated a sense of 'thirdness' with regard to how they viewed their sexual, sexed, or gendered subjectivities. Contrariwise, the formation of their identities is consistent with a discourse based on a binary code of gender, although the fundamental distinction is that the binary for which their subjectivities are organized is not centred around the axis of sex (as we will come to understand in the following chapter.) (Kulick, 1999)

While Kulick critiques this notion of 'thirdness' in academic interpretations of gender variance, David Valentine approaches the discussion from a slightly different angle, focusing on the category of 'transgender.' In *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*, Valentine traces the evolution of the social and political category of transgender, revealing how it originated and was instituted not by the actual peoples it is thought to represent, but by others, or specifically gender normative homosexuals in the process of politically mobilizing and lobbying for citizenship rights. Valentine's portrayal of how this category began as an imaginary that constituted its reality speaks also to the dangers of discursive creations in identity-based research of gender-variant peoples, and of creating fictional 'communities' based on ideas of imagined similarities, or as Kulick's study demonstrated, ideas of imagined differences. Essentially, the process of conglomerating diversity on account of how it differs from that which is recognized as dominant in a western ideological space into one category, 'transgender' or 'third gender,' simultaneously and dangerously produces alterity while it falsely homogenizes difference. (Valentine 2007, Kulick 1999)

The epistemological danger that lies in creating an imaginary identity category that is not reflective of the ways in which the said persons experience or relate to themselves (-'them' being the problematic term, for who is *them*?) is also illustrated within the ethnographic accounts of these very subjects. Because while the notion of 'transgender' is generally regarded in the literature as a category of *gender*, according to the informants who have also come to self-reference in such a way, it is in their words that 'a transgender is a man transformed into a woman. But a transgender goes for a straight man and gays go for other gays.' Thus, if to be transgender, as defined here, is not only indicative of a person with a particular gendering, but also a person with a particular sexual preference, if we are to insist on regarding this notion of 'sexuality' as a real, distinct, and tangible category, in certain contexts we should view, as they do, and analyze transgender, their transgender, not only as a possible 'gender', (as it is usually defined) but indicative of a particular 'sexuality.' However the phenomenon known as 'transgender' is not generally treated this way in the literature that focuses on it as primarily a 'third *gender*.'

Additionally, it should be noted that their erotic desires or 'sexuality,' if we will, is not actually defined only in terms of sex-specificity, but is also gender-and sexuality-specific; as they have stated, they desire, quite strictly, *straight men*. This again brings into question why in academia we have accepted the parameters of these terms and concepts circumscribing social experience, such as 'sexuality', to be arbitrarily pre-defined simply and narrowly by the *sex or gender* of those which one desires? I am not suggesting that we continue to construct false categories. On the contrary, I am arguing that 'sexuality is not easily summarized or unified through categorizations,' and thus we should not treat it as though it is (Butler, 2004:37). Furthermore, we must be careful in trying to understand these experiences and terms so that we do not confuse the power-embedded force of their linguistic and discursive functions with that of how they actually exist and function. And though we must honor the subjects' self-narrative of how they self-narrate, we must not underestimate the powerful regulatory discourse, which functions to disguise the experience of certain constructions as natural, and certain imaginaries as real, especially to those that are living them (which is quite true of every one of us).

For instance, while Donnazita recalls identifying with her gender distinctly and prior to her sexuality, in her anecdote about playing House part of her desire to be a woman included having a husband, thus complicating this idea that a gender identity was entirely separate from any notion of a sexual identity (even as she understands it). I draw this point, not to cry 'false-consciousness!', but in order to demonstrate that these concepts, categories, and abstractions are possibly imagined as distinct, and in these restrictive terms, lend very little to our understanding of human wholeness. Thus if we are going to discover and create more constructive ways of approaching the phenomenon of gendering from a research perspective, it must begin with a re-examination of our own rhetoric and discourses as academics, theorists, and ethnographers.

To return to where we began in this chapter, with a brief exploration of that common question concerning whether it can be said that the informants' sexual identities caused their gendered identities, the faulty logic first proves to be in assuming that these concepts are unimagined and the experiences are factually distinct from one another, (enough that they can even be hypothesized to be in a causal or non-causal

relationship.) But as this chapter concludes its discussion about the problematics of gender theorizing and research, the argument does not, however, contradict the overall theme of this work, which is undeniably still *gender*. Rather, such analysis is critical to the primary objective of this project, because while broadly this study is an interrogation of how gender is manifested and expressed in the social lives and becoming of these four persons, this project is more than an interrogation of the relationship these subjects have to their gender; it is simultaneously an interrogation of what, if anything, gender is?

What does it actually mean to identify with a gender?

When asked how it is that the informants initially knew or felt an association with their gendered identity, they recount desires to play particular games, enjoy certain styles of clothing, perform certain roles, and hold certain sexual interests. But when they report that they 'always felt like girls' because they enjoyed a certain style of clothing and role play, we must first ask under what conditions and how it is that the desires to play certain games or admiring and modeling ones' body in a particular type of dress, provides evidence for the being of or belonging to a gender? When questioned what it is that draws them to the female gender, they cite a woman's "sense of humour, class, diva-ness attitude, sophistication" and simply "I like to be treated like a 'lady.'" Yet the "characteristics of all these replies is that 'woman' is spoken of in terms of her appearance, her behaviours (buying "only the best"), and, consistently, her relationship to men" (Kulick, 1999: 93). The informants never reported *physically* feeling female, expressing desire to alter their sex, or even do away with any of the anatomically-male physical signs of their body (with the exception of facial hair). Rather everything for which they associate their natural feelings of womanhood relate only to those things that are deemed to mean feminine in a *cultural* context. And so how can we conceive and understand what gender is and how it is experienced outside these social meanings? Perhaps we cannot. And perhaps that is the question and the answer that leads us to consider that the informants "are not simply giving evidence of internal states, but performing certain kinds of actions, and even engaging practices, practices that turn out to be the making of gender itself" (Butler, 2004:98).

Drawing on ethnographic data in the form of narratives, which speak to the topic of performance and identity, the following chapter will continue where we left off expanding this ontological and epistemological analysis of gender identity, interrogating and challenging the notion that identity is a subjectivity that pre-exists as an inner sense of self, rather than that which is externally constituted through acts and discursive powers. This discussion will shed practical light onto the highly abstract and theoretical position of gender studies most prominent theory, and provide the knowledge and theoretical pre-requisites to understanding what role the informants play in the agentive constructioning of their selves.

CHAPTER VI: Performativity

Performativity Theory

Arguably the most prominent and influential contemporary perspective on gender is that which is grounded in philosophies of language, post-structuralist theories of the body, and Foucauldian analytics, and is accredited to the feminist philosopher Judith Butler and her concept known as Performativity Theory. The concept of *performativity*, as it derives from linguistic theory, can be explained as "that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names" (Butler, 1993:13). In applying this perspective to the concept of identity and gender theory, it was hypothesized that gender identity does not exist or originate as an interior essence, but rather is constituted through a set of discursively signified performances, in the form of habitualized acts, speech, gestures, and behaviours, which construct "the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express." (Butler, 1990:185) This essentially means that what the gendered subject experiences as an inherent identity originating from the self, is actually that which is artificially manifested through the subject's repetitive and ritualized actions, which are involuntarily assumed via socialization (Butler 1988, 1990).⁶³

Though this perspective dominates intellectual discourses on gender, it is also contested for being too philosophically grounded and abstract to have any bearing on our understanding of how gender is rendered in the 'real world'. It is for this reason that I have intended that this project speak directly to this debate, interrogating and informing the cogency of Butler's conjectural model in the light of a qualitatively gathered contextual analysis of this social experience.

⁶³ This theory is also associated and allied with the radical re-formulation of the traditional gender-sex distinction, discrediting the idea that gender is the socio-cultural signification created as an effect and ascribed to a pre-discursive notion of the body, and arguing in line with the post-structuralist position that claims the very notion of sex, rather, is an effect and function of gender

The following sex-themed dialogues will form the centre of our analysis throughout this chapter for the purposes of becoming intimately acquainted and engaged with the participants' own identity-making and signifying practices, allowing us not only to then apply this working-knowledge to contextualizing Butler's theoretical position as it relates practically, but to address the integral question of how these individuals agentively self-construct said '*identity*' and perform said '*gender*.'

The relationship of identity to performance, as it is told through sex narratives

A: So do gay men ever try to get with you or is it mostly straight men?

D: Some gay men. But I don't like a gay man, my god...eww (scowls and shakes head) awful!

A: (Turning to Nikita) Do you have more straight men or gay men that hit on you?

N: Ohh, I love a straight man! But obviously they are also still not *straight*. (Laughs)

A: What about your boyfriend, Nikita?

N: He is *sooo* straight.

N: I wanted him to get off of me...But he was just enjoying himself with my vagina.. (laughing)

A: Does he touch your penis?

N: Yes but I dont like it.

A: How come? (Conversation trails off.)

(Separate conversation)

A: When guys give you money do they want to do things to you, or do they want you to do things to them?

D: Nowadays!?! You must do things to them! They want to get screwed, instead of we get screwed. Unless its a straight guy.

A: And what do straight guys want?

D: They want to screw you.

A: Ok, so they are still, they're still straight?

D: Yes.

D: Its strange how a man can play that bigger role. He's like appearing in front of everyone, he's a man. But when he comes behind that door, he want to be like a woman! My god!

A: Ja, you were telling me about that the other night, and you said that you have to take on a different role as well?

D: Exactly. You have to be a man. No, man. Its very strange...(looks away pensively)

D: But I had that feeling once, he's also gay. Whats his name?..He's also gay. One night, that feeling came over me. ..Geez! Oh my god!

L: You sick bitch. (Everyone laughs)

D: I'm like thinking jirre..I'll fuck you, moffie! (laughs.)⁶⁴

D: But sometimes you really do weird things....

N: Like Nikita tells me she fucked a gay telling the guy all sorts of words, but then cant believe what sorts of things she was saying! (laughing)

It is within these casual conversations about sex that we begin to understand how the informants' bodies, roles, and desires are organized within a particular discursive framework that constitutes how they see themselves as belonging and relating to certain categories of subjectivity. Let us begin by embarking on an in-depth exploration of the meaning and making of their identities -sexual and gendered, as it relates to performance.⁶⁵

As Donna explains, a straight man is defined as a male who 'screws you,' thus if one male is penetrating and another male is being penetrated, then both male individuals would not be considered homosexual. This is because, as these narratives begin to reveal, in their cultural matrix it is not *sex* but *gender* that operates as the force, which defines whether two or more individuals are the same or different ('homo' or 'hetero'). Furthermore, these narratives suggest that while 'gender is the force,' *gender* is shown to be that which is constituted through particular actions that are (pre-)imbued with social meaning, for example the act of penetration. Thus the penetrator, through the act of penetration, is gendered to be a 'straight man', while the other, through the act of being penetrated, is rendered 'gay' or 'like a woman'.

Essentially "what all this means is that the gendered status of males is not given, but must be produced through the appropriate desires, which are manifested through the appropriate practices" (Kulick, 1999:126). And from this conclusion we can draw

⁶⁴ 'Jirre' is an Afrikaans slang word, used here as an expression of exclamation or astonishment.

two important points. Firstly, we have begun to understand that as a subjective experience, sexuality is not defined in regard to the respective sexes of the sexing pair in relation to one another, as western discourse would locate it, but by the gendered roles performed within that pair; or more specifically, by the gendered role each fulfills, either in accord with or contradiction to the gender associated with their sex. And secondly, gender is only real to the extent that it is performed, or simply in other words, *genderis that which one does*.

These narratives also illustrate how the subjects' performances, as defined here in terms of sexual behaviour, fluctuate distinctly from what is considered belonging to the masculine versus the feminine. And as expressions of the performative self may shift as the subjects traverse and negotiate different social settings and scenarios, a similar pattern is also felt in terms of their identities, specifically as gay or straight, and as men or women. For example, as the subjects occasionally penetrate other males for money or very rarely for pleasure, they express their confictions towards these acts. Their confictions, however, are not with the physical nature of these acts, but with the social meaning they convey about *what* and *who* they become as gendered persons. Thus, while the act of orally penetrating another male was physically pleasurable for Nikita, it also proved distressing because it altered her very sense of self. "I don't want to feel like a man, I want to be a woman." Therefore the internal conflict emanates from their feelings and desires to be like women, all the while they are being *positioned*, both physically and socially, as men.

A double entendre never seemed more appropriate than to summarize this theoretical dynamic: What one does is what one becomes. The double meaning, of course, is that gender is proven to be that which one performs or literally, which one *does*. While, 'what one does,' or in Donnazita's words, 'what one screws', is equally significant to how one is made into a gendered being, (even if that assignment is only temporary). This theoretical relationship is also apparent in Kulick's ethnographic work on the travestis, for which he concludes that "if what one does in bed had immediate and lasting consequences for the way one is perceived (and the way one can perceive oneself) as a gendered being," it thus "takes a man to make a travesti feel like a woman. A viado (Portuguese for 'gay') would short-circuit the conceptual system and make a travesti feel like -what? (The answer: a lesbian)" (1999:126). This conclusion

is certainly applicable to the identificatory and signifying practices of the subjects of this study, and it could not be more obvious than in their response to my inquiry about whether the informants ever have sex with one another. "My god! We're not lesbians, darling!"

Thus as the power of the performative carries the ability to dictate or re-articulate one's sense of self, transforming one from a woman to a man or from a gay to a lesbian, gender identity is proven not to be a pre-existing or static interior position, but to be an on-going process that is constantly in flux and always incomplete. Furthermore, if gender attributes are not expressive but constitutive and the gendered self does not exist prior to the acts that constitute it, as these analyses suggest, it is in fact the *performance* and its discursive significance, which renders the subjects knowing themselves. And thus these so-called 'identities,' are not those which pre-exist and *are affected by* power and discourse, rather these are proven to be *the effect of* such powers.

But while identity is demonstrated to be the effect of discourse, this does not prove the phenomenon to be entirely imposed and determined solely by external factors, rendering the subjects powerless over the construction of their selves. On the contrary, acknowledging that identity is not a pre-existing essence conveys not only the limits, but also the possibilities and the power that the agent holds in constructing and maintaining its self. Let us consider that as the informants evidently recognize the implications that what the roles they perform sexually have on what they become -or that dyadic relationship between performance and identity, they then expressively apply this knowledge as a tool to self-construct.

They plainly state that because the temporal experience of being a straight man is afflicting and at odds with what they desire in terms of a gendered notion of personhood, they conduct themselves accordingly by preferring to engage in sex with only straight men. However, this commitment is not because that is the only sexual desire or pleasure they experience, as Donnazita and Nikita both admit rare moments of attraction and intercourse with gay men or moffies, and all of them admit to the physical pleasure of penetrating and receiving oral sex. Rather the desire to engage with straight men is primarily based on the need to maintain a particular identity.

And thus these performative acts are expressively instrumental, indicating how the subjects autonomously interact with the powers of discourse to co-construct a sense of self.

An unequivocal indication of the personal agency and self-determination that the subjects exercise in the theoretical self-styling of their identities is also appropriately and luminously reflected in their literal *style*. Their self-authorship is written all over their bodies and can be read from head to painted toes, from the extensions in their hair, the glitter on their eyelids, and the sashay in their hips. Because while Lee explains that her desire to be a woman comes from within, she distinguishes between her desire and how she constructs herself into that which she desires: 'I am not a god-made woman. I am not a man-made woman. I am a *handmade* woman.'

This declaration recalls those famously penned words of Simone de Beauvoir, in her iconoclastic book *The Second Sex*, where she stated that "One is not born a woman, but becomes one" (1949/1997:295). And in many ways it captures the sentiment of the earlier theoretical positions on gender, which focused on gender as the site of socialization while the body was assumed to be an un-constructed fact. Interestingly however, while the informants adhere to aspects of this Beauvoirian sense of gender, in recognizing that categorizations of the body do not equate with the social aspects of becoming, being, or experiencing a particular gendered subjectivity, a more in-depth understanding of the way in which their subjectivities are configured and experienced, suggests a distinct departure from this train of thought.

Instead the participants demonstrate a conceptualization of gender and sex that would better support the more contemporary theories of today's intellectual discourses on gender, which reverse this original distinction in every way, and argue that gender is not a construction of sex, but that *sex is actually a construction of gender*. To interrogate this radical assertion and explore what this offers in conjunction with the primary question of this study, let us consider the relevance that sex, or the categorization of the informants' bodies, rather, (-as the term 'sex' is already enmeshed in a regulatory discourse), plays in the formation of their identities.

What these anecdotes about sex tell us about sex(-the other kind)

According to our previous analyses of their ethnographic accounts, it appears for one, that the way in which the subjects relate to their selves in relation to their bodies, does not indicate that the notions of 'sex' and 'gender' are truly distinct phenomena, and certainly not phenomena that define the social and subjective reality of sex as prior to that of gender. Instead what they express is that there is not actually a distinct experience of sex differentiated from gender. Because, essentially, the concept of sex only becomes significant to the formulation of their identities when it is engendered.

For example, if we are to regard 'sex' here in terms of anatomical differentiation, then in light of their ethnographic accounts, it is explained that when a penis wielding person (-male, as we would otherwise call it) performs the feminine, said person is thus rendered a woman/like a woman and gay, all the while, a penis wielding person performing the masculine is alternately rendered a man and straight.⁶⁶ Therefore, the meaning and significance of sex in defining *what* someone is, man or woman, gay or straight, is actually constructed and realized primarily through notions of gender.

Meanwhile, there is no indication that the classification of their bodies resonates with them outside of these gendered terms, or functions as a primary or isolated freestanding subjectivity. Therefore, while the regulatory discourse functions to disguise the notion of sex as a natural binary categorization of people that exists and functions as its own subjectivity, prior to the constructed meanings of sexuality and gender, these ethnographic accounts reveal that it is the constructed meaning of sex and its influence on identity formation, which proves to be a by-product of gender. Thus, based on these findings, I too would argue that essentially (or in theoretical terms, "anti-essentially"), this proves sex to be a gendered category itself, and as Butler argued, "an effect rather than an origin." (1990:192).

⁶⁶ I intend to emphasize here the problematic nature of defining even biological sex, as it is not universally defined and can refer to anatomical, chromosomal, or hormonal differentiation

“They all know I’m a moffie. So why must I dress like a man? I must dress like a woman”: the relationship of gender to sexuality.

Although the concept of performativity refers to how ritualized habitual acts that occur on the subconscious level as a result of socialization artificially create a sense of belonging to a particular gender, here it appears that we have a slight point of departure in that the informants are often keenly aware of the significance of their performances, and they even enact this knowledge to maintain their desired identity.⁶⁷ However, this does not imply that their identities are any less authentic, or authentically ‘artificial,’ to be more precise. Because while their articulations exemplify an incredible grasp and understanding of personhood and the constructed and performative nature of gender, acknowledging that they can be made and unmade via particular actions that are interpreted within a gendered framework, their gendered identities do *also* prove to be the product of their internalized socialization. This is most apparent when we examine how the informants regard their gender as that which is a natural correlation to their sexualities.

L: Alexis, I met friends in pollsmoor , gays who have like children, I couldn't believe it. Like in jail they are like *realreal* queens, but when they go to court they dress up like men...but they are living with their wives and children on the outside. And I was like shocked.

D: ...In between life.

D: You get some gays, neh, that hooks up with women, they has a relationship with that woman, and then makes that woman pregnant, and eventually in the meantime he goes back to his other life of him, and then, he met that woman, pregnant, drop the woman, runs off to the middle of nowhere and goes back to the other lover, the other life, the gay life, and to look for a guy, and on the other side his wife and children are waiting for him, he is sleeping with - (Lolly interjects)

L: Mhhmm, like this one guy has a wife and kid and in the meantime he is fooling around with guys, pays a moffie to get him guys... (shaking head in disapproval)

⁶⁷ One must be careful with their interpretation of the word, ‘desire,’ as it may have misleading connotations. To label it as such, does not indicate that it is a freely made choice, just as sexual desire is not assumed to be, nor are we to assume where this desire originates.

The subjects express their disdain for homosexuals who disguise themselves as heterosexuals, largely out of genuine compassion for the families they know to be impacted by the deceptions and indiscretions of these men that the informants have known personally through work (transactional sex), prison, or street-life. Naturally, the very existence of these husband and father 'closet-creepers,' as they mockingly refer to them, are all the more offensive to the informants, as it is rather the informants who honestly disclose their sexuality that are made to assume those accusations of immorality and of corrupting family and societal values (all of which are also cited in the name of justifying the structural violence inflicted on them from religious, social, and political spheres.) Meanwhile it is bitterly ironic, that it is actually the stigma of homosexuality, carried out by these institutions, and those parading and privileging as hetero-normative men with "a wife and kid but in the meantime is fooling around with guys," that are desecrating the sanctity of the family and community.⁶⁸⁶⁹ However, aside from the ethical and personal qualms they have with this behaviour, what is so utterly 'shocking' about seeing someone act 'like a real queen' as opposed to 'like a real man' is that, from their perspective, it portrays a notion of personhood that is contradictory and illegitimate. This again returns to the context of how their identities are formed and organized.

As we have previously concluded, within this particular identity-making matrix, the rendering of one's sexual identity is not simply gendered, but is the product of gendering, because to be gay as determined by your performance, which in these examples is determined by sex role, is to fulfill the role that is constructed to be and to mean *feminine*. Alternatively, we could even view this particular configuration from a slightly different angle, which Kulick hypothesizes in his study, and consider "that females and males who enjoy being penetrated belong to the same classificatory category they are on the same side of the gendered binary. They share in other words,

⁶⁸ This is interesting insight in light of the current moral, political, and religious debates concerning the right for homosexuals to marry. Because as the oppositional argument repeatedly cites the importance and value of the family, the heterosexual family, these peripheral findings suggest how the prohibition against gay marriage and the stigma against gay people realistically could have more negative implications on the traditional family, than does opposing gay rights.

⁶⁹ Lee is especially vocal about her contempt for these closeted married men, 'who come to her for sex, when that money should be going to his family,' and explains that it is these men that she steals from, 'not the little guy on the street, and not my friends or family.'

a gender."(1998:229) And from either perspective, what remains true is that, while that which renders one a man is directly in opposition to that which renders one a woman, and therefore also a gay, *one cannot legitimately be both a man and a gay*. Therefore, said individuals who parade as men, but are also gays, are incredulous, false, disillusioned, pathologized and immoral, or essentially, all of those things that the subjects themselves are often accused of being as a result of their honest, accurate, authentic, and unapologetic portrayal and proclamation of their identity as they experience it.⁷⁰

A salient testimony to the very degree to which their identification with the non-masculine is in direct association with their sexual identity, as they understand, represent, configure, and experience it, is conveyed in that rhetorical question Jennifer matter-of-factly poses: "They all know I'm a moffie. So why must I dress like a man? I must dress like a woman." Just as it would logically follow in certain socio-cultural spaces: "If I am a female, why would I act like a man?" The only difference between the two statements is that the latter is embedded in that ideological space where the relationship between gender and sex is primary, while in the world of the former, gender and sex are not givens and assumed to go hand in hand, nor is sex and sexuality; the pivotal relationship is between gender and sexuality.

In other words, the subjects' identities are organized around a binary concerned with the relationship between one's sexuality and one's gender, as contrasted with the assumed western ideology of binarized gender, which is centered on the axis of sex, and in which case gender (and sexuality) must correlate properly with *sex*. This is not to suggest that sexuality *causes* their gender, nor that gender *causes* their sexuality. If sexuality is part of the matrix of gender relations, as the theoretical reasoning and ethnographic findings suggest and demonstrate, the sexual subject can neither precede nor follow the gendered subject, because the two experiences are not actually separate or even in a relationship with one another, but rather expressions of each other. Thus, contrary to western notions, which locate sex and sometimes even gender as natural *facts* rather than social constructions, cross-cultural ethnographic depictions of gender, such as this one, indicate how gender, sexuality, *and* sex are socio-culturally

⁷⁰ Like travestis, they see themselves as 'the only true out homosexuals.' (Kulick, 1998: 222)

constructed and thus the ideologies which represent these phenomena are anything but fact, universal, or ontologically distinct. In effect, this conclusion acknowledges something that anthropologists have long noted – that these concepts are discursively created categories.

'Choosing'

While the informants state their erotic desires as pre-determined and not the result of their own choice, my selection of semantics describing them as 'choosing' is not accidental, as it refers to one of the ways they exercise their agency, *bychoosing to be 'out' and proud*:

C: When you walk alone people will sometimes make fun of you if you look like a woman...for dressing like a woman..

A: If you know you're going to be harassed by people on the street, why do you still dress like a woman?

C: Because I'm proud of who I am.

(separate conversation)

J: We decided, we made a choice in life to be like this. And we choose to be like this. So out in about. So, we can't be cross at the people we know...we sure how other people...how they treat other gays in SA so we could have said, "No, we don't want to be like that" and still be in the closet, but we decided to be like this so we must take the punishments that life gave to us. We can't sweat and yes, yes, I'm a moffie, because we choose to be this way. So either take it or go back in the closet.

D: Like it or love it.

L: Like it or love it.

A: So you're proud?

J: Exactly.

While the subjects regard 'closeted' and 'butch' gays as in disguise or denial, and not fully embracing their sexual identity, rather than deny the gendered role they play in relation to other men on account of sex and desire, they agentively *choose* to assert and own their position in society as "like women" or as "sharing a gender with women." Because their philosophies of personhood, which contribute to their knowing

and seeing themselves and others in a particular way, is constructed through a discourse that does not frame the experience of gender and sexuality as distinct subjectivities, but as one of the same, their gender is directly tied into their sexual identities (as the same can be said in reverse) and they so choose to own that. But as they choose to embody and proclaim their homosexuality, openly, honestly, authentically, proudly, and unapologetically, in doing so, they are *also* constituting that very identity. And thus, interestingly, we have come to understand that these proclamations, linguistically, embodied, and acted, are all performative. Thus, the subjects' modes of self-representing and self-styling are not 'simply free-play or theatrical self-presentation' (which as Butler notes is not the equivalent of performativity) but like any other person's, a mixture of strategic instrumental performances and those performatives that are truly unconscious products of habitus and socialization.

Thus, while their identity happens to be one that in the larger context, defies the rules of normativity according to certain frameworks of intelligibility, they did not choose an identity to defy normativity. Rather, the philosophies of personhood are not universal but culturally contingent, and are, as Lee explains, the result of how "Some people act how they are expected to act. What we portray in life is something that is right to us." Thus the informants are far from confused, disillusioned, or pathologized, as certain facets of society regard them, but on the contrary, reflect the range of human possibility. "Hence the strange, the incoherent, that which falls 'outside' gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently" (Butler, 1990:110). Furthermore, they demonstrate just how varied the ideologies even of those ubiquitously 'universal' and 'non-constructed' aspects of the human being (such as biological sex) are, and more strikingly just how varied these ideologies are within 'societies.'⁷¹

⁷¹ I say this to highlight the relevance of anthropology's contemporary challenge to relinquish those imagined notions of 'culture', 'societies', and 'communities.'

CHAPTER VII: The Discursive Trap

"To do justice to David is, certainly to take him at his word, and to call him by his chosen name, but how are we to understand his word and his name? Is this the word that he creates? Is this the word that he receives? Are these the words that circulate prior to his emergence as an "I" who might only gain a certain authorization to begin a self-description with the norms of this language? So that when one speaks, one speaks a language that is already speaking, even if one speaks it in a way that is not precisely how it has been spoken before'" (Butler, 2004:69)

While witnessing the subjects self-reflect and insightfully articulate the ways that they know themselves, I also became acutely aware of the limiting and repetitive ways that others attempt to articulate them in contrast to their own self-understandings and representations. Since arriving on the streets as children, the informants have been the sporadic and peripheral interest of non-governmental and socio-political activist organizations that promote the rights of LGBT⁷² peoples as well as sex workers, and the interest of at least one social scientist, myself. Through these avenues they have undoubtedly been exposed to the rhetoric of how *others* organize their experiences, most notably in descriptive terms referring to them as 'women trapped in men's bodies' or 'transgendered.'

Although I have occasionally heard the subjects incorporate this language into their own vocabulary of self-description, the invocation of these terms and phrases prove problematic as they suggest several things that are contrary to how the subjects otherwise convey their identities. As a feminist anthropologist whose intentions are to ethically and accurately analyse and represent the subjective experience of persons who are generally spoken *for* and *of*, I would not simply dismiss or reduce the appropriation of such terms to a notion of false-consciousness. However, neither would I simply regurgitate these narratives without challenging the actual relationship and significance they lend to the numerous other ways the informants express an identity that is in direct contradiction to these expressions.

⁷² Is the widely used short-form of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, and transgender people.

We will begin this chapter's journey by analysing the implications of this particular linguistic (mis-)representation, 'women trapped in men's bodies,' so as to shed light on how the informants otherwise articulate and convey a notion of self and personhood that is in contrast to this imposed identity. From there we will explore how this language is symbolic of how the informants are subjected to a dominant discourse that precedes them, restricting their very possibilities of being and becoming, only then to understand that it is this very subjugation which becomes the means they employ to formulate a notion of self that speaks to a livable life.

'Women Trapped in Men's Bodies'

"On the one hand we have a self-description, and that is to be honored. These are the words by which this individual gives himself to be understood. On the other hand, we have a description of self that takes place in a language that is already going on, that is already saturated with norms, that predisposes us as we seek to speak of ourselves"
(Butler, 2004:69).

A: Do you feel you are a woman trapped in a man's body, Nikita?

N: It's actually quite confusing for me.

A: Would you ever get a sex change if you...if you could?

N: Ooh', Lord would never forgive me! Actually now he forgive me for just doing my thing, the way I do, shaking my booty but not breaking my hip...but breaking my heels! Though, I am doing it..butja..

A: So you wouldn't get a sex change...ever?

N: I would love to have boobs.

A: But you wouldn't want to be without a penis?

N: No ways!!

A: You would never want like a fake vagina?

N: No ways! No! No! No...

It's not necessary...It is not necessary.

I would never do it. That's just the way I am. I am what I am.

The term 'woman trapped in a man's body' implies a gender-identity *disorder*, in which one feels an incompatibility between one's gender identity and one's sex. It also implies that one desires to be a woman, but believes that to be a woman one must be sexed as a female, and therefore is conflicted with one's anatomically male parts. Contrary to this depiction, however, everything that the subjects embody and demonstrate in their daily lives is a living testament that they do not regard their gender, identity, or authenticity as being reduced to their physical bodies.

We have come to understand that here the physical parts that distinguish between males and females are not significant for what they are, but for what they *do*; it is what they *do* that sanctions the possessor of those parts to become gendered in a particular way. In this way, a phallus is by definition phallic because it penetrates. While vaginas are constructed through sex as spaces to receive penises, the anus is made into a vagina through the act of penetration. And thus the owner of that vagina is then made into a woman through that act. Since they do not believe that to be a woman one must be born female, the corporeal reality of their bodies has no negative or conflicting bearing on their gendered identities. Rather, it is very clear that the participants recognize the compatibility that their natural bodies have to multiple expressions of gender. Therefore, the idea of being surgically changed into a female is not only 'unnecessary,' but as their tone and animated facial expressions suggested, quite frankly absurd.

Thus, just as the presence of a female vagina does not make a woman, nor does the presence of their penis have any incongruent effect on their identities as long as it is not penetrating and performing the act that would render them straight men, (rather than gay women). In her own words, Nikita does not see herself as 'trapped in a man's body.' She asserts "I am a woman with balls, and I am not only a woman, I am a special woman 'cause you don't get a woman with balls." It is certainly *her* body, not a 'man's,' and she is not 'trapped' in it.

Furthermore, labeling them as 'women trapped in men's bodies' only assigns incorrectly the cause of their 'pathology,' as these following conversations illustrate.

A: Do you ever wish you were born a woman, Nikita?

N: Uhhhh....yes...I'd say yes...only because why...because my life would be easier than it is now. (Donna in background agrees)

N: But I thank God that I am gay, moffie...as well.

(Separate conversation)

A: If people didn't ever harass you on the street and people treated you and reacted the same to you whether you dressed like a man or dressed like a woman, what are you more comfortable in...

L: If people wouldn't like told me stuff like that, then I would have been at home a long time ago. Because why...they judge you.. I would live at home, if they wouldn't call me names and what not.

A: So that's one of the reasons you left home?

L: Yes.

A: But your family accepts you.

L: My family accepts me all because...they accept me but when I go out of the house walking in the street or going somewhere, I am going to be called names ..and then I'm going to become angry or swearing or stab someone, you know. And then I'm going to end up in Pollsmoor (prison) and its not good. Two times a day. (Donnazita laughs)

L: Sometimes I act like a guy and wear the clothes I was born to wear, because people don't make fun of you. Or sometimes when you are drugged up you don't care, but when you are not, you are affected and feel alone.

It is clear from their articulations that it is not their bodies, but rather conflict with the violence that ensues from society's disciplining regulations of said bodies that sometimes makes them wish that they had been born female. Otherwise, they would be content if everyone was accepting and understanding, as they are, of *a woman with balls*.

Language, however, is undoubtedly more than an expression of our modes of thinking, but that which in turn shapes our modes of thinking, as "there is a lot in ordinary language and in received grammar that constrains our thinking— indeed, about what a person is, what a subject is, what sexuality is, what politics can be"

(Butler, 2004:327). Therefore the implications of such language, 'women trapped in men's bodies' as it is attached to the subjects' experiences, conveys more than the obvious ways they are misunderstood by much of society. Let us now analyze this language for how it symbolically represents the dominant discourse and its underlying normative assumptions, for which "such attributions or interpellations contribute to that field of discourse and power that orchestrates, delimits, and sustains that which qualifies as 'the human'" (Butler, 1993:x). This discussion is pertinent if we are to understand the agentive possibilities the participants hold in the constructing of their own selves.

Trapped in Bodies, or Bodies of Discourse?

"Who can I become in such a world where the meanings and limits of the subject are set out in advance for me? By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become? And what happens when I begin to become that for which there is no place within the given regime of truth?" (Butler, 2004:58).

The prevailing dominant cultural ideologies on sexuality and gender are heavily dictated by the hegemonically grounded supposition that gender exists as a natural binary, tied to one's sex. And as these persons' representations of a non-conforming gender and sexuality pose a threat to the dominant and oppressive gender order on which patriarchal power hinges, this particular language pedantically conveys how a non-normative phenomenon is re-articulated, both rhetorically and ideologically, in order to fit intelligibly within the dominant discourse.

As the dominant discourse is limiting and does not offer an interpretation of personhood in which individuals can desire and also be recognized as legitimately inhabiting an alternative space, such as that which is both male and feminine, we begin to see how the realities of those who do not subscribe to this discipline are circumscribed in order to uphold the 'natural' order of gender. But this regulatory process has both literal and symbolic implications for those it names. Let us consider, for instance, how this language renders those it describes as *victims* of a condition, their own abnormality that they did not choose or make, rather than agents of any

self-fashioning that falls outside of the norm. Meanwhile, as the following narratives attest, this implication is in direct contradiction to how the participants articulate their gendered expressions as largely the result of proud *choices* they have made, in part, to proclaim their sexual identities authentically, and in part as a statement that is both personal and political.

J: We decided. We made a choice in life to be like this. And we choose to be like this. So out and about. So we can't be cross at the people...we know how they treat other gays in South Africa, so we could have said 'no we don't want to be like that' and still be in the closet. But we decided to be like this, so we must take the punishments that life gave to us. We can't sweat it because...yes, I'm a moffie. Because we choose to be this way. So either take it or go back in the closet.

A: So you're proud?

J: I'm proudly gay, darling, I'm proudly gay, transgender, whatever you call it. You can call me names, all that, you're not going to stop me because this is what I am and you rather accept that I'm not who you want me to be. Do you understand?

C: Exactly.

D: I am what I am, I know what I am, and I don't give a fucking damn what I am.

A: I find what y'all do to be very empowering, because it's kind of like...It's a political statement, in a lot of ways.

Lee: Ohhh! Yoh! Yes! Of course! It's killing society, It's killing society, it's toning them down to reality. Because this ain't reality, what society is showing. It's *made-up* reality. It's the way it's *suppose* to be. It's what fits *everybody*, but not you. We choose to be who we want to be and what makes us happiest, and that's what it's all about at the end of the day.

When the informants are discursively positioned as 'women trapped in men's bodies,' this language reflects the regulatory and disciplinary function of the normative powers of discourse, in that while they subvert norms by proudly *choosing to assert* a self that does not coincide with the norm, "any effort to produce gender in ways that fail to conform to existing norms (or, fails to conform to a certain dominant fantasy of what existing norms actually are)" (Butler, 2004:77), is *pathologized*. But as their self-expressions and very identities forcefully undergo a discursive re-articulation, in

which these persons are said to be born into the 'wrong' bodies just as 'freaks of nature' unmistakably occur, not only is their agency and self-determination silenced, but their realities are framed as simply inverted versions of the heterosexual matrix. And if there can only exist inversions of this dominant norm, as suggested by this language and others, what is "proven", established, and ensured is the efficacy and fixed nature of the norm. Thus the dominant and even non-dominant, paradigm remains nonetheless, a dual-gendered heterosexuality, and the very structures of this powerful social force, called gender, remain unchallenged and intact.

From this we begin to realize the impossibility of conceiving or living intelligibly outside of this normative matrix, which is essentially where the subjects are located, since they embody a gendered notion of personhood that is consciously and not pathologically representative of a male-sexed person who ascribes and identifies with that gender assigned to non-males. And as a result, their very personhood is muted and absorbed by those powerful discursive properties that determine what will and will not count as a coherent life. "This is what Foucault describes as the politics of truth, a politics that pertains to those relations of power that circumscribe in advance what will and will not count as truth" (Butler, 2001:183). If we are to engage with Foucault's assertions that agents can only transgress norms to the extent that the discourses recognize them as doing so, the implications are monumental and it is clear that *it is the discourse and not their bodies that is responsible for the 'trapping'* (1972-1977).

This brings us back to our original question, or rather a question about our original question. As these analyses suggests that gender identity is the manifestation of discursive powers that pre-exist the subjects, then it must follow that no subject can be said to *decide* its gender. But, "if there is no subject who decides on its gender, and if, on the contrary, gender is part of what decides the subject, how might one formulate a project that preserves gender practices as sites of critical agency?"(Butler, 1993:ix).

Recognizing the authority of discourse to suppress and restrict the human subject does not represent a fatalism in which agency meets its impasse. As it turns out, while we are constituted by conditions and norms that pre-exist us, our agency does not deny

the way that we are made by norms, but rather is constituted by what we make of these norms. We shall now explore the theoretical formation of the agent, proving that identity is not the bastard child of discursive powers, but a child conceived through the discursive powers *in consummation with* the subjects' own power. Only then can we begin to understand how the subjects powerfully, agentively, and innovatively, (re-)work this oppressive subjectification into their own means. But before we can speak about a self who is capable of a choice, we must first consider how that self is formed. (Butler, 1997).

From Subject to Agent

The objective of this study, as it aims to understand how a gendered identity is constructed and performed by these unique persons, is largely an interrogation of *agency* and *subjectivity*. Agency is broadly conceptualized as the ability to act and engage with one's social structure, but an interpretation of agency that is most relevant to the thrust of this study is the "poststructuralist's suggestion to consider 'agency' the act, exercised by people through the various and contradictory discourses through which they are constituted, to 'author' a positioned self or person at particular moments or encounters" (Durham, 2000:117, citing Davies 1991).

In cohesion with this stance and under the influence of a postmodernist notion of the subject, Butler is explicit about the connection between the formation of the subject and the possibility for agency, stating that, "we find in subordination and subjection the very conditions for agency" (Butler 2007: 332). Or in other words, the possibility of agency is always ultimately an original denial of agency through the form of subjectification, because agency arises from the reiteration of that very oppression. However, agency is still confined to occur only within the borders of the oppressive structures of the original subordination (because one must recognize that there could be no agency external to the restrictive structure, since otherwise the said subject would not exist). This realisation that to persist, one must desire one's own subordination, appears to yield us to the impasse of how subjects are victims of their subjectification and thus cannot act outside the terms of this original denial of agency, which created them as subjects to begin with.

However, "Butler frames her theorizing of agency within a discursive model, and approaches it as a 'structural potentiality' rather than as a 'set of embedded practices'" (McNay 1999:183). This suggests that while we are constituted by conditions and norms that pre-exist us, our agency does not deny the way that we are made by norms, but rather is constituted by what we make of these norms. Thus even if the subject's emergence is a product of powerful oppressive forces, those same restraints become the tools for the agent's re-articulations and "even though my agency is conditioned by those limitations, my agency can also thematize and alter those limitations to some degree" (Butler 2004: 334).

Thus the very extent that the participants are disciplined by the predominant discourse, as indicative of how they are suppressed and positioned through ordinary language, inadvertently symbolizes their means of reifying the regulatory discourses through their own regimes of resistance. Therefore, though it seems paradoxical to how they are often discerned (especially by the Other) as disempowered victims of oppression, this perspective highlights the very degree of agency and power that the subjects theoretically possess in the creation of their selves.

While this discussion of agency has been in the abstract, we shall now begin to explore practically how these "conflicting values and resources which may be actively and sometimes creatively appropriated by actors to institute new value systems and new forms of collective identity" are negotiated by the *Agents* of this study (McNay 1999:187). These agents undoubtedly hold an interesting position in this social structure, which attempts to deny them recognition, causing them to find unique ways to exercise that agency in regards to constructing not only their selves, but new concepts of personhood.

What does gender want?

"Our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have" (Butler, 2004:33).

Butler asks the question: "What does gender want?" Then responds to her own inquiry stating that "while Hegel relates the function of norms to a desire for recognition, then gender, insofar as it is animated by desire, will want recognition as well." She explains that "if we are not recognizable, if there are no norms of recognition by which we are recognizable, then it is not possible to persist in one's own being, and we are not possible beings; we have been foreclosed from possibility; concluding then that"gender likewise figures as a precondition for the production and maintenance of a legible humanity." (Butler, 2004: 2)

But if "one "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but in a prior sense, by being recognizable," we see here how as determined by the norms which define what is a coherent model of the human, "recognition becomes a site of power" because "one 'exists' not only by virtue of being recognized, but in a prior sense, by being recognizable," thus further restricting, and for some such as those subjects who do not (and do not want to) fit into the normative paradigm already set forth for them, it paralyzes their very possibilities of even becoming. (Butler, 2004:5) Or does it? Rather before we regard these subjects and those like them as being theoretically disempowered, let us first consider the following sections discussion of the relationship between agency and subjectification; in which it could be argued that their subjectification not only to norms, but norms that do not accept them, predicates a forum not just for doing (agency), but a re-doing in which they in turn do not accept the norms that did not accept them.

Speaking to the topic of gender re-assignment Butler explains that "the only way to secure the means by which to start this transformation is by learning how to present yourself in a discourse that is not yours, a discourse that effaces you in the act of representing you, a discourse that denies the language you might want to use to describe who you are, how you got here, and what you want from this life" (Butler, 2004:91). While this statement (and our previous analytical dissection of the connotation of 'women trapped in men's bodies') captures the power of discourse to subjugate and repress, it also intimates how the internalization of a discourse that is not the informants' own, and either contradicts or at the least conveys an oversimplification of the way they regard and position themselves, might also signify

how subjects can rework those disciplining powers to their own needs, in order to institute a livable sociality.

If we accept that 'our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition,' and if that is predicated on 'learning how to present yourself in a discourse that is not yours', then we could understand how appropriating hegemonic gender ideals to frame their desires and experiences (for example owning women trapped in men's bodies), may indeed be instrumental to how they affectively exercise agency and authorship over the creation of their selves, rather than indicative of how they are denied agency and authorship. As for example, this appropriation could allow them to relate or convey a notion of personhood, which otherwise would be unrecognizable to the Other. But if we examine what the informants express about their need to be acknowledged in line with understandings of personhood, it is apparent that the informants are constantly involved in an effort to negotiate their (gender) coherence, in an effort that is worth more than appealing to their egos and desires; it is in appeal to their very need to exist. And while we have previously focused on the un-doing and un-making of persons through the powers of discourse, the remainder of this chapter will alternatively highlight how the informants self-construct by re-making and re-articulating a notion of personhood through those same discursive properties.

For a particularly poignant illustration of how they do this and one that also offers profound insight into the major subthemes of this work, including theoretics of *agency*, *performance*, *discourse*, and *identity*, let us consider these deeply thoughtful words spoken by one of our dear informants, Lee.

'If I had said to you, my name is Lee. You would have said, you're a moffie. Just because I'm saying I'm a moffie, now automatically I'm not a moffie, I'm a person, but if I said I was Lee, believe you me, I wouldn't have been a person. I would have been a moffie to you.'

Superficially, one could interpret the manner in which these individuals identify even with the pejorative connotation of this label, name, and form of address, as indicative

of their internalized oppression. Lee's decision, as she explains, to name herself Moffie, however, does not reflect an unconscious passive internalization or a devalued self-regard, but a radical and explicit self-declaration that is deliberate and powerful, one that signifies a kind of discursive performativity that is not only subversive, but profoundly instrumental in the *self*-construction of her identity. Furthermore, it is achieved in the form of a counter-discourse, and specifically one that works as a reversal to the power that makes it possible (McNay 1999:15).

According to speech act theory, performative acts can also be rendered in the form of language, in which certain utterances, just by speaking them, carry out an action and exhibit a form of power (Austin, 1961). If 'naming is an identity constituting performance,' an interpellation of sorts, then she who utters the word is the agent who brings about that constitution (Butler, 1990). By *naming herself*, in the terms that the Other would attempt to do, Lee shifts the locus of power from the external to the site of the self, granting herself the power to author that very constitution, all the while de-authorizing those who would otherwise attempt to do so in her place.

As "the word that wounds becomes an instrument of resistance in the redeployment that destroys the prior territory of its operation" (Butler, 1997:163), this counter-appropriation also represents a subversive re-signification, proving that "the social categorizations that establish vulnerability of the subject to language are themselves vulnerable to both psychic and historical change" (Butler 1997: 21). Because while Lee's choice to author this word does not necessarily singularly carry the power to immediately change the collective use of the word and all its intended meanings, if collectively practised and through reiteration, this linguistic performance of redefining this term does carry the power to modify its meaning, (as the following example shall demonstrate.) And as the subject appropriates the instrument of power rather than resisting it, which ironically is a radical act of resistance, through that declarative and performative speech act the word begins to garner a different type of meaning and social identity.

A relevant and similar demonstration of how those instruments of oppression can be re-appropriated into agentive tools that operate to positively transform and empower one's social reality is well-documented in David Valentine's ethnography of a

category (2007). Illustrating how a fairly recent institutionalization of a 'transgender' category began as a political imaginary, he explains that the desire for full citizenship rights by homosexuals has led to the exclusion of gender-variant homosexuals from acceptance and membership into the imagined gay community. Out of resistance and appeal to these powers, articulation of a new name and institutionalization of a new category of gender, *transgender*, has propelled non-gender- normative persons into social and political visibility.

While this resistance continues to occur within the oppressive rhetorical terms that ground one's identity in a sexuality or gender, as is a reflection of how subjects cannot act entirely *outside* the discursive power ideologies that created them, if individuals formed a collective which publicly asserted a particular identity (for example *Moffie*), then a new articulation of personhood could emerge from the agentic practices of those subjects. And that is precisely what Valentine theorized in his ethnography, and what these findings and these insights also suggest.

Because while it is generally understood that the notion of the person refers to the individual who not only has agentic properties but is the social being constructed and made legible through its relationship or position within the social structure (as Lee expressively recognizes and articulates), it is not just her non-conformist gender and sexuality that are rendered unintelligible and illegitimate. It is her very personhood that is ultimately at stake. "We see this most clearly in the examples of those abjected beings who do not appear properly gendered; it is their very humanness that comes into question" (Butler, 1993:xvii). And thus, both because of and by means of their non-normative gender expressions, they are able to and made to negotiate a social existence that pertains to more than just their individual identities, but to that which not only challenges, but creates new notions of personhood.

While the Other may mis-interpret the ways in which the subjects identify and know their selves, as proof of an internalized oppression or false-consciousness, insights such as these expose the deliberately instrumental intention behind these declarations, reflecting more accurately a sort of *double-consciousness*. Through this particular (linguistic) performance, Lee is asserting her humanity and constructing herself as one who can be made legible; this proves to be a personal, powerful and political

statement. Lee's fierce insight is profound as it demonstrates, practically and also theoretically, precisely how the informants creatively work the dominant discourse into a re-mastered canva; a self-portrait in which they are the artists. And this act of resistance not only works to re-configure the hegemonic social norms, but also holds the power to redefine the terms for personhood. Although the tools and techniques that many normatively gendered beings employ to assist in negotiating an identity that is at least partly one's own is, to most, probably subconscious and habitual, Lee not only exercises this type of subversive counter-appropriation, but she expresses a clear and profound awareness and mastery of that agency which is her very own.

Thus it becomes more and more apparent that these marginalized social positions that the subjects inhabit, which should not be reduced to their non-conforming sexualities and gender, but include other harsh social realities that affect them (i.e. their homelessness, lack of education, lack of healthcare and employment, lack of political representation, and all of the stigma that surrounds these issues), their ways of speaking, self-styling, socializing, skarreling, surviving, living, and just *being* are far from incidental, unconscious, unaware, pathological, or disillusioned. Rather, the subjects' ways of doing all of these things are testaments of their insight, creativity, self-awareness, knowledge, survivability, strength, resilience, choices, politics, activism, pride, and defiance.

CHAPTER VIII: Concluding Remarks

I began this text with stories of how the participants and I first met, how this relationship and this question came to be, and just how close I came to never actually beginning this research (although looking back in hindsight, I realize by then it had already begun.) Ironically it was my assumptions about their disempowerment, which almost led me to forgo pursuing this project that coincidentally formed the theme of this project in reverse.⁷³ Because although I was initially hesitant to take on this task of negotiating what I assumed to be obvious inherent power differentials attributed to our vastly different subjectivities and life experiences, what my research question became and largely what this piece hopefully proved to be was a challenge to those assumptions concerning how we think about notions of power, subjectivity, agency, and personhood.

It has been suggested, in theory, that identity does not function as a free standing and pre-existing understanding of self, but that which is framed by a pre-existing system of discourse, and that requires constituting through actions and performances. Then one could say that we do not exist prior to these normative powers and to the concept or force of gender; but nor are we produced *by* gender. Just as it was demonstrated through our examination of Lee's profound insight explaining her decision to call herself *Moffie*, as well as the endless conversations about sex, and the descriptive manner in which the informants emotively conveyed each story, weaving in details of the pleasure, pain, and pride they experienced with each partner, we come to understand just how the *theoretical* 'subject', or more importantly, these real persons here, serve as agents in the production of their gender identity as well. And therefore, in accord with Judith Butler's theory of the subject, this ethnographic study has in fact demonstrated that identity formation is a product of oppressive powers and how we experience forms of domination, but it is also a product of how agents re-articulate those forms of oppression. Thus what some would otherwise expect to be a depiction of marginalized disempowered peoples is, in actuality, a demonstration of *empowered*

⁷³ It has been said that "indeed instabilities and uncertainties are often the grounds from which the most interesting insights and intuitions about realities and possibilities for change emerge." (Bennet & Pereira 2013: 12)

peoples choosing to wear their skins symbolically as a personal, political, and social statement(contesting the ways in which we regard *agency* and certain individuals and peoples as marginalized or *disempowered* "victims"! ⁷⁴)

While the primary objective of this study was to interrogate and understand intellectually how these four individuals construct their own identity and enact gender, the trajectory of this text uncovered several other sub-themes. This project also aimed to provide an ethnographic voice to the abstract post-modernist theories that lead contemporary gender studies, such as Butler's Performativity Theory, as well as those post-modernist positions, which reverse the original theoretical distinctions regarding the relationship between sex and gender⁷⁵, in order to interrogate the validity of these theories in the real world. This project also challenged trends in gender theorizing -for example, exposing the problematics of a third gender discourse, as well as contesting the epistemological and ontological approach to studying gender, sexuality, and sex in terms of distinct compartmentalized categories of subjectivity. This text unpacked and explored the theoretical relationship between subjectification and agency, and of course, the relationship of performance to identity. And lest we not forget, before there was even a research question at hand, this endeavor began in part as a project that would adhere to the challenges of conducting ethical research in Africa among marginalized populations, by exploring the value of a feminist methodology, specifically one that was designed to reduce epistemological violence by blurring the distinction and power differentials between researcher and subject. Furthermore, many of the findings that unfolded throughout this work on these particular persons spoke to broader discussions and debates in the field of gender studies.

For example, the participants experience of gender, or more specifically their performance and construction of that gender identity (which was, in fact, our primary question) was revealed to be in many ways indistinguishable from their sexed and sexually oriented identities and contingencies. And thus throughout this text, I have contested the theoretical treatment of approaching research of gender as if it is

⁷⁴ Certainly this is not to underestimate the marginalization, discrimination, exclusion, and oppression that they experience on account of many factors (which extend beyond their gender atypicality.) Rather, it is an acknowledgement of the power they do possess, much of that which can even be said to originate from their experience of subjugation and oppression .

⁷⁵ -arguing, rather, that sex is a discursive category, and actually the effect of gender, instead of the widely-assumed inverse.

factually an unimagined *distinct* category of social experience (distinct from the experience of say, 'sexuality' and 'sex'.) Furthermore, these findings supported the secondary objective that I set forth in this project which was to challenge and enhance the discussions on the theorizing and methodological designs of approaching gender research, which asks: *What it is? How does it function? How is it made?*

However, I must highlight that it still remains that my arguments drawn from this study also prove problematic, at times, in how they are articulated semantically. And that is primarily because, I too, am the product of discourse. I must confess and recognize that I have framed my articulations within a hegemonic western ideological discourse that has framed me, created me and formed how I think, speak, and write. It is one that insists on using words like 'sex,' 'sexuality,' and 'gender,' even as it appears they may be imagined, and as I (dis)claim to deconstruct them.⁷⁶ Or even the words 'straight,' 'woman,' 'gay,' 'moffie' that are found throughout this text, (despite having problematized them and having only applied and defined them according to how the participants have given them meaning within this study.) Regardless, "women 'and 'men' are merely products of dichotomising discourses, and incapable (beyond the most general of scenarios) of keeping up with the kaleidoscope of embodied and sexual realities." (Bennet&Pereria 2013: 5)⁷⁷

Furthermore, as I am writing from an academic perspective that has taught me to deconstruct my position and the discourse that frames my analysis that would otherwise only lead me to draw a tautological conclusion about the nature of gender, I acknowledge that my thought processes are also reflective of a field of academia that has trained me, one that is as African, critical, and deconstructing, as much as it is colonial, western, and dominant. It is through my reflexivity that I have also been made to confront also my own limitations as a researcher and ethnographer, who is certainly challenging the discourses, but while also acknowledging my own personal

⁷⁶ Like Ratele who writes about the categorical 'race', (specifically as a construction, as well as a deconstruction that is always only repeatedly re-constructed), perhaps I too should supplement these words (gender, sex, sexuality) with an emphatic strikethrough to emphasize protest against these circulated naturalizations (1998).

⁷⁷ Kate Bornstein "Indeed, that "men's language" and "women's language" can be appropriated by transgendered individuals is the most powerful evidence I can think of that those labels themselves are hopelessly inadequate, theoretically impoverished, and conceptually sterile" (Kate Bornstein as quoted in Kulick 1990).

struggle to free myself from the constraints of the dominant discourse. Thus, undoubtedly, while I have wholeheartedly and reflexively aimed to deconstruct myself, my own biases, socialization, identity, gendering, and habitus, “social scientists, like social actors, are bound up with their own problems of resistance and identification, and this is never more obvious than in the field of gender analysis” (Moore 1996: 217).

I have chosen to draw out these points here, firstly, because it is this very field of anthropology that has trained me to do so, ingraining in me the pertinence of stringently scrutinizing the discursive practices of oneself as a knowledge producer. And, secondly, because in this double objective *ethnography of gender* and *of doing gender ethnography*, one of my primary aims set forth was to challenge our practices of approaching and writing about these intangible topics, and offer a way to re-theorize.

Nonetheless, because the findings in this study which do not stand alone, suggest that sexuality, sex, and gender are not always, if ever, extricable or truly distinct phenomena and perhaps are even imagined by those disguised to deconstruct them, I have come to conclude and argue that while gender theorists in past years have made conscious efforts to dismantle the trend of dangerously conflating sexuality with gender, and gender with sex, while the criticisms against the ill-informed treatment of these terms was certainly warranted, it is the anthropologists and gender theorists who established these distinctions, who must continue to re-visit this argument from a nuanced perspective. The more we feel ourselves struggle within the confines of our language and circulating discourses, the more affirmation it is that we need to *continue* to re-vamp our ways of approaching and writing about these concepts.

Additionally, in my moments of reflexivity and deep contemplation I have also become cognizant of how gendered performances assumed by my own third party interpretations and observations, as well as presented to me through verbal explanations, conversations, and reflections of the informants’ own, speak to a much larger picture and philosophy of the human condition than I had originally intended to understand.

Because while the subjects of this study do not overthrow the notion of gender, and while I have not engaged with the contentious debate of whether they should be regarded as subverting or upholding oppressive *binary* gender ideologies, they certainly re-articulate them, and submit them to not only a *doing* but a *re-doing*. And so just by *being*, they are *creating*, but also as a result, they are having to also create a space for themselves in the social world where they can be recognized as *Persons*. And so, while we have begun to understand that those performances, which must be viewed not only as subconscious and habitual (like such performances are generally theorized to be) but also instrumental, *also* do not simply serve the function of establishing their subjective being in a particularly gendered way, but more equally as establishing themselves as particular beings worthy of recognition.

They force you, often times over and over, to *see* them, and it is through this process, although violent as it can be towards them, that they are establishing their presence in this world, their visibility, their existence. Their theatrical loud and proud and 'in your face' *performances* that have earned them notoriety among strangers, and won my interest, are not just superficial attention seeking behaviours or part of their skarrelling-hustle, but they function as subversions, de-establishing themselves as invisible persons inhabiting that of a non-existent or even marginalized social space. They do not wait for permission to make themselves be known, *they confer permission to be, by being*. They "rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" and in doing so they create new categories of recognition, which speak to what is a livable life.

It was from these realizations that I became interested not only in the performative aspect of gender in the strict abstract theoretical stance of its relationship to identity, but also how it is a form of embodied politics; viewing particular stylized performances as more than mere habitual unconscious regurgitations of our socialization, but potentially as mediated and deliberate statements imbued with both artistic and political meanings, theatrical and dramatic displays that seem to provoke, yet also invite the Other to explore one's world. Unfortunately, while there is much more to say on this topic, time and word space un-permitting, we will then leave behind something for future projects and another day.

On that note, I would like to simply leave you with this...

My first time meeting Tamara, a fellow moffie and friend of the participants who knew nothing about the specifics of my research question, casually shared this with me during a stroll down Long Street:

T: The world is a performance and make sure everyone remembers your name...People don't understand who I really am or what really makes me tick so I have to express that in different ways, through different genres, and levels, externally by putting on make-up and hair and all that. And then internally and emotionally its about showing my passion my emotions -dressing like a moferette rather than a 'normal homo,' seeking attention and re-inventing yourself, being daring to get attention all the time. But inside...(pause) ..feeling different...I hate to be rhetorical!" (laughs) "For others its about coming out and getting to know who you are."

A: So would you say that this is an expression of your inner self as gay?

T: Ja but its all just attention seeking.

A: You think it's a performance?

T: Ja, because life is a big stage to live you see. It can be just a bit bleak and strenuous sometimes because you *always* have to re-invent yourself and come up with something new and something fun, something funtabulous. Its nice to be fantastically funtabulous..."

T: I'm acting, but I'm acting to the world. Thank you, love.

A: Aren't we all? Perhaps, you are just more profoundly aware of it.

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