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***“All the World’s a Stage”:***

**‘Gendered Performativities of ‘transitional’ Masculinities within a South African Female-to-Male (FTM) Transsexual context.’**

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A dissertation submitted in full fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Social Science in Gender Studies.

Faculty of the Humanities

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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.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date:

31/10/09

## Acknowledgements

*'For Makena, who fought for me long after I lacked the courage or strength to do it myself.'*

Thank You Lord for carrying me to the finish line. I thank You for your grace that has seen me through it *all*, for Your renewed mercies every morning, for the blessing of 'alternative' thinking, and most importantly for Your undying love. I am so grateful.

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## *Abstract*

The theoretical framework for this research was designed through contemporary work, both international and South African, on questions of gender, performativity, and masculinities. In addition, questions of social justice for those marginalized by gender conventions created the context for a qualitative research process in which transgender men's experiences of their subjectivities as 'men' served as a route through which to explore questions of gender surveillance in a post-democratic South Africa. Life-story interviewing of three South African Trans men from diverse racial, cultural, and class backgrounds made it possible to analyze meanings of 'masculinity' rarely foregrounded within contemporary feminist research in African contexts. Analytic themes covered a wide range of issues such as the disjuncture between an 'internal' and 'external' self, engaging with various 'ideals' of masculinity within specific contexts, the creation of 'alternative' versions of masculinity and the interruption of intimate and sexual relationships with heterosexual partners. Participants presented resistance to gendered expectations in light of their ability to create their gender identities independent of the physical body and to successfully negotiate their transitioning masculinities within hierarchal structures of manhood. The analysis of participants' material complicates the meaning of being an African man, where dominant norms are laden with colonial influences which may influence contemporary hegemonic national masculinities in South Africa but against which the research participants rebelled. The research contributes significantly to knowledge on often silenced and marginalized communities within African societies, where the majority of alternative sexualities and gender identities are often regarded as 'un-African'. The research concludes that the Trans men's masculinities play a pivotal role in the deconstruction of the gender institution as 'natural' by presenting alternative states of being as viable options within seemingly static boundaries.

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## Introduction

All the world's a stage  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts;  
His acts being seven ages.<sup>1</sup>

William Shakespeare.

Thus wrote the literary giant William Shakespeare in his play '*As You Like It*'. This specific quote, in my view, is particularly relevant when addressing the theories of sex and 'gender' from engagements with their social constructions to questions of the literal performance of roles and traits strictly adhered to if one hopes to effectively navigate society. One only needs to consider the case of those relegated to the fringes of the gender binary system, in this case the transgendered<sup>2</sup> community, to begin questioning the foundation of the ideals from which every individual is expected to create their social, cultural and political identities, presumably for the rest of their lives. The question of identity creation and self-awareness based on gender increases in complexity when the realities of trans-sexual possibilities are recognized. If society dictates that one is born into a certain 'sex' category (and therefore an assumed gender identity), then one's behavior and even persona is to be modeled on the assigned category (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Lorber, 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, W '*As You Like It*', Act II, Scene 7, pg 139-143. [www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes](http://www.enotes.com/shakespeare-quotes); last accessed 10/04/08

<sup>2</sup> This is a loose category of people who transcend gender norms in a wide variety of ways. The central ethic of this community is unconditional acceptance of individual exercise of freedoms including gender and sexual identity and orientation (Green & Peterson, 2006, p.9). There exists a complex relationship between transsexual and transgender terminologies as often the very notion of transsexualism relies extensively on successfully 'passing' as one's desired gender. This, more often than not, requires existing in stealth, whereas trans-genderism speaks to those whose gender identities and realities are not easily assimilated into societal gender binary beliefs, often easily identifiable. I however within this research acknowledge transgendered to refer to and represent all individuals whose identities are represented via a form of transition, be it through clothing or physical transformation.

Transsexuals are described as those who psychologically and emotionally relate to a sex or gender that is not anatomically assigned at birth and take the necessary steps (hormones and surgery) to physically, medically, and performatively transform their bodies to match their internal gender (Green & Peterson, 2006). This description illuminates an important question: how do those who fall out of the binary system *identify* their dissatisfied feelings of being in the wrong body and essentially 'the wrong' gender? What social realities, personal preferences and questions of 'appearances' are they unable to reconcile with their sense of an internal self? If our recognition as citizens who may take a place within the conventions of the cultures and societal places into which we are born depends on mapping an 'internal' to 'external' identity as a man or woman, what possibilities for change exist for those who wish to explore a perceived mismatch between an internal discernment of gendered identity (e.g. a man) and an external reality in which one is identified in a way one cannot accept (e.g. a woman) (Ghaul, 1994)?

To acknowledge the realities of transsexualism is simultaneously to acknowledge a connection of theoretical and political questions concerning the nature of masculinities and femininities from the perspective of those who wish to challenge any assumed linkage of a body type with a gender identity. Questions about the relationship between social constructions of gender and individual 'performances' of masculinity or femininity also arise. This is so as transsexualism engages with the meaning of 'becoming' recognized within frameworks of a gendered identity (e.g. masculinity) not available as a result of anatomy or physiology. And, as many radical theorists of gender such as Butler suggest, to engage questions of transsexualism is fundamentally to engage the politics of 'typicality' itself. Exploring trans-sexual recognitions of what 'masculinities' or 'femininities' means is to uncover the operation of gender as a critical and powerful force, holding all within a context to notions of humanity far from generous.

My own research focus emerged from work I undertook in my Honors year thesis (2007) at the University of Cape Town, where my research focus explored the definition of health in relation to the notion of 'well-being'. This notion takes the emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects of human life into account in the overall view of health. Given the way in which 'well-being' tends to assume a conventional relationship to gender, I was interested in how this concept translated when related to the lives of people engaged with complex and ambivalent relations to the social and cultural norms of gender. I worked with a transsexual community living in Cape Town.

My interest in the trans-gendered community began after I spent five years studying and living in Toronto, Canada, which has a massively visible LGBT<sup>3</sup> community and which in 2005 became the fourth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. While the country did have its own prejudices and struggles with regard to status-quo beliefs on sexuality and marriage, the different communities thrived openly and somewhat comfortably (in cosmopolitan cities). It was my overall experience in Toronto that served as a template in demonstrating how, for example, the State and possibilities of social engagements with diverse sexual and gendered choices were often co-operative, and as political spaces relatively unentangled in difficult, coercive or punitive negotiation. It was this exposure that enabled me to see the potential in studying visible 'alternative' gender and sexual identities in South Africa as the country became the first African nation to recognize same sex marriage in its legislation<sup>4</sup>. How was this nation with similar values as other African countries (in terms of key aspects of cultural / traditional background and

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<sup>3</sup>Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual & Transgender'. I have deliberately left out the 'T' in the popular acronym as I admittedly cannot recall a visible 'Intersexed' community/ discourse as with the other sexual/gender identities in the 'community'.

<sup>4</sup>South Africa became the fifth country in the world to legalize same sex marriage on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2006

gender ideologies) able to wrap its heads around acknowledging sexual diversity, essentially recognizing the holistic significance of 'anti-discrimination'?

I realized the unique opportunity that presented itself as I was living in Cape Town, deemed the 'Pink Capital', boasting one of the "continent's most developed gay and lesbian scene and eclipsing all other South African cities when it comes to the number of gay and lesbian venues (well over 100)" (Elder, 2003). While this profile privileged gay and lesbian identities as those at the forefront of challenges to conventional gendered options for social and political life, I was aware both from the political history of lesbian and gay activism and from my own reading that it was not only gay and lesbian people who were interested in rethinking gender conventions. The issue of transgender identities and realities was also a zone in which it was possible to explore challenges to these conventions.

Having direct access to academic resources, social interaction with people who identified as transgendered and greater contextual understanding of the issues I wanted to pursue made my research topic seem more possible. I was more than intrigued in the navigation of the transgender/transsexual individual in a heteronormative society that claims 'alternative' sexual and gender identities with people who identify as trans-gendered 'un-African' in popular and civil spaces (Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). I was also aware that in the Cape Town streets in which I lived, trans-gendered people were literally more visible in their rejection of gender and sexual conventions than many lesbian or gay people in terms of physical markers<sup>5</sup>. Their navigation of gender identities and their 'coping strategies' within societies which are concretely hostile to alternative gender and sexualities (despite legal protections

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<sup>5</sup> For example, a transgender man wearing women's clothing is more likely to stand out than say a 'butch' lesbian who may simply be regarded as a 'tomboy'.

concerning discrimination) were more telling of the realities I was interested in studying within an African context.

In my 2007 research, I uncovered little medical, social or academic material on issues facing African trans-communities, and that the majority of discourses about trans-gender were from a Western perspective. The previous research used semi-structured interviews with three transgendered individuals from two of South Africa's four 'recognized' racial categories. The participants (two white and one coloured) came from different relations trans-identity, including different forms of engagement with medically-based transition around physical self-recognition as 'masculine/feminine'. In popular terms, they were in different 'stages' of 'trans'-identity i.e. FTM and MTF<sup>6</sup>. I used thematic analysis to analyze common themes that emerged from the different lived experiences within a South African perspective to explore the meaning of 'well-being' where 'well-being' included engagement with that medically-based FTM or MTF physical transition. The research concluded that there existed a link between institutional and personal responsibility in the achievement of 'well-being'.

All the participants acknowledged that while the medical institution often pathologized their bodies and identities, it was the individual's responsibility to ensure that their mental, emotional, and spiritual elements of self were maintained, despite encounters with professional and cultural hostility to the participants' challenges to conventional ways of thinking about gender. This, the research showed, would in turn lead to a healthy psychological and physical sense of self (therefore well-being) in face of overt political and cultural marginalization within society. This view was reinforced by the fact that all participants had been successfully living as their

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<sup>6</sup>Female-to-Male and Male-to-Female Trans identities respectively.

preferred gender for over five plus years and had each found stable medical support systems, and reported their sense of 'well-being' intact.

One of the things I uncovered in the process of this research was participants' interest in thinking through not only general questions of the assumed link between a body and a gender identity, but also around the complexities of 'becoming' a man or a woman within diverse possibilities for masculinities or femininities. The literature on 'masculinities' often assumed a conventionally 'male' body, presenting the physical male body as a fixed site. Definitions and 'ideals' of maleness were further cemented to an irrevocable phallic body. While medically-based transformations to the body were a focus for my Honours research, my current research question explored the *Gendered performativities of 'transitional' masculinities within a South African female-to-male (FTM) trans-sexual context*. By tracing the diverse ways this particular trans-identity negotiated masculinity and exploring their location within gendered performance as 'masculine' at different life and transition stages, I revealed socially constructed notions of masculinity as a performance gendered 'male' individuals participate in for the sake (or perhaps fear) of the status quo. At the same time, I questioned the notion of masculinity as a performance which must be credible only from within the parameters of the conventionally 'sexed' male body. I also drew from my participants' diverse encounters with masculinities' strong theoretical positions on the possibility of inhabiting simultaneous 'alternative' and 'conventional' or hegemonic masculinities.

Feminist theories committed to producing alternative knowledge in numerous discourses emphasize the importance of regarding gender identities as other aspects of identity; as fluid and adaptable, capable of being "constantly created and recreated" in response to changing

circumstances and contexts, just as the individual does (Lorber,1994, p.1). It would appear that the individual ought to mould their identity accordingly and not adapt to the identity certified by external forces. Studying gender through a 'performativities' lens is particularly relevant for contemporary African-centered debates on the politics of inclusion. We have seen a surge in attention paid to gender issues as key to questions of equality and democracy-building. More importantly, we have witnessed a desire for a better understanding of the place gender has in our lives and various institutions as vital to the imagination of 'alternative worlds'. Uncovering gender's complex place in African societies can pave the way for actual transformation in medical and societal institutions. Also it may essentially challenge 'knowledge' produced from these sources often presented as 'fact' or tradition. This present dissertation is developed over six chapters.

Chapter Two lays the foundation of the research by exploring literature that addresses the wide range of issues embedded in this research. The themed literature review discusses the complementary and contradictory theories useful in uncovering the foundation of the concepts the research question inspires. The themes include: an introduction into discussions around the heteronormative construction and 'theater' of gender, the deconstruction of the 'masculinity as a site of construction' question as well as 'the performative aspect of masculinity'. Issues of race and class occupy pivotal roles in the analysis of South African post-1994 realities and the review of research on masculinities in a South African context is alert to this. This is followed by a review of specific cross-cultural ideas about transgender experiences and realities: a North American perspective of 'transitional' masculinities and 'transitional' masculinities realities within South Africa. Chapter Two concludes with a summary of the key theoretical insights through which my research has been framed.

Chapter Three explores the methodological approach to the research and the concerns raised by engaging marginalized communities as researchers. The concerns were all the more marked when the identity of the researcher fell outside of those constructed by the 'researched'. The chapter discusses the careful choice of research methodology that took into account the sensitivity required to explore the research question. It also emphasizes the need to prioritize throughout the importance of establishing respect, and a sense of familiarity between the researcher and the research participants (and for the researcher to participate fully in social interactions). The tensions between feminist epistemologies and masculinity studies and their ironic collaboration throughout this research is pinpointed in discussions within this chapter. In addition, a consideration of appropriate research methods that adhere to my research principles of allowing the participants to represent themselves is given. This chapter offers a narrative that explored my actual research process, positionality and the ethical considerations emerging prior to and during the entire research process.

Chapter Four offers a detailed presentation and analysis of the research findings, where thematic analysis allowed for a discursive mapping of trans-individual's physical and 'masculinity' transition journeys within their separate social and cultural contexts. The themed chapter explores a range of issues directly emerging from the rich material the participants' narratives produced. It analyses the material through thematic lenses designed to highlight questions of particular salience for understanding their relation to transitional masculinities. These lenses include questions of being recognized within both familial and public spaces as masculine. Questions of heterosexual sexual performance and romance, and questions of class and race difference in terms of what it means to 'become masculine' in contemporary South Africa are

also considered. This chapter highlights the numerous obstacles and ultimate victories the trans-individuals have faced during their transition journeys, and the complex triumph of the realities their successful 'transitional' masculinity afforded them.

Chapter Five integrates all the analysis and insights of Chapter Four with the crucial overarching issues raised throughout the dissertation concerning the meaning of conventional gender operations, the meaning of transitional masculinities, and the diversity of trans-individuals' engagement with masculinity. The chapter highlights the often insightful and challenging theories emerging from the entire research project. These theories inspired examination of all notions around the institution of gender. The chapter concludes with reflections on the research process and some ideas about new arenas of research opened up by the explorations I have undertaken here.

## Chapter II:

### Literature Review.

This literature review examines three main areas pertinent to my research. The first area, *'The Heteronormative Construction of Gender'*, is a discussion of the pivotal concept of 'gender' as a social construction where specific and often patriarchal expectations are projected onto the body. This leads to a discussion of ideas about the subsequent 'performance' expected of one's 'biologically' assigned sex translated into 'gendered' social and cultural norms of being. I explore material on this performativity in a section entitled *'The Theater of Gender'*. Drawing on ideas about the inevitable 'performance' of gender in order to cement identification as 'male' or 'female', I review material by influential researchers who provide insights which form the basis of feminist thought and debate in this terrain. By surveying an array of contexts and cultures (mainly Northern), the theorists' work is illuminated as useful in highlighting aspects of cross-cultural analysis relevant to my particular research.

This leads directly to the second area covered by this review where I delve more deeply into influential schools of thought and discourse around the notion of 'masculinities', from its 'constructed' nature (*Masculinity as a site of Construction*) and subsequent 'performance' (*The Performative aspect of Masculinity*). In this area, I locate discourses on 'African' masculinities and more specifically, I focus on the complexities of these discourses within a South African context (*The Construction of Masculinities in a South African context*). Theorists writing on the 'African' male body and masculinities can often be divided into two camps: those who work on colonial constructions of masculinity (Thompson & Thompson, 1997; Lindsay & Miescher,

'constructed' nature (*Masculinity as a site of Construction*) and subsequent 'performance' (*The Performative aspect of Masculinity*). In this area, I locate discourses on 'African' masculinities and more specifically, I focus on the complexities of these discourses within a South African context (*The Construction of Masculinities in a South African context*). Theorists writing on the 'African' male body and masculinities can often be divided into two camps: those who work on colonial constructions of masculinity (Thompson & Thompson, 1997; Lindsay & Miescher, 2003) and those who explore 'alternative' forms of masculinities in light of constantly evolving societies and 'African' identities (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2001, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005). However, although both schools of thoughts are relevant to my research question, the area of scholarship I focus on in the review is the amalgamation between traditional aspects of masculinities and the location of 'alternative' masculinity within the definitions.

It is important to note that there is a vast amount of previous research undertaken on gender and masculinities, which often overlaps given the interconnected nature of 'gender' and the study of masculinities. In this study, I have attempted to present complementary as well as contrasting theories. The study of gender and masculinities has produced a large field of theories resulting in bodies of literature that while relevant as bounded bodies of material, are also irrevocably interconnected. The interactions one may encounter within this review process in no way takes away from the research. Instead, they enhance the understanding of my overall research argument: that gender is indeed a social construction that subjects people to the fulfillment of patriarchal ideals often contradictory in nature.

The final section reviews the third area of research relevant to my interests, namely material on 'transgender' politics, and experiences. The review is especially interested in material on transmen, where I once again begin my exploration of these experiences from a Northern/global perspective (*North American perspective of 'Transitional' Masculinities*). I then present a cross-cultural analysis of transgender experiences within a South African context in the sub-theme (*Transitional Masculinities realities within South Africa*). This society encourages a higher level of discourse around 'alternative' states of being (not without its own prejudices), a factor that greatly informed my research. I also review the numerous 'reactions' to this more 'open' discourse around 'transitional' masculinities in both 'traditional' and 'modern' South African society. This locates the research participants' personal histories as well as their engagements with the realities of navigating SA society. Each must be understood in the light of the complicated position he occupies as masculine and more importantly, in the light of the contested grounds of what it 'means' to be a man' and an 'African man' across differing South African cultural communities and contexts. The review concludes with a summary of the most useful theoretical insights discussed for construction of the theoretical framework of the research..

### **I. *The Heteronormative 'Construction' of Gender.***

The notion of gender as a natural consequence of birth can be considered as one of the most hegemonic cultural beliefs. As a Gender Studies student, I am often asked 'what' is there to study about gender. How ingrained is this system of classification and what are the foundations on which it is built? Is it a force that usefully organizes individuals across contexts into

productive ways of being? Does it masquerade as a 'natural' way of stratifying society to fulfill different political, economic, cultural and symbolic agendas?

The initial question to consider thus concerns the deconstruction of this category. Four decades ago, Harry Garfunkel outlined the 'natural attitude' towards gender. According to him:

Our natural attitude toward gender (i.e. the real, objective facts) consists of the following:

1. There are two, and only two, genders (female and male).
2. One's gender is invariant (If you *are* female/male, you always were female/male and you always *will be* female/male).
3. Genitals are the essential sign of gender (A female is a person with a vagina; a male is a person with a penis.)
4. Any exceptions to two genders are not to be taken seriously (They must be jokes, pathology, etc.)
5. There are no transfers, from one gender to another except ceremonial ones (masquerades).
6. Everyone must be classified as a member of one gender or another (There are no cases where gender is not attributed.)
7. The male/female dichotomy is a 'natural' one (Males and females exist independently of scientists' (or anyone else's) criteria for being male or female).
8. Membership in one gender or another is 'natural' (Being female or male is not dependent on anyone's deciding what you are.) (1967, p.122-128 in Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p.113-4; Italics in original).

Numerous theorists suggest that gender is indeed a construction that is willingly upheld to construct forms of identity, organizing reality (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, 2004) whilst others

claim that gender as a dichotomized system is so ingrained that “we assume it is bred into our genes”(Lorber, 1994, p.1). Others go a step further into characterizing gender as a construction which is then re-created by individuals in human interactions, forming the basis of everyday living, essentially ‘doing gender’(West & Zimmerman, 1987). If this is indeed the case, what happens to those who are unsure of their own gender? Are they able, or rather permitted, to discover ‘who’ they really are and still comfortably and safely navigate society? Is the answer of ‘who’ they are judged by their membership of one of two types of gender or are there other parameters to consider? Seeing that there are only two ‘official’ gender categories (in mainstream discourse), can one ever occupy both simultaneously, or perhaps draw on them interchangeably across contexts? All these are important questions in not only revealing the restrictive undertone of the notions behind gender, but also for revealing the realities of those in society for whom gender is not so readily ‘obvious’ or identifiable i.e. transgender and transsexual communities. Lorber (1994) suggests that:

Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a *deliberate disruption of our expectations* of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced. Gender signs and signals are so ubiquitous that we usually fail to note them - unless they are missing or ambiguous. Then we are uncomfortable until we have successfully placed the other person in a gender status; otherwise, we feel socially dislocated (1994, p, 1; Emphasis mine).

According to Lorber (1994), it is important to realize that the transgender or transsexual individual does not exist in a vacuum but has to effectively learn to navigate society by ‘conforming’ to or adopting the same gender roles (often as a form of survival mechanism) that ‘normal’ individuals do in order to avoid detection. Socialization is often the site where children learn to internalize and conform to the pre-existing functions of gender as expected in society,

where dressing up in gender-colour clothing (blue for boy, pink for girls) and even in assigned activities such as 'rough-play' for boys and 'mother-child' games for girls are gender determined. It is this socialization stage of childhood that ensures gender is ingrained as the 'natural' way of being and is passed on through generations over time. Hence when considering the possibility of 'difference', the conclusions drawn are often signaled by their *unwillingness* to participate in specific gender-specific activities, often preferring the opposite sex's activities (Lorber, 1994; Kinoti, 2007). This sex-segregation of activities and clothing has persisted across generations to the extent that parenting expectations are often gendered, resulting in a 'double-standard' between the sexes that persists beyond childhood or adolescence (for example, in societal discourses around female sexuality or male economic status)<sup>7</sup>.

The idea of gender as a 'natural' entity is essentially flawed but remains successful as a construction because despite vastly diverse contexts, many individuals (collectively as a society) choose or rather are coerced to partake in its continual re-creation. As Lorber (1994) observes:

... [f]or human beings there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations. Individuals may vary on many of the components of gender and may shift genders temporarily or permanently, but they must fit into the limited number of gender statuses their society recognizes (Lorber, 1994, p. 4).

The question therefore remains: why do societies collectively ascribe to the notion of gender, in spite of its oppressive characteristics which do little to represent the fluidity and contextual nature of the human condition? West & Zimmerman (1987) argue:

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<sup>7</sup>Here I make reference to the belief that a man is labeled as a *successful provider* if he earns more income than his female partner, but is 'emasculated' when the female earns more.

In one sense, of course, it is individuals who "do" gender. But it is a situated doing, carried out in the virtual or real presence of others who are presumed to be oriented to its production. Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society (1987, p.126).

This perspective of the societal construction of gender, now solidly entrenched within much social science over the past three decades, is essential in considering the case of the transsexual individual, where even the overall concept of gender serves to preserve hierarchical interests (West & Zimmerman, 1987). One cannot deny that a majority of individuals across societies participate readily or perhaps subconsciously, within the system, in all the functions and expectations necessary to secure their membership. Transsexuals often also seek to conform to the constructions of their desired gender (essentially rejecting one construction for another). How does the process of 'doing' gender ensure one remains 'on course'? Are there other external forces separate from the individual that actively reinforce the inherent and 'natural' need to conform to gendered expectations? Lorber (1993) in her article *Believing is seeing: Biology as ideology* puts forward the following notion:

The moral imperatives of religion and cultural representations reinforce the boundary lines among genders and ensure that what is demanded, what is permitted, and what is tabooed for the people in each gender is well-known and followed by most. Political power, control of scarce resources, and, if necessary, violence uphold the gendered social order in the face of resistance and rebellion. *Most people, however, voluntarily go along with their society's prescriptions for those of their gender status because the norms and expectations get built into their sense of worth and identity as a certain kind of human being and because they believe their society's way is the natural way* (1993, p. 578; Emphasis mine).

Therefore, yet another form of 'doing' gender occurs via accountability to external institutions (e.g. religion, 'tradition', science) forming an integral part of societal existence where "[i]f we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals - not the institutional arrangements - may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions)" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 146). Whilst traditional concepts of gender take place through and on the body, theories surrounding the impact of gender construction on transgender bodies focus on the converse event where 'gender' is created independent of the body (Dozier, 2005). Heteronormative gender assumptions are exclusively based and reliant on the external physical 'signifiers'/organs of the individual to represent an accurate and permanent assignment of one's gender category. The trans-individual on the other hand is able to 'present' or successfully 'pass' as a member of their desired gender even without possessing external 'signifiers' specific to that gender category. This is especially true of FTM individuals who even upon testosterone hormone therapy and a host of various surgical procedures remain unable to successfully possess the 'ultimate' signifier that society places great emphasis on. With regard to 'manliness' they manage to live successful and productive lives as men. Raine Dozier in *Beards, breasts and bodies: Doing sex in a gendered world* takes on the issue of sex and gender in relation to the experiences and life history interviews of a large sample of North American FTM transsexuals. Dozier (2005) finds that:

...[w]hen sex is ambiguous or less convincing, there is increased reliance on highly gendered behavior; when sex is obvious, then there is considerably more freedom in behavior... (perceived) sex is an important aspect of the construction of gender and that perceived sex is a lens through which behavior is interpreted. However, particular sex characteristics such as a penis or breasts are not as crucial to the perception of sex as their meanings created in both social and sexual interaction (2005, p.304).

Therefore, the socialized behavior of FTM transsexuals in their daily lives is more central to their membership in the male 'category' of gender. That is, the *perception* of being regarded as 'masculine' proves more reliable to social credibility than the literal presence of a penis. It is this distinction between 'perceived' and 'actual' membership into a gender category that serves to pinpoint a crucial point of weakness in the notion of gender as a 'naturally occurring' entity (Garfunkel, 1967; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The existence of FTM transsexuals who successfully 'pass' and navigate society as men indicates an overt reliance on external 'signifiers' to effectively gauge 'correct' gender identity. It also points to questions of surveillance individuals deploy using 'gender' as a key variable (race and class are other examples of such 'categories') for political ends.

❖ *The 'Theatre' of Gender.*

While sociobiologically inclined research sees gender as occurring 'naturally' (Wilson, 1975), feminist research works with the notion that the construction of gender is designed to uphold the interests of political status quo (Lorber, 1993, 1994; Butler, 1990; Bornstein, 1994; Kessler & McKenna, 1978). Since the 1990s, discourse has turned to uncovering the 'performances' that go hand-in-hand with the creation of gender. Judith Butler's pivotal work in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* enables us to understand the part every individual in society plays towards fulfilling this patriarchal agenda, be it subconsciously through generations of conditioning or perhaps consciously as a survival mechanism. Butler (1990) puts forward the theory that the performance of gender is a repetitious act constantly enforced and consequently:

...Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through the *stylization repetition of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self... Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (1990, pp. 191-192; Italics in original).

It becomes perhaps easier to navigate the 'theatre' of gender when one realizes just how seemingly essential it is to an individual not only to participate, but also *ascribe* to gender 'roles' and identities. Willing participation may actually be "a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, [as] gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (Butler, 1990, p.190). However, an interesting concept that arises out of gendered performativities lies in the question: is there one gender that takes precedence over another? Kessler and McKenna (1978), Dreger (1998) and Paetther (2003) all approach this question differently but reach similar conclusions. Kessler and McKenna's work draws on the 'gender attribution process', where one is classified as 'either' female or male (1978, p. ix) to explain how every day experiences in society are influenced by how successfully one's biological sex is 'signified'<sup>8</sup> and in turn interpreted and affirmed by others of the same or opposite sex. Paetther (2003) goes a step further in relation to 'gender attribution' by suggesting that the process is deemed the only

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<sup>8</sup>Here I am referring to *physical characteristics/ cues* ascribed to particular genders, e.g. broad shoulders or Adam's apple in males or protrusive breasts in females.

way to ensure a binary gender system is upheld as well as drawing out *specific* guidelines on what certain characteristics / 'signifiers' show evidence of .

Therefore, even in the face of uncertainty, short of actually being able to observe one's sexual organs, attribution of "secondary sexual characteristics"<sup>9</sup> is usually used for such ascriptions, even if other common markers, such as hairstyle or dress are ambiguous"(2003, p. 76). By expanding the criterion of markers of gender to include 'secondary characteristics', patriarchal influence ensures the participation/conformity of those I personally refer to as *performers* (i.e. those who *ensure* they project both primary and secondary 'signifiers' of their perceived gender in their daily interactions) and *accomplices* (i.e. those who judge their own as well as others' 'signifiers' by societal ascribed roles)<sup>10</sup>. This situation takes on an entirely new meaning when one considers the case of the Pre-<sup>11</sup> and even Post-Operative<sup>12</sup> transsexual individual who, upon self awareness at a particular stage of life, perhaps finds themselves constantly on the receiving end of the *accomplice* gaze whilst desperately, if not actively, attempting to perfect their role in the *performers'* category.

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<sup>9</sup>It is my understanding that the author classifies distinct 'on display' physical appearances e.g. facial hair for men or 'delicate' facial features for women, as 'primary' characteristics and sexual organs/genitals as 'secondary' characteristics hidden from immediate view.

<sup>10</sup>I believe that these two categories are interchangeable, with every individual in society finding themselves under the scrutiny of either category, at different stages of their lives or even particular interactions in their daily lives.

<sup>11</sup>I also use this term here to refer to any steps previously undertaken (before surgery) to transform the body into the desired gender i.e. use of hormones, artificial breasts or phallus, clothing and even mannerisms that assist in the successful 'passing' of the individual.

<sup>12</sup>I use 'Operative' to refer to the 'Sexual Reassignment Surgery' (SRS) that the majority of transsexuals undergo in order to fully align their external bodies to their internal gender; I also use this term here to refer to any steps previously undertaken (*before surgery*) to transform the body into the desired gender i.e. use of hormones, artificial breasts or phallus, clothing and even mannerisms that assist in the successful 'passing' of the individual

Kessler and McKenna argue, prior to Butler's ideas on performativity, that it is a 'gender attribution' process (which is essentially *genital* attribution<sup>13</sup>) that serves to privilege the male body/ masculinity over that of the female body/ femininity in all aspects of societal interaction; the penis is the attributed organ and to possess it automatically implies/affirms one's 'maleness'. It is this recognition created and upheld across cultures that turns this genital attribution / assumption of the appendage into a 'cultural' genital (1978, p.150). The researchers explain how:

...the salience of male characteristics is a social construction. *We construct gender so that male characteristics are seen as more obvious*....To fail to see someone as a man is to see them as a woman and vice versa, since 'male' and 'female' are mutually constitutive. However, the conditions of failure are different. The condition of failure for being seen as a woman is to be seen as having a concrete 'male' characteristic. The condition of failure for being seen as a man is to be seen as not having any concrete characteristics. In the social construction of gender 'male' is the primary construction" (1978, p.159; Emphasis mine).

Two decades later, Dreger draws on similar concepts when highlighting the supposed link between biological and external 'signifiers' on the body, which illuminate one's place in the gender binary system, when exploring the medical construction of gender on intersexed babies. Genitals have to reach certain 'requirements'<sup>14</sup>, with those failing to live up to expectations being promptly surgically 'modified' to resemble a clitoris, instantly attributing the child to a female 'gender identity' (1998, p. 26). Dreger's main interest lies in the fact that given the stringent

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<sup>13</sup>This follows Kessler's theory on 'gender attribution' which focuses on physical signifiers, i.e. a penis or vagina and therefore essentially attributes possession of particular genitals to a particular gender.

<sup>14</sup>For example, no less than 2.5 centimeters to earn a 'penis' classification (Dreger, 1998, p. 28).

requirements of what it takes to 'be a man', the 'default' gendering is therefore female. To be female is to 'lack' what males possess.

All the described theories are indicative of the strong sense amongst many Western feminist researchers on the construction and in effect performance of gender, that the privileging of the male body begins from the very commencement of gender via constructions of biology. The penis is then upheld as the *signifier* of 'gender' (male). Consequently 'masculinity' roles are also expected to continue this notion of dominance leaving 'femininity' with its 'opposite' traits, as the receptive site of this dominance and essentially providing a full trajectory of a 'binary' system of gender.

In the light of the concerted effort through which feminists have challenged societal patriarchal influences with regard to the notion of gender as a construction, it is perhaps useful to study theories put forward by researchers (feminist or not) on the performativity of gender. This direction enables one to fully understand the overall research focus on the construction of masculinities by analyzing the performances (essentially pre-requisites) of what it 'takes' to be regarded as a certain gender 'identity'. Theorist Lisa Disch presents her standpoint on gender [performativity] "not [as] an identity but a discourse that helps to effect the distinction between nature and culture on which it purports to rest" (1999, p. 548). It becomes increasingly clear that the nature of 'performativity' and thus gender itself often becomes blurred as both are not only constructions of patriarchal ideals, but continually draw definitions and affirmations from these traditional discourses, leaving 'alternative' identities labeled as 'deviant'.

Other theorists suggest that the performance context of 'masculinities' and 'femininities' are not only essential parts of gender, but there exist different levels of 'performances' within each

category varying across individual efforts and contextual social situations. Where one may possess an overall awareness of their gender category, the 'familiar' soon becomes 'strange' once placed in a context that renders one's performance 'ineffective' or lacking (Paecther, 2003; Connell,1995). This places 'performances' of masculinities and femininities by individuals under constant surveillance within our societal navigations to ensure survival. The theory that masculinities and femininities are active sites of 'practice', learnt from childhood and reinforced in adulthood is put forward by Paecther (2003) who theorizes that gender performance is modeled as a 'community of practice' where:

The learning of what it means to be male or female within a social configuration results in shared practices in pursuit of the common goal of sustaining particular localized masculine and feminine identities. It follows from this notion that the localized masculinities and femininities within which these identities are developed and sustained can be seen as communities of practice. *Practice is fundamental to the conception of communities of practice.* Shared practices are what holds these communities together, what makes them communities of practice. *Practice is also not fixed, but fluid; the practices of a particular community are constantly being shifted, renegotiated and reinvented. It is what the learner learns as he or she moves from peripherality to full membership.* In doing so, she or he additionally takes part in the practice of learning....It is clear, however, that someone who does not share with the full members...an understanding of what it is to be male or female in that context will be at best only a peripheral member of that community (Paecther, 2003, pp.71-72; Emphasis mine).

By perhaps analyzing the motivations behind the performative nature of gender, one is able to actively trace the inherent need for individuals and essentially societies at large to overtly uphold the influential space that gender occupies in spaces across cultures. This is of extreme importance in attempting to understand the consequences that the research participants (collectively and individually) have endured, and continue to endure, in relation to their life

journeys and respective transition stages. The notion of 'communities of practice' (Paecther, 2003) can also be a useful concept in uncovering the 'meanings'/consequences of trans-gendered experiences across different South African cultural communities/ racial categories. Research suggests that black African, white and coloured practices of masculinities, despite occupying similar geographic location, are engaged with experiences (because and in spite of race) as different as night and day (Ratele, 2001; Morrell, 1998; Connell, 1995). After all, in the midst of the FTMs transsexual's transition stage, be it from an awareness of violating gendered roles as a child to an actual achievement of physical transformation in adulthood, the process of 'transitioning' from femininities to masculinities is demanding and delicate. As Paecther puts it, it is as "joining a community of practice involv[ing] entering not only its internal configuration but also its relationship with the rest of the world" (Paecther, 2003, p. 73).

This perspective of 'transitioning' from one gender category to another in the light of such theories is best explored in examples of autobiographical accounts of undertaking such practices, from popular engagements with transgender realities (Vincent, 2006) to actual lived experience of 'transitioning' (Feinberg, 1996; Green, 2004). Norah Vincent in her book *Self-made man: My year disguised as a man* deals with performance and specifically in her case, those of masculinities. She describes the year long social experiment she undertook, where she literally transformed her appearance and lived, worked, encountered and pursued social relationships as a heterosexual male. Although Vincent (2006) does not identify as a transsexual or transvestite<sup>15</sup>, her approach to the 'performance' of gender 'maleness' for her is particularly relevant. The

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<sup>15</sup>Transvestite, popularly referred to as 'cross-dresser' is one who dresses in the clothing of the opposite sex; with majority being heterosexual men deriving pleasure, sexual or other, from the practice. (Green & Peterson: 2006).

author cites her motivation for the experiment as stemming from a fascination with and concern over the contradictory nature of gender (2006). The non-academic writer concludes that:

Trying to be a man when you are a woman is not just being a horse of a different color, or a person who has traded in her old trappings for new ones: new clothes, new makeup and hair. Through 'Ned' I learned the hard way that my gender has roots in my brain...living very close to the core of my self-image. Inseparably close. *Far, far closer than my race or class or religion or nationality, so close in fact as to be incomparable with these categories*, though it is so often grouped with them in theory. (2006, p,270 ; Emphasis mine).

The wealth of other autobiographical accounts of 'transitional gendered' living/realities, whether from a non-trans-gendered space (Feinberg 1996; Vincent, 2006) to actual lived experience of FTM trans-gendered spaces of gender realities (Bornstein, 1994 ; Califia, 1997 ; Prosser, 1998 ; Green, 2004) all contribute to engagements with feminist and trans theorists. They help create the discursive space necessary for 'alternative' systems of thought and debates that specifically respond to 'knowledge' produced by oppressive traditional patriarchal systems. It is this effective partnership that guided my overall research focus, as both perspectives unsurprisingly expose the underbelly of 'gender' as a fiction that deems the dominance of one gender over another as 'natural'.

## **II. 'Masculinity' as a site of Construction**

The rise of 'critical men's studies' in Western society resulted after certain social scientists, especially in education in the late seventies took up a feminist challenge around the need to uncover the micro-politics of gender construction and explored the realities of 'men' and their experiences (Connell, 1985 ; Kimmel, 1987 ; Brod & Kaufman, 1996). Some of this occurred in

discussion with feminists who had prioritized the experience of women as critical to new theorizations of power. Brod and Kaufman (1996) in *Theorizing masculinities* explain how:

For decades, it was feminist women who had been theorizing about the meanings of masculinity- and with good reason: *Men's efforts to live up to some vaguely defined notions of masculinity had some disastrous consequences for women.* Institutionally, women lived in a world in which men held virtually all the positions of power. [F]eminism thus proposed a syllogism: Women were in power and did not feel powerful; men [are] in power and therefore must feel powerful...sure, it was empirically quite true that men occupied virtually all positions of power, and thus it could be accurately said that men were *in* power. But this power did not translate to a feeling of *being powerful* at the individual level (1996, pp.VII-VIII; Emphasis mine).

Leading 'men' theorists (Kimmell, 1987; Brod, 1987; Connell, 1988) expand on this notion of assumed power and dominance of men/'masculinities' over women/'femininities'. They began to actively deconstruct the numerous 'meanings' of what it actually entailed to be male. Theorists Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985) effectively summarize the history of research on masculinity by studying a wide array of other theorists' work on men's experiences in differing societies and contexts as moving from a 'roles' perspective i.e. projected expectations based solely on gender towards an emphasis on the 'constructed' nature of gender. The authors describe their intentions behind exploring the sociology of 'masculinities' as:

... [a] hope for a realist sociology of masculinity, built on actual social practices rather than discussion of rhetoric and attitudes. And we hope for a realistic politics of masculinity, neither fatuously optimistic nor defeatist. We see such an enterprise as part of a radical approach to the theory of gender relations in general made possible by convergences among feminism, gay liberation, contemporary socialism, psychoanalysis,

and the history and sociology of practice. The theme of masculinity only makes sense in terms of that larger project. At the same time it is, we think, an important part of it (1985 , p, 553).

It is thus through renewed focus that Carrigan et al. (1985) present an overall conceptualization of 'masculinities' expounding upon its stratified nature in the pursuit of power and associated privileges. These ideas saw the genesis of a critical understanding of 'gender' with regard to the theoretical (and social) spaces already marked out by feminist theory.

Robert Connell is considered as one of the authoritative voices in the study of masculinities. His pivotal work *Masculinities* (1995) is credited with developing the different approaches of understanding 'manhood' and more importantly the deconstruction of masculinities as a societal construct, much like the overall notion of 'gender'. Connell's earlier works (1985, 1987) sought to expand the notion of 'gender' from its previous conceptualization as a 'women-only' space to include issues facing men within specific societal expectations of 'manliness'. The author is most widely known for the influential concept of 'Hegemonic Masculinity'. His first substantial discussion of the idea in 1979 (later revisited in 1995) has essentially changed discourse around the realities of 'manhood'. This 'type' of masculinity is described not only as the most dominant form of 'maleness', but the gauge in which all 'Other' types of men are measured up against, and those falling short left by the wayside ( Connell, 1995, p. 76). He recognizes that there are different versions of masculinities, separated by varying notions concerning identity and varying embodiments of power, effectively deconstructing the theory that *all* men occupy positions of power (1995, p. 37). By presenting four different 'types' of masculinities (Hegemonic, Marginalized, Complicit and Subordinated), Connell (1995) presents an alternative sociology on

masculinity as well as an overall understanding of the *stratified* nature of power functioning within it, explaining:

To recognize diversity in masculinity is not enough. We must also recognize the *relations between the different kinds of masculinity*: relations of alliance, dominance and subordination. These relationships are constructed through practices that exclude and include, that intimidate and exploit and so on. *There is a gender politics within masculinity* (1995, p. 37; Emphasis mine).

The 'gender politics' of which Connell speaks can be seen as yet another direct response towards the construction of 'gender' in order to maintain the status quo. The pursuit of dominance is central to definitions of masculinities, where those who are unable to embody the 'ideal' (read: hegemonic) are relegated to the peripherals of 'successful' masculinity. In *Men's gender politics*, Lorber suggests that some of the parameters of defining one's 'position' are "embedded in stratification systems of Western societies--racial and economic-- as well as in the homophobia of 'hegemonic' masculinity" (1998, p. 4). The masculinities that find themselves outside the parameters of 'hegemonic' masculinity are often regarded as lacking in currency or legitimacy, leaving the definitions of masculinities to reflect only the interests and ideals of those who are able to 'live up' to hegemonic standards (Morrell, 1998).

This is not to say that Connell's influential concepts (1995, 2000), are not without its critics (Blauner, 1996 ; Whitchad, 1999 ; Lushcr & Robins, 2001). 'Hegemonic' masculinity often comes under fire for essentially failing to take into account that masculinities (as identities overall) are constantly in motion according to circumstances and contexts. Demetrakis Demetriou, in his article *Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique*, argues that the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' *needs to be thoroughly examined, not for validity* (i.e. as a

suitably accurate and applicable description of aspects of masculinities) but more for its effectiveness in embodying 'manhood' as experienced across differing cultural and social contexts. Demetriou (2001) offers his own thoughts on the overall concept citing that:

...Hegemonic masculinity is not a purely white or heterosexual configuration of practice but it is a hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the re-production of patriarchy (2001, p. 337).

The author's critique stems from the argument that 'hegemonic masculinity' does not essentially stand alone (let alone at the top) of the stratified structure of masculinities, but is instead created and in essence *sustained* by 'other' types of masculinities (2001, p. 338; Morrell, 1998, p. 609). By arguing that 'hegemonic masculinity' is mandated by lower status 'types' in order to preserve the overall dominance of men/ 'manliness', this assertion becomes a crucial aspect of effectively deconstructing the role that 'gender' plays within daily discourse, social interaction and even cultural traditions. Demetriou (2001) compares his argument to that of Connell's (1995) whose understanding of 'hegemonic masculinity', he argues, tackles the definition from:

...a more elitist way where subordinate and marginalized masculinities have no effect on the construction of the hegemonic model...Hegemonic masculinity relates to non-hegemonic ones only by subordinating and marginalizing them and thus their potential pragmatic value in the construction of hegemony is underplayed" (2001, pp. 345-6).

It is in recognition of this 'alternative' framework for considering the application of 'hegemonic masculinity' within different social, historical and cultural contexts (given its immense theoretical popularity) that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) respond with *Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept*. Here both masculinities' theorists respond to critics stating that:

...our understanding of hegemonic masculinity needs to incorporate a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchy, recognizing the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of dominant groups and the mutual conditioning of gender dynamics and other social dynamics... [*and in defense of the concept*]... It is also a widespread research finding that certain masculinities are more socially central, or more associated with authority and social power, than others. The concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of non- hegemonic masculinities, and this is a process that has now been documented in many settings, internationally. Also well supported is the idea that the hierarchy of masculinities is a pattern of hegemony, not a pattern of simple domination based on force. *Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimation of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities* (2005, pp. 838-46; Emphasis mine.)

The authors both respond to critics and rework the original concept of hegemonic masculinity to include varying social and cultural contexts which essentially serve to highlight the theoretical strength as well as immense relevance of ideas about 'hegemonic masculinity' within the study of gender across differing contexts. This concept is useful in relation to notions of 'alternative masculinities', which are created largely in resistance or 'response' to unattainable standards of effective performances of 'manliness'. This notion of 'alternative' masculinities is particularly useful in light of my research focus, where the body is central in the evolution of research participants' engagement with a concept of 'hegemonic' South African masculinity. However, the notion extends to where their lived realities also explicitly engage with identity-creation through 'alternative' and other 'versions' of masculinities. The reality is that FTM Transsexuals are able to 'pass' and successfully participate, as any 'genetic' man, in the 'male' dilemma of embodying or 'failing' power within the stratified patriarchal structure of masculinities. It is within this evolved theoretical space that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discuss 'hegemonic masculinity's' location arguing that:

Bodies are [now] involved more actively, more intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed. Bodies participate in social action by delineating courses of social conduct—the body is a participant in generating social practice. It is important not only that masculinities be understood as embodied but also that the interweaving of embodiment and social context be addressed. The need for a more sophisticated treatment of embodiment in hegemonic masculinity is made particularly clear by the issue of transgender practices, which are difficult to understand within a simple model of social construction.... *'Self-made men' can pursue gender equality or oppose it, just like non transsexual men.* What the transsexual experience highlights is modernity's treatment of the body as the "medium through which selves interact with each other" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 851; Emphasis mine).

It is this recognition of the societal construction of masculinities that has lent its weight to the reworking of a pioneering concept of the construction and relations within its stratified system. Arguably, the re-working of 'hegemonic' masculinity and the recognition of the contribution other 'types' of masculinities play in the sustenance of patriarchal systems effectively pave the way for exploring 'alternative' masculinities, both in terms of their shapes and impacts, and also in their complex and iterative engagement with hegemonic masculinities. It is the overall nature of these 'responses' as well as the level of visibility of these 'alternatives' that differs across historical, social and cultural contexts, but are nevertheless present (Brod & Kaufman, 1996; Kimmel & Messner, 1992). The evolution of these 'responses' is particularly relevant to my research focus. The research studies the differing ways the research participants engaged with their own 'responses' to projected expectations of their initial gender, and also the individual routes each appropriated to their current realities as men.

❖ *The Performative aspect of Masculinity.*

Masculinity as a construction invariably leads to individuals within society desiring (subconsciously or consciously) to act out the expectations attached to the assigned/desired gender category, not only as a means of confirming identity within the category, but also and simultaneously as a route towards social recognition as an 'effective' member. Influential sociologist Ervin Goffman explores this in his leading work *Gender advertisements*. He writes about the effects that social norms and values, particularly as embedded within 'popular culture', have on the overall notions of 'gender displays'(1976). The sociologist's leading research provides insight into the 'performative' aspect of masculinity which theorists' cite "regularly conceals its genesis" (Butler, 1990, p.190). 'Popular culture' theorist Susan Alexander succinctly places Goffman's work in context, explaining how:

Goffman understood gender display not as biologically predetermined but as a performance of a gender ideal that one can more or less adhere to: "*One might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender*" (Goffman, 1976, p.8). For Goffman, women and men "read" images of femininity and masculinity and then attempt to *mimic* them when giving a gender performance. While feminine and masculine images may come from any number of agents of socialization, Goffman's analysis of advertisements shows the importance of popular culture in the construction of gender (Goffman, 1976, p.8 in Alexander, 2003, p.539; Emphasis mine).

The constructed nature of masculinities is irrevocably tied to the 'performance' of the gender identity by individuals within society, not only to fit into a certain 'type' of manliness, but as discussed in previous themes, to determine access to privilege and assumed power attached to male bodies. Judith Butler in a revised chapter (1999) of her influential book *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* revises previous theories put forward in the original publication (1990). The writer places emphasis on the apparent necessity of an effective

'performance' of one's 'gender identity' linked to survival within gendered societies. As she argues, gender is camouflaged as a 'natural' entity of human existence. The author's theory is relevant in considering the performance of masculinities in light of the fact that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration"( Butler, 1999, p. XV).

And yet, discourse around the 'performance' aspect of masculinities is not confined to Western discourse/notions of manhood. An interesting perspective of this concept within African masculinities is put forward by researcher Russell Luyt in his UCT thesis *Hegemonic masculinity and aggression in South Africa*. The researcher suggests that 'hegemonic' masculinity acts as an integral part of the overall conceptualization and subsequent 'performance' of 'manliness' (or masculinities), as the concept *provides the template* of what 'ideal' or acceptable 'manhood' should look, sound and act like. Luyt (2002) suggests that:

...[a] consensus is reached in hegemonic definition, not through its own conceptual solidification, but through constant contrast with the despised (effeminate) 'Other'. 'Othering' removes immediate focus from the inadequacy of self and group, acting as constant reminder of what is *not* to be a man, and thereby continually policing the boundaries for acceptable masculinity (2002, p.18 ; Italics author's own).

Vincent (2006), whose work *Self-made man: My year disguised as a man* is not academic research, but forms one of a number of over two thousand texts of diverse genres (narratives, autobiographies, films) exploring gender in innovative and often deeply personal ways (e.g. Bornstein, 1994 ; Feinberg, 1996; Califia, 1997; Green, 2004) . The author, who identifies her female self as lesbian, describes her temporary lived experience as a man providing a literal eye-opener in understanding the processes functioning beneath 'manhood'. Vincent (2006) had

previously experimented with 'drag' and her interest was piqued by the 'fluid' potential of the otherwise strict nature of gender. The author explains that "culturally speaking, I have always lived as my truest self somewhere on the boundary between masculine and feminine, and living there has made this project more immediate and meaningful to me"(2006, p.16). By navigating society as a heterosexual male, she was able to gain a better, if not more sympathetic, understanding of what it 'took' to be male. She revealed the persistent demands made on the male body within a North American context.

Vincent's alter ego 'Ned' various experiences ranged from traditionally masculine 'spaces' and careers; from bowling games, strip clubs, jobs in highly competitive commission-based office cultures, male self-help retreats to a literal 'male-only' sanctuary: a monastery. Judging by the numerous 'epiphanies' the author had along the way, it becomes clear that her experiment yielded fruit in uncovering the fallacy of the binary system. It uncovered the performances of 'manliness' in differing circumstances and contexts, as well as evoked an intense discussion on the consequences of failing to live up to societal expectations (2006). The author also theorizes on the concept of masculinity as a 'performance' and the extent to which gender forms an intricate and central component to our daily existence in contemporary society where:

...So prevalent was this gender coded behavior that I came to ask myself whether it isn't almost as impossible for any of us to treat each other gender neutrally as it is to conceptualize language without grammar....I wonder; could there be a preprogrammed and possibly inescapable grammar of gender burned on our brains? And is every encounter prescribed as a result.... [A]s in everyday life, not every interaction was loaded, and not every interaction was loaded in the same way. But there were gender-coded patterns of behavior happening most of the time, currents running underneath the words and gestures, and if you were looking for them, as I was, standing inside

someone's else's suit, you couldn't mistake their intent. They told you what you were and how to behave (2006, pp.224-5).

Given that the above author's inspiration stemmed from her fleeting encounter with 'drag' which led to her putting forward important concepts and questions about gender and masculinities, it seems appropriate to briefly consider writing on 'Drag'<sup>16</sup> performances with particular relevance to the Transgender community and others who seek to transcend gender boundaries whilst comfortably exploring the potential fluidity of sex and the body. Sheila 'Dragon Fly' Koenig in *Walk like a man: Enactments and embodiments of masculinity and the potential for multiple genders* offers a rare glimpse into the 'resistance' against gender roles. She prescribes identities that Drag Kings specifically and even consciously use via their stage performances. The fact that the author herself is a Drag King makes this piece not only relevant but almost a way of uncovering reactions to the socially ascribed gender roles we have and continue to perform on a daily basis. In this paper, Koenig (2002) uses Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity reinforced through repetitious acts (p.190) to explore the way in which drag performances serve to actually break the repetitious cycles of gender performance by subverting the roles attributed to gendered bodies (2002).

The precedence of masculinities over femininities (Butler, 1990; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Dreger, 1998) becomes a necessary avenue towards addressing the faulty 'natural' label that gender currently employs when challenged by 'alternative' schools of thought. The literal 'performance' of drag may serve as an outward and tangible reflection of gender as performance

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<sup>16</sup>'Drag' is the performance of one or multiple genders theatrically, with 'Drag Kings' essentially women, performing masculinity theatrically and 'Drag Queen' performing femininity theatrically. (Green & Peterson, 2006)

as “[d]rag king performance takes and exploits markers of ‘masculinity’ to the point that these markers become visible as constructions” (Koenig, 2002, p.150). It is crucial to consider this point in relation to the performances of masculinity that FTM transsexuals deploy, be it in resistance towards their initial ‘female’ gendered bodies or within their own transition stages as they work towards ‘affirmation’ of their male status. Butler (1990) explains this link between ‘drag’ and ‘performance’ of masculinities in connection to survival within gendered societies, where:

...the distinction between expression and performative is crucial. If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured...that gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender’s performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (1990, pp.192-3).

While ‘drag’ performances and transsexualism operate on distinct and complex levels<sup>17</sup>, the connection between the two in exposing the gender paradigm as a farce produces innovative and ‘alternative’ knowledge around gender that challenges those promoted by traditional institutions (psychology, biology, popular culture) which benefit from conventional definitions.

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<sup>17</sup>The complex distinctions between the two elements that matter to me as a gender researcher include acknowledging that ‘drag’ performers often overemphasize gender ‘performances’ or associated characteristics of gender categories in order to essentially stimulate discourse around these ‘natural’ attributes projected onto gendered bodies within societies; whilst Transsexuals consciously transition from one gender identity to another in order to realign their ‘internal’ and external selves. The Trans individual may not necessarily over enunciate his/her ‘performance’ of their desired gender during their transition, *but merely attempts to successfully ‘pass’* as a member of their desired gender identity that allows one to navigate society related to as such.

The FTM perspective is particularly discerning of performances from the outlook of ‘complete’ female and male body (as defined by heteronormative standards) as conversion procedures of female to male genitalia (phalloplasties<sup>18</sup>) remain largely unsuccessful. Therefore an element of ‘femaleness’ persistently remains attached to the FTM individual due to the lack of a ‘fully’ functioning appendage<sup>19</sup>. Yet in light of these problematic definitions, the author engaging discourse around ‘drag’, emphasizes the notion of FTM’s ‘alternative’ masculinity that contributes towards the conceptualization of masculinity, whilst embodying the inefficiency of gender as a site of identity. Koenig (2002) writes:

The FTM transsexual who passes and identifies securely as a man may still enact a sort of failure to embody gender norms, not through a trans-identification or through flawed performance, but through a radicalization of gender practice. Here I am talking about a sort of infiltration of manhood, through which by approaching manhood with a knowledge of what it has been to be a woman (at least in body) and to be excluded from manhood, he can redefine what “man” entails. Thus he is failing to conform to a predetermined category of “man.” He may not even intend to reinvent manhood in such a way; in some ways, the act of becoming a man physically and accepting this transition emotionally is already radicalizing manhood, since the basis for heteronormative gender categorization is the body into which he has been born (2002, p.156).

Koenig’s position is that the very *existence/presence* of those who embody this fluidity and transcend the boundaries of gender (transvestites, drag performers). This, in my view, is testament to the need for more research carried out and ‘alternative’ knowledge produced to topple patriarchal institutions which insist on the rigidity of ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ links.

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<sup>18</sup>Phalloplasty: creation and surgical attachment of a ‘functional’ penis often grafted from an individual’s leg tissue or other body part.

<sup>19</sup> Here I am referring to the construction of ‘true’ masculinity in the ability to successfully and frequently *penetrate* and sexually satisfy and fertilize a woman. The creation and immense popularity of the erectile dysfunction drug, Viagra (even by younger men not suffering from ED) attests to this element of masculinity regarded as one of the pinnacles of ‘performing’ successfully.

❖ *Construction of Masculinities within a SA context*

The construction of masculinities within an African context is often fraught with colonial representations as African traditional ideals, practices and ways of life were essentially altered under colonizers' ethnocentric definitions. Although the majority of the continent gained independence in the late sixties', South Africa remained firmly in the grips of apartheid, a system of social and cultural stratification solely based along racial lines, well into the early nineties. Fifteen years after independence the country has distinguished itself from the rest of the continent with a booming economy and progressive Constitution. However race remains at the forefront of contemporary South African society, a firm reality that is impossible and academically irresponsible to ignore. I have therefore undertaken to present and discuss foremost theoretical discourses/ South African literature around the construction of South African masculinities, and the notion of African 'identities' undoubtedly influenced by pre- and post-apartheid realities.

Masculinity "bears the marks and characteristics of the history which formed it [is important] to distinguish meaningfully among different collective constructions of masculinity and to identify power inequality among these constructions" (Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005, p 4). A number of studies carried out on African masculinities often stem from a Northern perspective, with a majority of the discourses revolving mainly around HIV/AIDS issues (often offering a 'consideration' of 'African' sexuality) or an almost gleeful exploration of the 'subordination' of unfortunate African women (Caldwell, 1987, 1989). However, for the purposes of this study, I will focus on works (Ratele 2001, Luyt 2003, Morrell 1998, Reid & Walker 2005, and others)

functioning in direct reactions to these colonial discourses; creating 'alternative' (or perhaps more accurate) accounts of the immense complexities of navigating masculinities in an African/South African context.

In the volume edited by Ouzgane and Morrell (2005) there are numerous case studies and individual papers tracing the history, so to speak, of the construction of African masculinities in pre- and post-colonial (and in South African cases; apartheid) discourses (Jacob, 2005; Vahed, 2005; Clowes, 2005). The works attempt to show the different ways in which 'masculinities' and 'femininities' transition, straddling 'traditional' and 'modern' African realities. Previous volumes (Lindsay & Meischer, 2003<sup>20</sup>) also place emphasis on tracing the evolution of African masculinities from colonial periods; as this system of oppression had and continues to have a profound impact, not only on the entire continent, but on the ever evolving identities of individuals and their communities within. Dover (2001 in Morrell, 2005) offers up a perspective of gender that is one part universal and second part highly relevant to a conceptualization of African gender identities that differ greatly from Northern perspectives. The author explains that "if we take gender to be the social construction of masculinity and femininity, in which culture elaborates on the sexed body, *then socialization and enculturation are the most important formative process*" (2001, p.174; Emphasis mine).

The author's analysis mainly stems from the understanding of the body via sexuality by analyzing the Goba tribe of Zambia's views on gender and sexuality. Despite this, Dover's focus is still relevant to my research as he uncovers the way in which sexuality (and therefore gender identity and gender roles) in this tribe was created separate from the body. Socialization of

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<sup>20</sup>Their volume focused more on West African masculinities

'separate' genders operate from birth, and performative expectations taught to the young through village elders (2001), illustrating the reinforcement of gender construction across generations and presented as 'tradition'. Bodies are the repositories of social and cultural creations and expectations, e.g. the assumption that the possession of a particular genital symbolizes one's membership to a particular gender (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Dreger, 2002). The tribe's notions of gender and specifically masculinities are also projected unto the 'fully functioning' penis that serves to symbolize one's virility, authority and power (Dover, 2001). The fact in this case is that masculinities are constructed identities based on patriarchal ideals to maintain the status quo built on the subordination of women. However, if to be female is to 'lack' what males possess, Dover suggests that:

[W]omen's acquiescence in reflecting the phallus is necessary to allow men the construction of power and autonomy, that is, hegemonic masculinity... [T]hus one sees *in the Goba phallus the inherent conflicts and stresses in terms of male ideals, expectations of manliness and the corresponding burdens*... [H]is ideal is to be head of a compound in which he provides for others, but he is not beholden to them. His failure to meet these obligations is demeaning. He needs a woman's emotional and sexual succor... and her productive and reproductive services... *In sum, the Goba phallus pretends that it stands alone, but it is always dependent on others*" (Dover, 2001, p.184; Emphasis mine).

Is it therefore possible that the construction of masculinities and femininities in an African context, not only stems from a socially constructed entity from colonial eras but also a *deliberate* coalition between men and women in upholding certain ascribed roles, in the name of 'tradition'? Do African men living in 'post' oppressive times struggle to find the balance of finding their identities in the murky waters of what used to be 'African-ness', to an uncertainty of new identities of what it 'means'/takes to be African *and* male? Does the mutuality that masculinities and femininities appear to share in the Goba community (and assumedly other

African societies) change in the face of globalization, or women's increasing empowerment in the workforce/economy? How do these drastic and 'modern' changes affect the social and cultural projection of the body; or does idealized masculinity and its prescribed roles constantly find itself wanting? Other studies suggest that in the face of changing masculinity ideals, given the move towards more 'modern' social, cultural and economic concepts, African men's 'reactions' involve increased levels of gender-based violence, substance and drug-abuse and alcoholism (Silberschmidt, 2005 ; Reid & Walker, 2005; Morrell, 2001). Given the dismal picture painted on the masculinity in 'crisis' in African contexts, Silberschmidt (2005 in Morrell, 2006) for example, explains the notion of increased violence in response to masculinity ideals but not before cautioning against adopting the notion as essentialist of all African masculinities further reinforcing colonial constructions of the Black<sup>21</sup> body but:

... [W]ith masculinities being socially and historically constructed, masculinities are not constant or static, and domination is not inscribed in men's nature. While men and women have deep-rooted, often unconscious conventional ideas of masculinity and femininity, which cannot be easily reshaped, there is always potentiality for innovation or creative action: masculinities are dynamic and open-ended processes.... Stereotypes are dangerous: they are static, they do not allow for change, and they hide the fact that there are cultural variations (Silberschmidt, 2005, pp.199-200 in Morrell, 2006).

There is a wealth of information, theories and definitions of South African masculinities (Ratele 2001; Morrell, 1998, 2001& 2005; Thompson & Thompson, 1997) for various reasons. As a non-South African researcher writing about South African masculinities in a South African space, I found Reid and Walker's article 'Masculinities in question' an excellent starting point in understanding what elements are involved in constructing a South African male identity. The authors (2005) contextualize the high levels of scholarship attributed to South African

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<sup>21</sup>I use the term here to refer to all identities of African origin i.e. from African-American to Africans

masculinities; exploring the drastic change from a society steeped in the historical system of oppression of apartheid to a democratic nation boasting one of the world's most progressive Constitutions, in which gender equality is explicitly written. This factor alone sets the country apart from most African nations, whose gender equity projects originate from politicians' policies with 'optional' implementation into practical results (with the exception of Rwanda).

This move towards a 'democratic' society has specifically affected masculinities as "the first decade of [democracy] had thus exposed previously hidden sexual practices and abuses, confronted and unseated traditional gender hierarchies, created the space for the construction and expression of new masculinities, and catapulted matters of sexuality into the spotlight"(Reid & Walker, 2005, pp.8-9). South African masculinities, like other African ones, also had previously colonial constructions and definitions that mainly revolved around the black body as a site of all vices: sexual, spiritual and even physical. With racist discourses came pathologized representations in academic literature which were not only essentialist but produced inaccurate knowledge that still plagues discourse around the majority of African issues today (2005). Reid & Walker (2005) explain that with regard to SA masculinities, "if colonialism and apartheid shaped the masculinities of the past, the transition to democracy in South Africa in the 1990s has had the effect of unsettling and unseating entrenched masculinities: masculinities which were, in the main, patriarchal, authoritarian and steeped in violence" (2005, p.8).

This definition therefore sets the stage for a deconstruction of SA masculinities by describing the isolating settings in which men were taught or tested on how to be men or their ideals of what it 'took' to be a man were destroyed, especially in a prison setting. Reid and Walker (2005) begin

an interesting debate on not only the constructions of SA masculinities but on how 'others' perceive the resulting creations. This is of particular relevance to my research focus as my research takes on the 'performance' of masculinities in a South African context, the perception of what it 'takes' to be a SA male, and the consequences this holds for an FTM occupying these performance spaces. For example, does a SA FTM also engage in gender-based violence towards their partner? Will he also participate in violent activities to prove his manliness (or perhaps even mask his Transgender status) to fellow male peers/counterparts?

Kopano Ratele in *Contradictions in constructions of African masculinities* and Richter and Morrell (eds) in *Baba: Men and fatherhood in South Africa* provide 'alternative' realities. Ratele (2001) on his part deliberately sets out to directly address the 'contradictions' of South African masculinities, in both academic and social discourse. He argues that in readiness to acknowledge the victory of South Africans over the apartheid legacy and essentially the nation's meteoric rise as one of Africa's most democratic countries, there still exists a "fact that seems to contradict our freedom [which is] race"(2001, p.1). It would be unwise to simply ignore the complex location race occupies in South Africa, given that race is not considered a pivotal factor in other African nations. The absence of distinct physical markers as obvious as skin color<sup>22</sup>, colonialists created 'differences' out of the wide range of *ethnic identities* (based on language and geographical location) existing within African societies. It is therefore clear to observe the ways in which the South African experience of race rivals all that of other locations in Africa, and that race (or contradictions) would indeed form an integral part of the previous and present construction of masculinities. Ratele (2001) places this into context, explaining that:

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<sup>22</sup> I recognize that skin tone and other physical characteristics are considered marks of difference in various African societies, and was used by colonialists to suggest 'superiority' of one ethnic identity over another, e.g. Rwanda. However, I use skin color here as a way of distinguishing one race from another i.e. white vs. Indian, or black.

...until recently, the racial aspect of our identities trumped all other forms of being. Racialised identities underpinned our everyday lives and politics. Our practices, our institutions, our histories...our relationships, prospects...psychic investments and fantasies, all have always been indexed on the question of racialised identity (2001,p.2).

Ratele (2001) supports Lorber's (1994) theory of the fluidity of identity when explaining race in SA, where race is used to stratify society in order to enable people to find their place within it (2001, p.5). This is however, a flawed attempt as the categories used to create these identities are also societal constructions. Having previously observed the way in which masculinities, African or other, rely on a form of 'Other' in order to exist as a structure of power (Dover, 2001), Ratele points out that "if 'the thing' that makes a man a man is something all men know or must know something about, then white/European males help in making African men African/men.... We should actually talk about masculinities, and should talk of identities rather than identity" (2001, p.3). It is clear that the effects of colonialism and apartheid still possess African identities in a choke hold, where the realities of power structures and 'neo-colonialism' still play a part in the creation, portrayal and lived experiences of African identities.

The notion of violence and other social vices as a way of explaining the 'reactions' to the ever-evolving identities of South African masculinities in the face of stagnant economic and social realities is already established (Reid & Walker, 2005; Morrell, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2005). The important question therefore is: are these 'reactions' part of the constructed nature of masculinities or are they indicative of the *performance* of masculinities? Are the 'reactions' part of the 'performance' projected on the male body indicative of successful masculinity? There is no literature or school of thought on the 'performance' of African masculinities, as perhaps the

issue is not linked to the daily struggle for survival of the African male in the sea of poverty, disillusionment and anger. Ratele (2001) explains:

Back then, if gender was ever broached and dominant masculinities shown to be a problem, the reasons given for dismissing the problem, would be that African males had to deal with more important stuff, 'bread and butter issues' .....*Now [with 'gender' issues addressed] they are dismissed with laughter and arguments that African males have to deal with...democracy, making some money.* African men, that is to say, back then and today, do not have the luxury to forge new concepts of masculinity and new ways of relating" (2001, p.4).

It is clear that previous assumptions/discourse of dominance and ascension to power of South African males left out integral discussions on projections onto the male body, and the silencing around the masculinity 'crisis' in light of changing social, economic and cultural structures of African societies. Morrell (2006) speaks of this 'crisis' by drawing attention to the fact that:

...boys and men choose how to behave and this choice is made from a number of available repertoires. Such choices are never entirely free, because the available repertoires differ from context to context and because the resources from which masculinity is constructed are unevenly distributed (Morell, 2006, p.14).

Therefore, first understanding the foundations of SA masculinities from the apartheid influences to contemporary societal and economic issues that 'threaten' the traditional patriarchal culture is key to tracing the tensions that the FTM individual has to navigate, conform to or resist in light of vastly differing 'meanings' of manliness within SA's cultural communities. The question therefore is; what does the current state of 'crisis' around the mere 'meaning' of SA masculinities mean for the FTM who is perhaps doomed to base their notion of masculinity around these unstable foundations? Does having been once part of the opposite end of

masculinities influence/inspire the Trans individual to create their own niche within masculinity 'conceptions'? Or does one merely conform to faulty conceptualizations as a survival mechanism? Are we all doomed to merely regurgitate the gender 'roles' ascribed to us?

#### **IV. 'Transgender' Politics & Experiences.**

The review has thus far explored all complimentary and contradicting aspects around the institution of gender, and dealt more specifically with the construction and performance of masculinities over a range of social and cultural contexts. My research focuses specifically on the performance of masculinities examined through the Transsexual experience of transitioning from one gendered body to another, and in this case, from Female-to-Male. By examining historical and current theories around masculinities and critically deconstructing 'ideals' of manhood across contexts, I will now focus this same lens onto the transgender experience. This will be done both from a North American and South African perspectives by providing a cross-cultural analysis and understanding of the universalized 'performance' of masculinities and femininities.

The field of study around 'female masculinity' (Halberstam, 1998 ; Prosser, 1998; Koenig, 2002) is central to my overarching research focus which places emphasis on studying Female-to-Male

(FTM) 'transitional' masculinities in direct relation to the notion of 'gender' as a 'performance'. It is essentially this 'performance' that allows former female gendered/ 'biological' bodies to embody, not only physical 'characteristics' associated with masculinity, but also create 'acceptable' social 'cues' that influence one's 'standing' within the desired gender category. In this section, I will begin my study on theorists' works emerging from the North American perspective, given the higher visibility and more 'open' discourse around 'alternative' states of being, at least in contrast to an African context. By initially presenting this material, I offer a stronger theoretical foundation for exploring the prevailing issues facing the African transgender community. I present theories that link 'female masculinity', 'Drag King' and 'transitional' masculinities to one another, which share similar challenges in dismantling the overall concept of 'gender'. I follow this with an example of the 'challenges' that transitional masculinities, in essence, Trans men face in light of the 'threat' the very notion poses to the overall gender binary system.

❖ *North American perspectives of 'transitional' Masculinities*

In light of the numerous theories surrounding the notion of 'female masculinity' (FM), I would like to begin my discussion with the historical accounts of the concept. I will then delve into a study of the contemporary theories emerging as reactions to or elaborations, of these historical concepts. Laura Doan in her article 'Passing fashions: Reading female masculinities in the 1920s' focusing on pre- and post World War I England, explores the different ways women first began to 'transgress' from their gendered norms (mainly in garb and not biological bodies). Influential women such as Radclyffe Hall and Colonel Victor Barker, alias Valerie Arkell-Smith

wore male clothing and lived fully as men in their various contexts (1998). It is interesting to contrast the two women when one considers that the latter was a decorated military hero and for the vast majority of her life, deliberately concealed her 'true' identity as a woman (Doan, 1998). Doan in her article describes that upon the discovery of Baker's true identity an 'obscenity trial' was convened, where she effectively 'confirmed' her 'femaleness'. When asked how she kept up the 'masquerade' for such an extended period of time Baker simply stated:

*Change your clothes and you change your sex, [I have had] no surgical operation to turn me from woman into man, [but] for so long have I lived as a man, that I have come to think as one, behave as one, and be accepted as one (1998, p.664; Emphasis mine).*

It is important to note the multifaceted issues arising from this example. By drawing the link between clothing and assumed gender identity, Baker serves as the living embodiment of current theorists' notions around the 'gender attribution' process (Kessler & McKenna, 1978), namely gender as a 'performance' (West & Zimmerman, 1987) and 'masculinities' as converse and interdependent elements of 'femininities' (Brod & Kauffman, 1994; Pleck, 1992). This historical discussion of 'female masculinities' sheds light on a vital aspect of my research in relation to FTM transition journeys. It shows that the desire to possess the 'biological' bodies of the opposite sex whilst still in gendered 'female' bodies often translates into attempts at being 'read' as 'male'. Whilst initially the possibility of physically transforming one's biological body may not be apparent, the idea that one can, albeit temporarily, inhabit clothing, mannerisms or even partake in 'male specific' activities, brings one a step closer to entry into the desired gender category.

Doan (1998) describes how “even the nature of transgression is culturally inscribed” (1998, p.668). She explains that soon, women’s ‘fashions’ served as reflections of gender ‘boundaries’, with trousers upheld as an example of ‘transgressing’ these limits. Initially during the First World War, women were given their first opportunity to wear trousers mainly in practical sense of the roles many played in the army/weapon industries at the time. However, soon after the War, women were immediately relegated back to their ‘corner’ of societal boundaries, and “trousers or breeches [were] such an indisputable sign of masculine power *that the unusual sight of a woman so attired [could not] escape a masculine appearance*, and thus [became] the object of whispers, scowls, and bemused looks.”(1998, pp.676-7; Emphasis mine). Even ‘accessories’ were also used as ‘indicators’/ ‘announcements’ of sexual preference. The monocle (a single eye-glass), for example, soon became the widest known ‘symbol’ of lesbianism (1998, p. 679).

Doan cites cultural theorist Marjorie Garber (1992) who in her own article ‘Vested interests: Cross-dressing and cultural anxiety’ elaborates that the monocle, cigarette and cigarette holder were all “accessories, both before and after the ‘fact’ of lesbianism”(1998, p.679). This illustrates the cultural elaboration of the assumptions around FM in past and present discourses. Those who straddle both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ social spheres are regarded as ‘deviant’, and consequently relegated to the periphery of societal inclusion. The question therefore is: has the notion of female masculinity and the surrounding discourse evolved over time? Given Butler’s (1990) warning that gender “regularly conceals its genesis”, is the concept ‘revolutionary’ or an oxymoron?

Female masculinity theorist, Judith Halberstam, is all too aware of 'oxymoron' and what the very term inspires in both academic and societal levels. The author in her similarly titled book *Female masculinity* seeks to continue exploring the 'performative' aspect of gender and to promote FM as "a specific gender with its own cultural history", arguing against the notion that it is "a derivative of male masculinity" (1998, p.77). In a 1999 interview conducted by Annemarie Jagose on the motivation behind authoring her book, Halberstam explains:

Female Masculinity emerged for me as a term that was implicit in many different discussions of gender, gender performativity, constructivism and so on but was never named as such. In my book I actually argue that despite an almost universal concurrence that femaleness does not automatically produce femininity and maleness does not produce masculinity, very few people seemed to be noticing or thinking through *the material effects of disassociating sex and gender and this has been particularly true in the sphere of masculinity*. Since femininity signifies in general as the effect of artifice, as the essence of "performativity" (if performativity can be said to have an essence), we have an easier time understanding it as transferable, mobile, fluid. *But masculinity has an altogether different relation to performance, the real and the natural and it appears to be far more difficult to pry masculinity and maleness apart than femininity and femaleness* ([www.Genders.org](http://www.Genders.org) ; last accessed 6/08/08; Emphasis mine).

It appears that Jagerbose is not yet convinced that enough has been done to actively dissociate 'maleness' from 'male gender identity'. As a result, she complicates the notion of female masculinity that Halberstam aims to represent as an "authentic way of living female (as opposed to) a parasitical appropriation of male masculinity" (Hausman, 2001, p.478). It is my opinion that given the privileged discourse attached to the male body and pathology to the female one, it is not surprising to uncover the assumption that allowing femininity/females 'access' into male

spheres of society involves a form of 'upgrade'. The converse on the other hand would result in a 'downgrade' as the delusion of power (earned or assumed) attributed to the male form is compromised. After all, patriarchal notions of power are geared towards an achievement of dominance over female bodies. By perhaps transferring this power to female bodies, the overall structure of the oppressive system is demolished.

Halberstam (1999) goes on to elaborate on her own definition of female masculinity where she explains, "if "FTM transsexual" becomes the term for female-born people who experience prolonged male-identification and think of themselves as male, then what happens to those *female-born people who think of themselves as masculine but not necessarily male and certainly not female?*"(1999, p. 3; Emphasis mine). It is here where one begins to dissect the numerous meanings attached not only to our gendered bodies, but also to the gendered 'displays' chosen to represent these bodies. The theorist asks, if one possess external 'signifiers' associated with femaleness i.e. female genitals, but displays mannerisms, clothing etc associated with being masculine, and yet feels no desire to actively possess male 'signifiers', what category does one fall under? How is society expected to effectively 'identify' this individual? Halberstam sheds light on this predicament, explaining:

I am less interested in expert-produced categories ("the homosexual," "the invert," "the transsexual") and far more interested in sexual vernaculars or the categories produced and sustained within sexual subcultures. *I think scientific discourses have tended to narrow our ability to imagine sexuality and gender otherwise* and in general the discussions that take place in medical communities about embodiment and desire may be way behind the discussions taking place on email lists, in support groups and in sex clubs. *Doctors use categories in very different ways than people cruising for a sexual partner use categories. I think we should take over the prerogative of naming our experiences and identifications* (1999, p.3; Emphasis mine).

It soon becomes clear that there are no easy routes towards conforming to categories (gender, sexual or other) and this is a key aspect into my overarching research focus. The 'alternative' perspective that FTM individuals present in no way embodies nor resembles the socially mandated prerequisites of masculinity as their own masculinities are formed external of the body; the very site on which gender 'difference' is based/constructed.

Attempts to theoretically draw links between the practices of 'transitional' and female masculinity soon emerge between theorists Butler (1991) and Halberstam (1998, 1999) who examine the different ways such a union challenges heteronormative notions within societies (Green, 1996). Califia (2006) in his article 'Manliness' presents via an autobiographical location, his contextual experience with issues affecting his conceptualization of his 'manhood', in light of the fact that he was neither essentially 'born' nor socialized into the male gendered 'role'. The author's current understanding and even daily experience of 'manliness' is one he critically deconstructs by identifying himself as formerly 'butch lesbian'. He explores how his female 'life history' essentially influences his 'manliness'. The article's introduction explains how "socially dominant forms of masculine personhood--even if they can be attained--are often not even desired by individuals with female life histories, particularly if those individuals have feminist leanings and lesbian histories" (Califia, 2006, p.1). In this case, the author walks us through his literal transition experience, deconstructing his 'masculinity' each step of the way in light of the physical transformation he underwent, and the social 'meanings' he ascribed to his own 'signifiers', and those others attached to them as well. Califia (2006) insightfully ponders:

In the end, what it came down to was that I could not progress in my exploration of masculinity and male identity without the help of a plastic surgeon....It is hard to claim the word "man"; easier to simply define as FTM (female-to-male) or transgendered. I had accumulated 45 years of history operating in the world as a woman, albeit a very different

sort of woman, before I transitioned. *Those habits of thought, self-image, movement, expression are hard to break, no matter how deep my dissatisfaction.* I am more than a little jealous of “primary transsexuals” who can honestly say they feel like men who were born in the wrong bodies; that they are correcting an error of nature. *My gender dysphoria has had more to do with feeling that there is something wrong when other people perceived or treated me as if I were a girl. Not wanting to be female, but not having much enthusiasm for the only other option our society offers* (2006, pp. 434-5; Emphasis mine).

Although evidently, the author is not implying regret for transitioning into a male body, instead, he offers a challenge into critically examining the constructed and performative nature of ‘gender’ as an organizing principle within society (Lorber, 1994). After all, if transsexualism serves to effectively debunk the myth of the biological body as a static site of ‘identity’, then the notion of ‘female masculinity’ that this author suggests, is a critical outlook into the ‘significance’ that is attached to the (supposedly) gender-specific genitalia and other physical characteristics. The author explains that his own dissatisfaction with his body was primarily linked to the ‘significance’ that was attached to his external ‘signifiers’. He notes how ‘others’ related to him, i.e. as a girl, leaving his only option to escape ‘femaleness’ via the route of ‘manliness’. It is this unique perspective into ‘transitional masculinities’ that transforms debates around the notion’s link to ‘female masculinity’. Similar issues arise between the two, namely; the desire/need to ‘escape’<sup>23</sup> the assumed significance projected onto one’s gendered body, and a recognition of the ‘limited’ options of transforming (aesthetic or physical) to the ‘other’ side of

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<sup>23</sup>I am by no means suggesting that ‘female masculinity’ or ‘Transsexualism’ are forms of escapism. I am merely trying to capture the sense of being trapped in societal expectations whose parts we play with limited say in the matter.

gender. The individual is thus left acutely aware of society's unwavering 'disapproval'<sup>24</sup>, even when the desired (perhaps inevitable) destination is reached.

Other theorists who discuss female masculinity never stray far from the overall notion of 'performing' gender via lenses, similar to those Butler (1991, 2006) and Halberstam (1998, 1999) present. Koenig (2002) address the disjuncture between FTM experiences of 'gender' and 'drag King'<sup>25</sup> performers. The author, herself a 'drag King' performer speaks of the overall practice of 'dragging' and how the practice "takes and exploits markers of "masculinity" to the point that these markers become visible as constructions"(2002, p.150). Whilst this may at first glance fail to fully capture the role that FTM transitional masculinities plays within the dismantling of gender 'norms', the description that Koenig puts forward of drag performances ironically illustrates the similarities between female masculinity and FTM Trans realities. Admittedly, I found theoretically distinguishing between the two notions somewhat complicated in light of the overlapping theoretical social and discursive realities surrounding the two notions. This is so because both notions embody an 'alternative' perspective of 'masculinities' created externally of the seemingly static and permanent 'biological' body.

After all, these two notions ultimately create identities that essentially shed light on the flawed foundations upon which the "naturalness" of gender is built. Additionally 'drag Kings' in their "hyperbolic" performances of Masculinity further illustrate the absurdity of internalizing and ascribing to gendered 'performances' of our external 'signifiers' across social contexts. However, in spite of the reluctant alliance that all three gender 'disruptors' and the challenge to gendered perceptions these practices embody, I personally find that FTM Trans reality is one with the most potential to effectively

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<sup>24</sup>I am referring to the perception of 'transgression' of gender 'norms' and 'roles' that female masculinity and FTM Trans individuals are believed to exhibit in their separate practices of living independent of heteronormative notions around gendered bodies. For example, the assumption that Trans men are not 'real' men given the absence of a phallus, or 'masculine' women assumed to be lesbians given their rejection of 'feminine' attire or 'mannerisms'.

<sup>25</sup>A person who performs masculinity theatrically (Green & Peterson, 2006).

challenge gender 'norms'/categories. Not only do FTMs expose the 'constructed' nature of 'gender, but also go on to expose the fallacy of attaching one's 'identity' to the 'biological' body as its transformation from 'femaleness' to 'maleness'. This not only upsets male patriarchal precedence over women's bodies, but also destabilizes the 'myth' of the 'biological' body as an unchangeable entity<sup>26</sup>.

However, the challenges that 'female' and transitional masculinities pose to overall societal structures are also perceived as mere 'manipulations' of the 'system' in pursuit of reinforcing gender stereotypes (Raymond, 1979,1994), as socio-medical constructions (Billings &Urban, 1982) or through self-narratives that create 'plausible' gendered selves'(Mason-Schrock, 1996).

Hausman (2006) in her article 'Body, technology, and gender in transsexual autobiographies' suggests that the ways in which transsexuals represent themselves in autobiographical narratives, acts as social<sup>26</sup>'justifications' for undergoing gender-reassignment procedures. The author explains that closely studying these narratives shows "how transsexuals compromise the official understanding of 'gender' as divorced from biological sex by their insistent reiteration of the idea that physiological intersexuality is the cause of their cross-sex identification" (2006, p.336).

Hausman subsequently argues that trans-individuals deliberately manipulate their own experiences within the gender binary system in order to 'justify' the 'transgression' of desiring different physical bodies. This perspective effectively destabilizes the importance of obtaining Trans stories as told by trans-individuals in contexts where misrepresentation or complete silencing around 'alternative' states of being run rampant.

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<sup>26</sup>In light of this fact, I do acknowledge that many FTMs also do not alter their physical bodies, but still retain some *comfort in light of this fact* i.e. biological body as non-permanent, and still *identity as transsexuals without* undergoing altering procedures.

The majority of discourses around transsexualism and other 'alternative' identities involve pathologization from academic to medical sites (which ironically Hausman claims, *aids* trans' manipulation of the system). The author's apparent conservative stance on Body transformation stems from the belief that transsexuals still present society with 'gendered' bodies in spite of their 'resistance', often doing more harm than good to feminist practices for example, by reinforcing gender stereotypes. Hausman (2006) elaborates as follows:

The production of the concept of gender within research on intersexuality and Transsexualism suggests [that] the transsexual speaks fully within the cultural discourse of/on gender, not only because that discourse was produced precisely to account for intersexual and transsexual subjects' experiences, but also because the performance of transsexual subjectivity depends upon the expert manipulation of traditional gender codes. To be transsexual is perhaps to be "in gender" more fixedly than other subjects whose gender performances are perceived to be 'natural' (2006, pp.337-8).

In conclusion, I personally disagree with the standpoint the author takes on transsexualism and more so on the notion that trans-sexual narratives are manipulations of the overall gender binary system. I find that Hausman's perspective is indicative of the innate fear of the 'threat' to the organizing principle within society that trans-individuals pose. By first challenging the notion of 'genitals=gender identity' and subsequently 'passing' successfully as male or female individuals by following similar 'cues' that 'genetic' individuals perform in their daily lives, the very principle of 'gender' is redefined. Perhaps the author is uncomfortable with the 'desecration' of the 'fixed' human body or possibly more disturbed that trans individuals are as readily 'detected', thus making their labeling as 'Other' increasingly difficult. Whilst I admit that the theoretical distinction between female masculinity and FTM realities remains somewhat blurry,

the questions within this section therefore remain unanswered as I find it difficult to place these notions theoretically separate. However I take refuge in Halberstam's (1998) endeavor to bridge this gap, aimed at:

...focus[ing] on certain categories of butchness[female masculinity] *without presuming* that they represent early stages of transsexual identity within some progressive model of sexual trans-identity *and without losing their specificity as masculine identifications within a female body*...it is time to complicate on the one hand the transsexual models that assign gender deviance only to transsexual bodies and gender normativity to all other bodies, and on the other hand the hetero-normative models that see transsexuality as the solution to gender deviance and homosexuality as a pathological problem (1998, pp.152-4; Emphasis mine).

It is useful to now examine these two notions within a cross-cultural context by studying the possible theoretical and societal distinction made between the two within a South African context. This is particularly accessible given the somewhat more progressive societal discourse (and overall visibility) around female masculinities and transsexualism.

❖ *South African Perspective of 'Transitional' Masculinities.*

Having already examined research on the complex construction of South African masculinities (Ratele, 2001; Morrell, 1998, 2001, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005), the question can be put : how much more complex is this concept of 'masculinities' when approached through FTM notions of gender and 'transitional' masculinity and their own complex locations within these notions?

While there is little discourse around African transgender construction of masculinities, Rankhotha (2006) explores the marginalized voice of same-sex relationships in Zulu

masculinities and the different ways this is negotiated around the apparent 'alpha-male' group of South African identity (Rankhotha, 2006, p.166).

Rankhotha suggests that given the heteronormative discourse that surrounds South African masculinities, and more specifically Zulu masculinities, it is interesting to note that even within same-sex 'Zulu' masculinities, the same model of heteronormative 'roles' is applied amongst intimate gay partners (2006). This can be closely tied into FTM notions of 'masculinities' in light of attempts to 'perform' or have one's male status 'reaffirmed' by other 'genetic' (and often presumably heterosexual) men, who by default occupy higher hierarchical positions of 'maleness'. The marginal position non-heteronormative masculinities occupy within SA discourses (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2005) can be cited as the reason for this conscious decision to model gay Zulu relationships on similar dynamics as heterosexual ones. This is probably a way of retaining any sort of 'position' within the stratified structure of masculinities whilst simultaneously creating 'alternative' perspectives of SA masculinities.

The heteronormative nature of the discourse around 'African sexuality' is best seen in countless claims by early Western anthropologists and explorers about the absence of specific words or terminologies in the majority of African communities that described same-sex relationships or the 'people' who engaged in them (Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Epprehect, 2004). It was these ethnocentric assumptions that created the now commonly held belief of the importation of such 'practices' by colonialists in a bid to undermine the African way of life, and therefore essentially 'un-African' (Epprehect, 2004). It becomes clear that once again, colonialist constructions which created some African identities (Ratele, 2001) are still embedded in notions of self common to

African contexts. And perhaps as a form of 'resistance', individuals from 'alternative' communities (gender, sexual or other) seek to carve out their own niches within African societies, by increasing visibility and invoking discourse around 'taboo' issues, even in the midst of often dire consequences (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Reid & Walker, 2005; Nkabinde, 2008).

Constructions of masculinity that do not currently (or even comfortably) fit into patriarchal cultural traditions are labeled 'un-African' (Epprecht, 2004, Kendall, 1999). Rankhotha (2006) succinctly presents the argument that the majority of 'alternative' states of being, for example 'masculine women' or 'female men' or even alternative gender identities within a contemporary African societal context are deeply marginalized, where "traditional patriarchal masculinity believes itself to be naturally ordained. [A]lternative masculinities must thus be perversions of nature's 'truth'" (2006, p.166).

The construction of masculinities (African or otherwise) in direct opposition (and therefore in relation) to femininities (Dreger, 1998; Dover, 2001 in Morrell, 2005; Ratele, 2001) persists in Rankhotha's account of the construction of traditional Zulu masculinity. According to him, "the masculinity of [Zulu] boys was [therefore] being constructed in relation to an explicit and ritually reinforced renunciation of femininity" (2006, p.166). By putting forward a theory of ways in which traditional Zulu masculinity evolved over time in the light of changing political and social arenas in South Africa,<sup>27</sup> the author explores ways in which gay Zulu men reconstruct their own masculinities in light of previous long-standing ideals of Zulu masculinities. Although gay men were seen (amongst themselves and the community at large) to possess certain normative and positive characteristics such as politeness, higher standards of hygiene and non-violence, their

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<sup>27</sup>Such as being circumcised in a hospital *instead of circumcision school* or the use of non-violence to achieve certain political ideologies (Rankohta, 2006, p.168-9).

'effeminate' behavior and their sexual practices (which would not create children), were deemed non-normative and outside the 'male ideal' (Rankotha, 2006, p.170).

The response to inhabiting such 'non-normative' masculinity appears in two guises according to Rankotha. The first one is constructed around the heterosexual notion of relationships and sexual practices, with passive and dominating roles between partners supposedly guided by 'inner feelings' which ended up resembling 'models' of hetero-normative Zulu masculinity. The other gay Zulu masculinity is centered on direct reactions *against* a heterosexual model of interactions, where maintaining flexibility in passive and dominating roles was preferred, in sexual and other contexts of the relationship. It is "this flexibility in playing different roles [that]enables these gay men to construct their masculinities both inside and outside the hetero-patriarchal world, being on the 'margins' of society as it were, yet attracted to the masculinity represented by those at the 'centre'"(2006, p.173).

This flexibility of gay Zulu alternative masculinity not only serves to disprove stereotypes around African masculinities as 'static' (Silberschmidt, 2005 in Morrell, 2005) but further illustrates the patriarchal intentions around the construction of masculinities, where rigid notions of gender identity equals specific gender 'roles' and 'performances', essentially stifling the fluid and contextual nature of identities (Lorber,1994). The dismantling and creation of 'alternative' gender 'roles' and performances is particularly relevant to my overall research focus, which examines ways in which FTM transsexuals reconstruct their own notions of masculinities in their separate social, racial and cultural contexts. The meaning of 'alternative' masculinities within non-heteronormative space is vital to my theoretical framework. This is especially so given that notions of 'alternative' versus 'hegemonic' masculinities are overwhelmingly, in the mainstream literature, deployed in researching diverse heterosexual men and boys.

My research (previous and current year) was undertaken in Cape Town, and has been assisted immensely by the only organization in South Africa (and the entire African continent), that is dedicated exclusively to issues facing African trans-communities: GenderDynamix (GDX). The organization has grown to become the reference point for those with questions about their own as well as others' transgender identities. It provides a wealth of resources: academic, medical and social in nature, and has become a haven for those seeking 'safe' spaces. My relationship with the Director has been of great importance to me, as an individual and researcher as 'Trans-friendly' researchers, professionals and students are welcomed to approach GDX for collaborative research processes as one obtains research assistance.

All this has, contributed to the expansion of GDX resources on trans issues which can benefit members and affect social change. This is the collaborative context in which exchange student, Harper Keenan, wrote an article '*They call me Umfowethu: Transgender men and female masculinity in South Africa*'. The article is one of the first papers written on the trans-community in South Africa, with special focus on black communities of which there is traditional silencing around transsexual or other 'alternative' states of being. By obtaining the life histories of three trans-men in their various transition stages, Keenan (2006) who himself identifies as a FTM Trans-sexual, tracks the history of gender variance in South Africa. He also examines the response of various non-governmental organizations to the increased visibility of trans issues in society. The distinction between trans-sexual men and masculine-- or male--identifying women, warrants a different investigation into their lived experiences within their respective South African communities.

Keenan's (2006) initial research interest was informed by his own location: Western as well as his own Trans status, and therefore he sought to compare his status to those in a different

location. He argues that the trans-sexual men (FTM) of the SA community he was researching did not see themselves as 'women transitioning into men', but instead:

[the Transmen]...describe[d] feeling some level of discomfort in their female bodies and prefer to be recognized as men, but may not be aware of hormone treatment or gender reassignment surgery. Some identify as being neither male nor female, but believe that they exist somewhere in between....There is evidence of what Western culture might today call Transgender identities, known as murumkadzi (man-woman) and mukadzirume (woman-man) among the Shona. Murumkadzi took the role of a wife in a relationship with presumably gender-normative men, and mukadzirume took the role of a man in relationships with women....There is a long tradition of female sangomas (traditional healers) who engage in same-sex relationships, and it has been said that gender inversion is a powerful trait among them (2006, p.2-5).

This apprehension positions the notion of 'alternative', non-heterosexual, masculinities into a very particularly African set of concerns. Keenan's research into this already 'transitional' space with regard to the definitions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' within African 'traditional' spaces is further complicated when one considers the example of 'lesbian sangomas' he cites in his explanation of gender 'fluidity' sanctioned by supposedly rigid African societies. A first hand account of one such 'transitional' perspective is seen in Nkunzi Nkabinde's autobiographical account of her lived experience that often sees her occupying differing spheres of SA society; as a respected sangoma and a lesbian. Nkabinde in her book *Black bull, ancestors and me: My life as a lesbian Sangoma* explores how her position as a woman who occupies a heightened position of respect within her own cultural community and overall 'traditional' sphere of SA society is simultaneously harshly judged by the very tenants of both 'traditional' and 'modern' social spheres for being a lesbian.

The author walks one through her own 'calling' which refers to the occurrence of cultural significance where a person, often at a young age, falls ill with no medical explanation or cure available. It is then believed that the individual has an 'ancestor' (often a deceased relative from one's maternal or paternal lineage) who desires to communicate with others via the individual. Often, the 'called' person has to undergo a form of 'training' to be a '*sangoma*'/traditional healer to simply learn about the ancestor who 'called' them or how to harness the gift in their own lives and for those around them (Nkabinde, 2008; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). The author's straddling of these two spheres of SA society is further complicated when she reveals that the ancestor who 'called' her was a man. This essentially influenced the conceptualization of her own 'femininity' with regard to the gender 'roles' she felt more comfortable undertaking as well as the overall understanding of herself as a 'female'. Nkabinde (2008) describes how:

*My uncle taught me about my culture in passing and I learned many things from following him....I learned what is expected of a Zulu girl and I learned about the life of a Zulu man. I was more interested in the life of a Zulu man. Some of the girls' things did not feel right for me. I remember I was told to drink warm milk from the cow so that I would grow up to be a healthy mother and give birth to healthy children. I had to struggle to drink that milk.... I didn't see myself as someone who would get pregnant and be the mother of children (2008, p.20; Emphasis mine).*

Nkabinde's (2008) description of the complexities of traditional healing with regard to her gender as well as fitting into heteronormative understanding of 'femaleness' (e.g. bearing children) is useful in thinking about the position that trans individuals, and more specifically FTMs, occupy in the differing avenues. Whilst the author does not personally define her own reluctance to 'perform' certain 'feminine' roles as indicative of a complete rejection of her

'femaleness', it is interesting to note the similar processes involved within 'female masculinity' (Halberstam, 1999) and transsexualism. 'Membership' within each category evidently involves an acute resistance towards adhering to social constructions of gender and subsequent attached assumptions based on external 'signifiers'. Nkabinde's (2008) own experience speaks of 'female masculinity' within a South African context, where the fluidity of gender 'norms' proves ironic in light of stereotypical Westernized views of overall African gender and sexual realities (Mudimbe, 1988, 1994 in Murray & Roscoe, 1998). This is highlighted in Nkabinde's description of how 'female masculinity' is exhibited and accepted (albeit within *sangoma* boundaries) in the gender 'roles' she is allowed to perform, where:

In traditional Zulu culture, a man must be a man and do male things and a woman must be a woman and do female things but with sangomas it is more flexible. I can dance like a woman and wear woman's clothes and dance like a man and wear a man's clothes. I can do the work of a man like slaughtering a goat or a cow, although in traditional Zulu culture a woman cannot slaughter.... *Sometimes I become too much of a man* and people will look at me and say, "Today you look like a man." *That is when I know it is Nkunzi's spirit in me. If I am just myself then I am not too much of a man, I am feminine too.* Then I know it's me (2008, p.73; Emphasis mine).

The space that Nkabinde's perspective as a woman and sangoma occupies in relation to the possibilities that this specific elaboration of 'female masculinity' exemplifies is one that supports the overall theoretical space that countless feminist theorists have put forward in relation to the constructed notion of gender as a 'performance' and in this particular instance, the *tolerance* for this fluidity within traditional African contexts. Nkabinde (2008) describes a meeting with another 'out' lesbian sangoma she was interviewing about her own experiences as a traditional healer in a same-sex relationship, and explains how:

I was surprised to find her dressed in feminine clothes, a white t-shirt and a skirt with flowers on it and a sangoma cloth wrapped around her....The first thing I noticed was that *she had breasts and a beard like a man who has just shaved. I was impressed by her way of expressing the male and the female in her at the same time* (2008, p.80; Emphasis mine).

Nkabinde's (2008) 'transitional' masculinity in particular reference to 'female masculinity' (Prosser,1998; Halberstam,1999) is useful in locating the transitional/contextual form of masculinity within a cultural space that is 'open' to the fluid aspect/nature of gender and overall 'identity' categories functioning within cultural communities in SA. However, it is also important to understand that in spite of the flexibility of gender roles that is accepted within this 'traditional' SA sphere, there still exists an element of foundational heteronormativity. It is the presence of a *male* spirit within Nkabinde's life that essentially acts as the 'key' towards her being allowed to perform traditional male roles. Were it not for this male ancestor within the author and presumably, other female sangomas, one may question whether the traditions would be as 'flexible' in light of gender-specific roles and overall patriarchal cultural ideals.

It is particularly interesting to note that the author does not ascribe her sexual orientation to the male ancestor residing within her, but simply the natural expression of her own identity and sexual preference. According to her, she had her first sexual experience with a woman at the age of 13, nine years before her 'calling' experience (Nkabinde, 2008). It is this standpoint that the author takes, that in my opinion, heightens the need to dissolve 'categories' prevalent within society that serve to restrict the fluidity of 'identity', as these categories create 'differences' often based on reinforcing patriarchal ideas around gender and access to power and resources. The

author succinctly illustrates this need to dismantle ‘categories’ when describing how her desire to ‘come out’ openly as a lesbian sangoma was potentially hindered by numerous factors:

*I wanted to live my life as a sangoma and a lesbian--as one person--not divided up into pieces and I wanted to connect with other lesbian sangomas who felt the same way. Although I was confident as a lesbian, I was not confident as a lesbian sangoma...because I knew that many of these sangomas were still living in hiding. They were not public about their sexuality like me...Many people believe that being lesbian is not African. Sangomas are afraid to come out because of this. There are people who say that if you are a lesbian you cannot have the powers to heal and others believe that being homosexual is a sin. That is why most same-sex sangomas feel that if they disclose their status they will lose their clients (2008, p.79; Emphasis mine).*

The construction of African masculinities within Western ideals (Reid & Walker, 2005 ; Murray & Roscoe, 1998; Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005)) has served to create a form of tension within the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ spheres of African societies, where what it ‘means’ to be African within constantly evolving societies creates a form of ‘crisis’ already discussed in previous themes. This ‘tension’ manifests itself within Nkabinde’s own experience as well as other sangomas in same-sex relationships. Other lesbian sangomas act as acute personifications of the ‘tension’ between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ South Africa, as the cultural practice serves to keep a fast-fading ‘traditional’ Africa alive, whilst simultaneously accused of embracing ‘un-African’ lifestyles.

A similar article on this transitional/ alternative space of masculinities and the increased complexity of gender variance within a South African context is explored in another GDX article ‘The trouble with men: Frameworks for African masculinities’ by fellow researcher Lincoln Theo. Theo’s (2007) overall position is complex and multifaceted. Although the author is a non-

trans identifying homosexual white South African, he has silicone breast implants (designed specifically to imitate those of a female) and regularly couples high heeled 'feminine' shoes with 'masculine' attire<sup>28</sup>. His entire body is covered in tattoos and piercings. Theo (2007) cites his body as a reflection of his desire to challenge the perception of 'femininity' as exclusively attached to 'female' bodies and 'masculinity' to 'male' bodies.

Although Theo does not inhabit the same space as my research participants, his perspective on deconstructing the 'exclusive' labels attached to our gendered bodies is useful in obtaining a South African perspective on all forms that 'transitional' masculinities may take, given the limited material that exists within this context. Theo (2007) puts across an interesting argument in working towards this conceptualization of masculinities that falls outside the 'ideal' in one's cultural context, by first locating his work "as an opinion piece...and in the context of my ongoing attempts to contextualize my own personal experiences both in my personal life and in the environments of social theory and change" (2007, p.1). Theo (2007) offers important ideas to my overarching research focus in the contextual space of South African society, where race and class form a pivotal concept in the negotiation of its space, influences that will undoubtedly emerge within my participants' narratives and overall analysis of the research focus. He explains that his own 'position' within SA society locates him as:

...[an]African, both by virtue of birth and upbringing in South Africa, and of feeling that I belong in Africa rather than anywhere else... *social circumstances imply an identity for me as white, English-speaking and middleclass, which, in South Africa often results in incorrect assumptions, concerning my intentions, feelings and self-identity, that I do or*

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<sup>28</sup>He claims that this often causes strong reactions as his physical appearance is very 'masculine' i.e. his physique conforms to the 'hegemonic' masculinity ideal in Afrikaans society.

should subscribe to the ideals, aspirations and frames of reference of others who self-identify as white, English-speaking and/or middle class (2007, p.2; Emphasis mine).

It is apparent that the inflexibility of 'identity' within race and class are parallel to those that fail to accurately represent the 'gender' identity of trans individuals, as these rigid categories exclude those who do not fall within society's definitions of 'male' or 'female'. The author's description of the assumptions that link his skin color to the historical stratification of racial identity within South Africa is indicative of similar processes that undertake to 'place' one's gender by using external 'signifiers'. In recognition of the way in which trans-individuals physically align their 'biological' bodies to their 'internal' selves, Theo uses his extensive tattoos and piercings "to publicly reject the restrictive norms of my context" (p.3). The article goes on to discuss popular theorists' accounts of masculinities in both African and Western contexts and the complicated space in which the majority of contemporary African societies find themselves amidst ever-evolving identities e.g. what is 'organically' African? Within the multifaceted material that the author brings to surface in this article, the most relevant and pertinent to my research focus lies in his exploration of the role that men can play in the evolving concept of what it 'means' to be a man in contemporary African society. Theo explains that:

In understanding that neither culture, nor society, nor even sex and gender are necessarily *inherent and immutable*, perhaps men can begin to revise dysfunctional actions *in relation* to others in their worlds, which actions are arguably often based on fear and misplaced responsibility (Theo, 2007, p.5).

Theo argues that by learning to accept the evolving nature, not only of society but also the tenants of 'identity', rigid categories can also undergo an evolution of sorts, and within African contexts cease disguising these inflexible notions as 'traditional' or 'cultural'. This is particularly

important when one considers not only the author's own standpoint where his race and external appearance are often inextricably attached to assumptions of his identity, but more so when considering the immediate consequences meted unto trans individuals on the periphery of society. Does this not seem too high a price to pay for 'failing' to live up stagnated categories that refuse to evolve in order to maintain patriarchal interests? Does the destruction of patriarchy lie in the evolution of identities?

Discussing the 'reactions' of African masculinities in response to changing cultural, economic aspects of societies that redefine the position of power (Ratele, 2001; Silberschmidt, 2005 in Morrell, 2005) leads to the consideration of violence against Trans-males and masculine-identified women, where elements of misogyny are often linked to sexual violence. Ruth Morgan and Saskia Wieringa (eds.) explore this occurrence across African contexts in their book *Tommy boys, lesbian men and ancestral wives: Female same-sex practices in Africa*. The editors present accounts of different female same-sex relationships and the understanding of what this 'means' in specific African cultural contexts. Unfailingly, a pattern emerges amongst the differing understanding of lesbian or 'masculine' women within separate contexts.

The specific threat of violence aimed towards 'alternative' individuals is of paramount concern/occurrence. The majority of respondents reported feeling the threat from 'genetic' men in their respective communities by way of 'fixing them', often known as "corrective rape"<sup>29</sup> (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005, p.46-7). The respondents in both Morgan and Wieringa's (2005) and Keenan's (2006) research corroborate these experiences as masculine women believed that the

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<sup>29</sup>This term is used to describe the act of men raping lesbian women in an attempt to show them that they are women and not men. It's also believed to be linked to the notion that lesbians are attracted to women simply because they have never had vaginal sex with a man and therefore by exposing them to male penetrative sex, they will revert to being heterosexual. This is often carried out on butch/masculine or lesbian women.(Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Keenan, 2006)

'biological' men were threatened and disturbed by their masculine displays and 'lifestyles' and often harassed or outrightly violated them (Keenan, 2006, p.36). The FTM experience of masculinities in this SA context is further complicated when one considers which aspects of these constructions and arguably 'performances' of masculinity reflected in societal contexts are then *internalized* in a bid to effectively 'perform' as 'real' SA males in order to receive this affirmation from other men as well as their female partners. Keenan (2006) places this notion in context when explaining how living in a culture where:

...aggression is the currency of Masculinity [Transgender men and masculine/male-identified women] attempt to 'adopt society's norms' for masculine and male identity; it seems that butch/masculine women and Transgender men frequently take on negative qualities that are often associated with manhood. From my observation in conversations with transgender men and masculine women these included misogynist speech, occasional homophobia toward gay men, and the expression of physical dominance over women. Domestic violence was referenced as a problem by several participants... (2007, p. 47).

Keenan (2006) goes on to discuss other forms of violence which are targeted specifically towards masculine women and trans-gender males in SA's various cultural communities and contexts, where dangers such as 'virgin-cure' or sex with a virgin is believed to hold the cure for HIV/AIDS. As butch women or transgender men are often believed to be 'virgins'<sup>30</sup> they are targeted for rape. This occurs in contexts where they already have to negotiate their vulnerability at the periphery of society, unprotected by legislation and often navigating society under anonymity and without 'rights'. These issues as well as countless examples outlined in numerous theorists' work can be regarded as the reality of 'reactions' towards 'transitional' masculinities

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<sup>30</sup>I refer to 'virgins' here in recognition of the heteronormative assumptions of what constitutes 'real' sex, i.e. vaginal penetrative sex by a male phallus.

not mandated by 'culture' (as seen in the example of female *sangomas*). By offering insight into some of the realities that face the trans community within a SA context, it is my hope that the underbelly of the institution of 'gender', creating 'differences' based on external 'signifiers' is exposed.

It is therefore critical to ensure that *all* levels of my engagement with the trans community in my research process, be it through discourse or social interaction, remain sensitive to the vulnerability that trans-gendered individuals often find themselves within 'research participant' positions. It is of immense importance not to assume that one's trans experience is representative of the entire community's or vice versa, whilst simultaneously interrogating what studying/interacting with trans communities reveals to an individual about themselves (Hale, 1997 ; Timtunga, 2000). The fact that there are numerous issues in a continuous evolving state (of Trans terminology, theories and realities) to the trans-sexual experience is important in my own work. The reality is that whatever the research in my particular experience uncovers, it is representative of the voices that spoke and not of the silent ones.

### *Chapter III:*

#### **Research Methodology:**

My research examines societal implications for those who fall out of society's unrealistic gender binary system. This particular research focus is grounded in feminist discourse, which as I have suggested in the previous *chapter*, differs vastly from much of mainstream 'knowledge'

produced around gender, 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. The research takes into account the reality of the gender binary system as a category that not only oppresses those who fall outside of it, but also constricts those within its set boundaries. It is this focus that leads to questions about the construction of this system. In doing this research, I aim to explore how FTM individuals make sense of their realities and 'maleness', and how this in turn relates directly to the strict gender binary system in South African society, where boundaries between 'meanings' of masculinities and femininities are clearly drawn. My main focus is on the differing ways the participants encountered notions of masculinities within their specific social and cultural contexts. My study closely examines the conceptualization of their own maleness in close relation to external reactions to their individual 'transitional' masculinities.

The overall aim of the methodology and methods I employ is thus influenced by my conviction that the information I seek is best obtained from listening to FTMs' experiences as "personal narratives are particularly rich sources because *attentively interpreted*, they illuminate both the logic of individual courses of action and the effects of system-wide constraints within these evolved courses" (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p.128; Italics in original). The trans participants occupy interesting locations within my research, as discourse around the community is often silenced within the broader African context. South Africa however boasts one of the more progressive Constitutions on the continent, greatly influencing awareness and discourses around 'alternative' sexualities and states of being. However, tensions between traditional and contemporary beliefs exist within this society, often silencing or overtly rejecting these

'alternative' realities within specific societal and cultural contexts<sup>31</sup>, and thus relegating transgender experiences and voices to a 'subaltern space'.

The personal goals of this research guide its use of methods (which I will discuss in a later section). Dominant discourses serve to project expectations onto gendered bodies via gender 'roles' and gender identity categories. This practice essentially misrepresents the fluidity of identities across contexts, restraining the personal element, if not the basic variety, of choice. In order therefore to achieve the goal of exposing the notion of gender as a farce, the active use of the appropriate research tools is essential. While I am aware that this introduction is somewhat underdeveloped, I will fully explore essential issues around the politics of methodology in the course of the chapter. This chapter also explores the methodological choices and challenges encountered in the course of the research and also explores the theoretical foundations informing the research. It focuses on feminist epistemology, methodology and methods, and critically reflects on the sensitive issues underpinning my positionality. I also discuss the ethics of the research given the sensitive nature of the participants' stories and their realities in light of the vulnerable position they occupy within the research space. I also discuss the different challenges and limitations I encountered in the midst of the entire investigative study.

### **Locating the research.**

#### **❖ Epistemology:**

Epistemology is defined as the *study of source, nature and limitations of knowledge*<sup>32</sup>. While this definition may suffice when applied to social and other non-academic settings, I believe the

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<sup>31</sup> I will discuss in greater detail, the characteristics and implications of these tensions between traditional and modern aspects of SA society in the Analysis chapter

<sup>32</sup> Collins Gem English Dictionary

definition takes a more interesting slant when it comes to the consideration of *feminist* epistemology. And while theorists may argue there are several feminist theories on research processes, there exists no specific feminist epistemology (Thompson, 1992), but instead actual methods that prove consistent with feminist values (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991). The study (and inclusion) of gender (read: women's) issues into societal and institutional arenas led to discourse and knowledge production that served to directly challenge mainstream patriarchal discourse (Harding, 1987; Narayan, 1989; Imam, 1997). By providing 'alternative' methodologies, methods and even alternative research 'sites', the heightened visibility of female perspectives has vastly eroded the biased and inaccurate landscape of institutional 'truths' (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Eagle et al. 1999). Russell Luyt in his UCT thesis *Hegemonic masculinity and aggression in South Africa* supports the notion of using supposedly 'alternative' modes of research to capture, deconstruct and represent societal realities accurately (to a greater rather than lesser extent). In the specific case of his research on the link between 'ideal' African masculinity and gender-based violence, Luyt (2002) makes a particular case for feminist research citing that:

*Feminist study highlights the way in which research has traditionally come to reflect the concerns and values of white heterosexist male society* (Frank, 1987) as such reflexivity gains prominence within the research enterprise. That is to say both the means by which knowledge is produced, as well as relations in which it is manufactured, are explored in order to uncover political goals lurking behind the safety of supposed 'objective' science (2002, p.8; Emphasis mine).

It is from this 'alternative' knowledge produced and subsequent challenge to 'traditional' systems that one can observe the benefits society gains, when discourse begins to include a serious consideration and analysis of the different ways gender affects the daily lives of its

inhabitants. Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter in their article 'Introduction: When feminisms intersect epistemology' explicate the *genesis* of this form of epistemology. They argue that "feminist work in epistemology, as in all other areas, began as a critique of the tradition (including a critique of the dominant narratives about just what that tradition is). Although this critique continues, constructive and reconstructive work in the theory of knowledge is emerging...." (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, pp.2-3). By studying the way men, women and 'other' gender identities navigate society under similar circumstances and yet with *glaringly* distinct experiences, it becomes important to closely study and address these gender-based differences (which function to preserve the status quo).

My research focus is inspired and grounded in feminist epistemology, and given the 'type' of knowledge epistemology seeks to produce, is more interested in using particular forms of data gathering which not only leaves ample room for the researched 'voice' to be presented, but also allows it to represent itself (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Jones, 1997). This is in direct opposition to traditional/patriarchal modes of research, where often the researcher's own agenda directs the knowledge production process (Harding, 1987; Blanche & Durreheim, 1999). I am not suggesting this was not the case in my own research process. I, however, endeavored that both parties would on no account feel exploited by the other. Burman (1996), a social psychologist, defends feminist epistemology in knowledge production via 'un-conventional' research methods in challenging traditional research processes, pointing out that:

The common basis for such feminist commentaries on research processes is to reject the traditional oppositions structuring research, between theory and method, and theory and practice. Rather, within a feminist framework, these oppositions are seen as necessary and inevitably intertwined, united through the connections between the purposes, conduct and outcome of the research (1996, p.123).

Using feminist epistemology as the guiding framework of my research process is particularly helpful in studying the realities of a trans-sexual community in South Africa/Cape Town. This initially appeared difficult as it is evident that discourse around 'alternative' states of being (gender, sexual or other) is often silenced within an African context or invariably dismissed as 'un-African' (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2001; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005). It therefore became increasingly important to subscribe to an epistemology whose recommended research processes were developed in direct challenge to patriarchal methods, whose methods have often resulted in inaccurate and androcentric knowledge production (Imam, 1997; Narayan, 1989). I do however acknowledge that on the surface, my use of narrative interviewing as method may not necessarily classify as 'oppositional' given that patriarchal research models often also use interviews as research methods. However my conviction that my particular approach isolated to this particular research that largely involved participants representing themselves and their experiences in their own words, lends weight to the 'opposition' against mainstream knowledge emerging from research with patriarchal foundations.

Mark Jones (1997) in his article 'Men and feminist research' explores the science of feminist methodology in his own search of its specific benefits as opposed to traditional research processes, in his research on female nurses working conditions and overall job satisfaction. He suggests:

...a feminist methodology is about leveling the potential power imbalance between researched and researcher. It is about admitting that the researcher has her (or his) own agenda, that is intertwined with the lives and experiences of those being researched. *It is about allowing participants in the research process to participate fully--to speak in their own voice, to be heard and listened to by someone who understands...* [feminist

methodology] then, is the underpinning structural theory delineating a research approach intended to give equality to the participants, and allowing them to use the research process to address the question as they see it, rather than simply providing the answers the researcher may require (1997, p.134; Emphasis mine).

One may however question the possibility of applying feminist epistemological approaches and associated methods to my specific research focus, given the apparent paradoxical and complex location feminism and 'transitional' masculinities appear to occupy. One may argue, the FTM research participants would reveal their 'rejection' of one gendered body's stereotypical representation/conceptualization in favor of the other. Don't FTM individuals (by the mere definition of 'transsexualism') buck at the very notion of being regarded as 'female', whereas feminist research/epistemology focuses on reducing pathologized discourse and research around women's bodies? I however argue that feminist epistemology *remains particularly relevant* to FTM realities in light of the adamant use of methodologies and methods that allow participants to represent their individual realities. This increases visibility of marginalized voices whilst challenging notions about 'alternative' states as those identical to options offered under patriarchal contract. As 'feminist epistemology' seeks to analyze the operation of gender dynamics as political, if the FTM individuals' performance of gender turns out to conform to patriarchal visions of gender, this will not render epistemological lenses as void, but will merely illuminate yet another site of patriarchal infiltration.

It is important, however, to clarify that I am by no means suggesting my reality as a 'genetic' woman; the ease with which I am related to and regarded as a female<sup>33</sup> places me in a position to

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<sup>33</sup>Here I am simply referring to simple interactions such as wearing 'female' associated clothing or accessories, or being recognized and referred to by female nouns, titles etc. I am however *never* at 'ease' with common place

identify with the sensitive and often traumatic experiences of FTM transsexuals (let alone those of my participants). However, the reality is that my navigation of gendered society, whose foundational ideals on notions of power, access to resources and even experience of 'traditional' African culture is based on patriarchal and colonial ideals (as discussed in the previous chapter). This therefore allows me to identify in complex and partial ways with the realities of disenfranchisement and oppression based merely on 'biological' and subsequently gender 'differences', the very reality/experience trans individuals across contexts are forced to endure.

It is this particular standpoint that enhances my position both as a feminist researcher and trans-activist. Where traditional discourse would assume a 'tension' between the two, feminist epistemology allows for a negotiated 'transition' between both spheres. This is possible given that both theories take the issue of 'gender' seriously, and seek to deconstruct and challenge social, cultural and academic discourse around the notion. It is with this in mind that I consider the pivotal position *gender analysis* takes within feminist-inspired research as explained by Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook in their article 'Back to the future: A look at the second wave of feminist epistemology and methodology'. The authors (1991) share similar opinions with Harding's (1987) on the absence of a 'distinctive' feminist mode of inquiry. They argue that there are indeed unique features that feminist knowledge produces and the research processes undertaken in order to produce such knowledge. Referring to the existence of a feminist epistemology, Fonow and Cook argue that:

...the need for this type of analysis comes from the limitations and strictures placed on feminist studies by a patriarchal academic and research infrastructure...the experience of oppression due to sexism can create a unique type of insight, involving the ability to

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encounters, that serve to disenfranchise women on the basis of 'gender differences', or 'feminine' 'roles' (social, 'cultural' even biological) that women are assumed/expected to want to perform.

penetrate “official” explanations and assumptions to grasp the underlying gender relations and their motor mechanisms... (1991, p.1).

It therefore becomes increasingly clear that when one considers the need to create ‘alternative’ knowledge in response to androcentric and misrepresentative discourse, the first step involves actively seeking ‘other’ modes of research processes that actively accommodate sensitive issues that deserve visibility, and endeavoring to value those who participate and lend their silenced voices to the research process.

❖ *Methodology:*

Having examined the motivations behind applying feminist epistemology to my research process, it is also essential to discuss my choice of qualitative research methodology which theorists cite “by its very nature, can provide data and raise questions that no quantitative methods [can] generate, in great part because it allows for the emergence of the unexpected” (Ambert,1994). The intensely sensitive nature of my material indicates the vulnerable position my research participants placed themselves during and after the research process. It is crucial to therefore apply a mode of inquiry and associated methods that actively reflect the required sensitivity and to simultaneously produce knowledge that is not only original, but also indicative and descriptive (non-essentialist) of the experiences and realities of an otherwise silenced/marginalized community. This in turn reflects underlying and often overlooked processes functioning within society masquerading as ‘natural’, for example in this case, the institution of ‘gender’.

The question therefore becomes: what features of qualitative methodology make it the preferred choice in light of the prerequisites my research focus demanded? Jennifer Mason in her book *Qualitative researching* outlines features of what this 'type' of research entails:

[Qualitative research] is grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly 'interpretivist' in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced...[is] *based on methods of data generation which are flexible and sensitive to the social context in which data are produced (rather than rigidly standardized or structured, or removed from 'real life' or 'natural' social context)*...[is] based on methods of analysis and explanation building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context. Qualitative research aims to produce rounded understandings on the basis of rich, contextual, and detailed data...(1996, p.4 ; Emphasis mine).

Quantitative methodology in contrast is not suitable to the specific needs of my research process, as methods typically associated with this methodology often result in the "objectification of subjects [and] exploitation by researchers using the dominant methods [that reduce] human beings to social facts" (Gorelick, 1991, p.460). This general mistrust of quantitative methodology largely stems from the association of overall 'traditional' methodologies which feminists in the past have found deliberately misrepresent women's and other silenced communities voices, with actual research techniques that undoubtedly influence research outcomes. These negative experiences stem from personal experience (Reinhartz, 1979), and political agenda with sexist, racist and elitist agendas prevalent in research outcomes (Unger, 1981 in Fonow & Cook, 1991; Blaunche & Durreheim, 1999). They also derive from the overall rejection of 'positivism' which encourages hierarchal interaction between researcher and researched and claims of 'value-free' science (Wittig, 1985; Gorelick, 1991; Eagle et al., 1999).

The apparent gravitation towards qualitative methodology by feminists and other social scientists seeking to reduce the distance between the researcher and researched (Harding, 1987; Fonow & Cook, 1991) is not without its critics for this very same reason. Given the theoretical popularity of qualitative methodology, authors Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) argue that criticisms are often focused on the determination towards having a more 'intimate' research process, worrying that "[the] abandonment of all aspects of traditional methodology may carry political and scholarly costs" (1991, p.85).

Whilst it may not be apparently clear what 'costs' are in question, these concerns have some validity in terms of the interconnecting issues that may occur when boundaries inevitably blur. If the researcher extends across imaginary boundaries and relationships intertwine, it inevitably influences research outcomes. Sherry Gorelick works with this argument when exploring the potential futility in 'alternative' knowledge that feminist methodology, which often relies heavily on qualitative methodology and methods, ventures to produce. Gorelick (1991) discusses sociologist Smith's (1974) contribution to this debate as follows:

Smith argued that male-dominated science objectifies, but something very fundamental happens when both the knower and the known are women. When the *pronoun applied to the knower is she, rather than the seemingly impersonal he, the knower is changed immediately from The Scientist to a person with a gender*. And when this scientist with a female personal pronoun studies women, she is apt to feel a different relationship with her subjects, because she is subject to finding herself mirrored in them, a fact with revolutionary implications for the relationships among observer and observed, theory and experience, science, politics, race, and class (1991, p.460; Emphasis mine).

I, however, believe that this 'blurring' of boundaries between the 'subject' and observer enhances the research experience, while ensuring that both parties emerge fairly changed or

challenged in their separate personal realities. Parsons (1996) supports this when illustrating how “... adopting a qualitative approach allows unanticipated responses to emerge and become incorporated into the research which is continuously reflexive...*the qualitative interview enables respondents time to cope with topics which are rarely verbalized*”(1996, p.79; Emphasis mine). I believe that anxiety over the qualitative methodology research methods perhaps stems from the desire for the researcher (hence the overall academic institution) to remain at the apex of the hierarchal structure of ‘knowledge production’ power. I feel that the maintenance of distance between ‘subjects’ and those who study, and the belief that this guarantees complete ‘objectivity’ of knowledge produced (Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gorelick, 1991) results in the streamlining of access to power and resources as well as controlling the prerequisites of accessibility within societies.

This is not to say that in spite of previous aversion to the use of traditional/quantitative methodology within feminist-based research it is wholly impossible to successfully reap and amalgamate the positive attributes of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Jaynarthe and Stewart (1991) effectively outline the motivations behind this crucial union between the warring methodologies. They argue that:

The emphasis here is on using methods which can best *answer particular research* questions, but always using them in ways which are consistent with broad feminist goals and ideology. Thus, the feminist debate on these issues can be seen to have evolved from one defined by opposition to all aspects of mainstream research to an argument for use of a broad range of methods in pursuit of research reflecting feminist values and goals.... Procedures commonly used in quantitative research which are inconsistent with feminist values can be altered without abandoning the quantitative strategies, which can be beneficial to feminists (1991, p.91).

In the light of the numerous options available to a present-day feminist researcher, it is no longer wise to automatically adopt a particular methodology, given the benefits that both types of methodologies can bring to feminist-based research or research that takes gender seriously. It is with this in mind that I chose to use qualitative research methodology for my particular research focus, as the methods associated with this form of research process spoke with more sensitivity to the research questions themselves. Jaynarthe and Stewart (1991) outline practical steps towards implementation of a feminist perspective of social science research, citing one of their recommendations as:

When designing the study, we should propose methods that are both appropriate for the kind of question asked and the information needed and which permit answers persuasive to a particular audience.... If the research goal is descriptive of individual lives and designed to promote an understanding of a particular viewpoint of the subjects, more qualitative methods may be appropriate (1991, p.102).

The sole motivation for insisting on using methods that allow the participant to represent him or herself lies in the basic and unfortunate fact that African trans-communities often find themselves on the periphery of mainstream society (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2001). The majority of available discourses around trans-communities often stems largely from a North American perspective, with the resulting creation of FTMs and MTFs as active sites of essentialist, eroticized, and blatantly voyeuristic information (Gamson, 1998; Fields, 1999). The reality that there are not many theoretical spaces where these misrepresentations or overall African trans-issues are discussed leads me to believe that this is perhaps indicative that *not enough* people are asking the important question: what are the realities of those who navigate [my] society without rights? Therefore all these factors made the notion of simply 'listening' to the research

participants' narrative representations that actively shaped their own conceptualization of 'Self'<sup>34</sup> a more attractive option than simply approaching the individuals with my own ideas of 'who' they were, and asking them to merely 'confirm' it<sup>35</sup>.

However, my own location as a feminist researcher essentially 'listening' to male voices is complicated in light of the tumultuous past feminist theory and 'men's studies' have shared. The latter was a direct 'response' to misrepresentations of men and their experiences by women, an occurrence invariably linked to assumptions of power-possession (Brod & Kaufman, 1994). It is these assumptions (reached by not 'listening') about *all* men's access to power, that early feminist theorists' in the 70s and 80s insinuated that women's experiences stemmed categorically from 'subaltern' spaces (Anderson & Jack, 1991). It is therefore not surprising that ignoring men's individual voices led to the rise of 'critical' men's studies (Brod & Kaufman, 1994) which included the voices of those who claimed to represent men and their experiences (Connell, 1985; Brod, 1987; Kimmell, 1987) by virtue of being men themselves. This paradigm, however, failed to take into account that their theorizing around 'men and masculinities' involved using conventional social scientist methods and overall traditional approaches to research which did not reflexively dissect the complexities of what it is to be a certain 'type' of man writing about *all* men.

The question therefore asks: in light of these theoretical dilemmas, what does it 'mean' as a feminist to listen to male voices in a theoretical landscape that presents both women and men's studies as seemingly polar opposites? After all, was I not approaching masculinities from an

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<sup>34</sup>As discussed qualitative methodology will allow me to do precisely this.

<sup>35</sup>As quantitative methodology methods would require/encourage me to do.

'outsider' perspective fraught with misrepresentations of the two paradigms I was attempting to study? Did my belief that it is theoretically irresponsible to approach research that takes gender seriously without including *both* theoretical frameworks, not act as a necessary starting point? I straddled complex and multifaceted locations; a 'feminist' perspective that emphasizes the importance of studying 'marginalized' realities whilst actively negotiating with realities where trans individuals reject<sup>36</sup> their initial 'female' bodies. I finally approached the notion of 'masculinity' attached to male bodies using theories built on non-reflexive research processes as guides. However, I feel these dilemmas accurately reflect the complex and multifaceted layers of societal occupation that FTM transsexuals face within their own experiences, from childhood to present day realities that make it impossible to 'tie-down' one's identity that evolves over contexts, time and individual realities.

❖ **Methods:**

Julie Owen in her article 'Childish things: Men, ageing and violence' in *Gender and qualitative research* states that "qualitative methods allow the researcher to explore the everyday world of the research participants, to produce research grounded in their experiences" (1997, p.63). My use of *qualitative methods* was guided by my research interests and more importantly, by the idea of allowing my participants to represent themselves in their own light. The main method I undertook in obtaining the necessary data was partial life histories via *narratives interviewing*. I asked my participants to simply speak to me about their life experiences, having already outlined my research focus which allowed

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<sup>36</sup>In this case I am referring to rejecting societal 'expectations' attached to their external 'signifiers' that are irrevocably linked to one's gender identity.

them to 'hone in' on the more relevant stories/narratives. This method was aimed at documenting feelings, experiences and stories which reflected how the participants made sense of their world. Hatch & Wisniewski (1995) in their article 'Life history and narrative: Questions, issues and exemplary works' featured in the same book they edited outline the 'narrative' method's location within qualitative methodology, explaining:

Narrative analysis gathers descriptions of events and happenings and generates a narrative as a research product... narrative knowledge is organized as stories, and this knowledge is best expressed in storied narrative forms. The process of doing narrative inquiry involves sharing narrative knowledge through the telling of stories; the products are the stories of self we choose to tell.... (1995, pp.125-6).

The interview questions were deliberately open-ended and carefully fashioned to allow my participants to fully engage and reflect on their own experiences. This was of immense importance to me as a researcher, as I was wary of creating knowledge that would be used to essentialize FTM Trans-sexual experiences. Therefore, by being aware of issues that may or may not have affected my particular 'sample' of respondents, I obtained the data in the manner it was intended: reflective of specific Trans experiences, within a certain context and across varied transition stages.

One may however ask whether it is not simpler to conduct semi-structured interviews<sup>37</sup> given the vastly vacant theoretical space around African trans-issues. Additionally, is it not responsible to obtain information from the participants that while 'representative', can act as a 'starting point' for future research around trans communities? I however argue, that the acute realization that my

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<sup>37</sup> "Semi-structured interviewing is best; it has much of the free-wheeling quality of unstructured interviewing...but is based on the use of an interview guide. This is a written list of questions and topics that need to be covered in a particular order" (Bernard, 1994, p.209).

research focus as well as the community in which I undertook the research, not only deals with sensitive and often traumatic information, but also has a history of exploitation and misrepresentation in social, academic, medical discourse. Butler (2001) suggests that “acts of self-observation and self-reporting carry a special significance for transgender people” (2001, p.634). By providing a research process laden with opportunities for representation independent from ‘very specific’ prompts, it would therefore be unwise to use the research to essentialize trans-experiences, given the wide range of differences within each response.

My use of interviewing in the form of narratives was mainly inspired by an anonymous author (1996) who had undertaken research in a North American trans-community, also using this method. The researcher (1996) explained that ‘narratives’ were arguably a recommended way to obtain information. Given the likely proficiency trans-individuals have had in presenting themselves and their experiences over time (to different ‘audiences’), they would perhaps be more comfortable approaching a research process carried out in a similar vein. The author elaborates:

Transgender people requiring hormones or surgeries must narrate their personal histories convincingly to physicians and to mental health professionals in order to secure these technologies from gate keeping institutions. Furthermore, Transgender people’s lovers, friends, family and co-workers may expect them to explain their decisions to transition and to otherwise clarify details of their biographies and bodies. *Although Transgender people may be repeatedly called upon to perform instrumentally crucial or emotionally fraught acts of self narration, this ought not to imply that such narratives are unreliable.* Rather than asking a specific battery of questions, I asked each person how he wanted to start and then let him dictate the course of our conversation. The few questions I did ask were intended to follow up on the themes established by the individuals I interviewed. I approach the interview material not as exact renderings of truth, but as narratives offering

'a critical perspective on the norms that confer intelligibility itself (Anonymous, 1996, p.12; Emphasis mine).

It is crucial at this stage to point out that personality differences between participants and the need to create a seamless research process that would put both parties at ease required using open-ended interview questions as a 'guide'. After all, even the most experienced speaker can be silenced by vague and shallow questions about 'yourself'. Therefore the questions acted as a reference point for one to begin one's narrative with a specific focus in mind. I found this method most useful in getting the more reserved<sup>38</sup> of the participants to essentially 'open-up' and simply begin to talk about their life, or specific experiences related to a particular question. This often led to other unprompted yet relevant and important information. Luyt (2002) explores this process within his own research context, explaining that:

In narrative interviewing, this method is regularly said to find itself oscillating between direct questioning and narrative.... In order to avoid an overly structured approach, questions were phrased in an open-ended fashion so as to encourage the telling of 'stories', these were useful in exploring concepts of masculinity from the interviewees' frame of reference. This strategy proved beneficial in offering direction in further questioning... [N]arrative discards emphasis on interviewer led discussion, alternatively placing importance on the role of 'the listener', thereby shifting responsibility from interviewer to interviewee. *The technique makes active use of story-telling a common tool in the recounting of daily experience, in doing so doing remains closer to actual interviewee lived reality*; a task poorly attained through interviewer led discussion. Whilst it is recognized that interviews are co-constructions of knowledge, it is also stressed that they exist as representations of context specific reality, thereby locating narratives as discursive constructions embedded in specific power relations through time and space" (2002, pp.29-30; Emphasis mine).

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<sup>38</sup>Reserved here indicates personality-wise and not indicative of an unwillingness to participate in interviews.

One may question the wisdom of using a method that decidedly requires a certain level of mutual trust, respect and an overall feeling of ease between the researcher and 'researched' in order to successfully generate sensitive data (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995). My Honor's year project (2007) into the concept of 'well-being'<sup>39</sup> and how this is defined by a transsexual community living in Cape Town, included interviewing three transsexuals across trans identities and transition stages (one MTF(white) and two FTMs(colored and Afrikaans). My first priority, given that I previously had little or no experience with a trans-community in any context, was to seek opportunities to first become familiar with trans-individuals and allow them to do the same with me. By attending a GenderDynamix (GDX)<sup>40</sup> formal in Cape Town which was the largest gathering of transsexual individuals across South Africa, I was able to interact with those gathered, not only as a researcher<sup>41</sup> but through simple social interaction. Admittedly, this exercise doubled as an avenue to network and identify those whose experiences were particularly relevant to my research and were willing to commit to the process. It was this familiarity that allowed me to obtain honest and more intimate responses than if I had not negotiated access prior to commencing the research.

As there was little medical, social or academic material on issues facing the African trans-community, I used *participant observation and unstructured interviews* methods. I used the data

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<sup>39</sup>'Well-being' in this case recognized the need for medical and traditional discourse around definitions of 'health' to also include mental, emotional, spiritual and psychological health, and given the pathologized stance majority of institutions (academic, medical) take on Transsexualism, made studying Transsexuals experience of day-to-day issues in obtaining medical care and the effect this in turn had on their notions of 'well-being', an excellent comparative study so to speak.

<sup>40</sup>The only Non-Government Organization in South Africa, and entire African continent, that deals specifically with Transgender and Transsexuals issues (<http://www.genderdynamix.co.za>).

<sup>41</sup>The director prior to the commencement of the social event introduced me as both a researcher and a 'friend' of GDX to those gathered. My mere presence at the social was a GDX Board-mandated decision given the vulnerability of those gathered and overall protection of GDX members from external voyeurism by 'genetic' society at large. The director's introduction essentially 'legitimized' me and my research as well as social intentions.

obtained from the interviews to establish and analyze themes that emerged from the different lived experiences of each participant. The research concluded that there was a link between institutional and personal responsibility in the achievement of 'well-being' and highlighted the influence external factors have on the internal Body (therefore 'health'). The research acted as a starting point towards undertaking research within marginalized communities and revealed to me that Trans individuals essentially conceptualized their gender independent of the physical Body. In that, all three participants underwent somewhat similar processes of a disconnect between their 'internal' and external selves, coupled with various traumatic and affirming occurrences that shaped their notions of 'well-being'. My experience of this process and research findings served as the contextual ground for my new methodological choice, where I realized that this independent gender-creation process warranted much further attention. This, in turn necessitated subscribing to a research process that would allow me to 'listen' to the complex and multi-faceted processes involved in the construction and performance one's desired gender.

❖ *Actual research process:*

Having discussed the intensely sensitive nature of the narratives amassed, I have changed the participants' names and as they have entrusted me with specific life experiences/circumstances, I will not use any surnames, real or imagined. The participants are racially diverse with three of the four 'recognized' races within South Africa represented<sup>42</sup>. I felt it important to obtain participants from each cultural community in recognition of the pivotal position race occupies within past and contemporary SA society, coupled with differences in age, transition stages and personalities further enriching the material. It is important at this juncture to state that given that

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<sup>42</sup>I use the term here to indicate presence/accounted for and not actual 'representative' of issues specific to a particular race.

there was only one participant from each 'racialised' group, I do not mean to imply that this choice would adequately address racial and class complexities. But I was interested in reading 'race and class' contexts from *within* each interviewees' representation of his engagement with masculinity, rather than suggest any essentialized connection between the three cultural experiences. My previous involvement with the non-governmental organization GenderDynamix (GDX) which I will explore in greater detail enabled me to gain familiarity with the research participants.

Chuck is a fifty-year old colored FTM trans-sexual who has undergone a hysterectomy and testosterone hormone treatment for an extended period of his life. He is currently waiting to undergo 'top-surgery'<sup>43</sup> by the end of the year. Chuck has been living as a man for over 10 plus years, both in stealth<sup>44</sup> as well in the 'open' to specific groups, and has no plans to undergo bottom-surgery mainly due to *financial constraints* (which speaks to class issues in South Africa). He is a great lover of sport and absolutely joyous company. We have been friends since his participation in my previous year's research. I feel this heightened the level of familiarity in our interactions coupled with Chuck's open personality where no topic was too taboo, a testament to his own bravery and willingness to help a Master's student with her research.

I feel it is important to mention that I am by no means the only researcher who has approached Chuck nor is this his first research participation. One may even consider him a 'professional' interviewee. However, at no point did I ever feel this negatively impacted our interview process nor did I feel that Chuck's responses were rehashed. I am confident my particular perspective is

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<sup>43</sup>This term usually refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest, but may also refer to breast augmentation (Green & Peterson, 2006).

<sup>44</sup>This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successful passing. Also referred to as 'going stealth' or 'living in stealth mode' (Green & Peterson, 2006).

unique enough to be stimulating (coupled with and recurring assurances from the man himself). Chuck walked me through his personal transition journey which proved to be an enlightening and enjoyable experience for us both.

Larry is a forty-five year old Afrikaans FTM trans-sexual, and has undergone a hysterectomy, 'top-surgery'<sup>45</sup> and an oophorectomy<sup>46</sup> within his transition and also testosterone hormone treatment for five plus years, and reports the current space with regard to his physical transformation as satisfactory. Larry is a self-proclaimed rugby-fanatic and lover of the great outdoors and has chosen not to undergo 'bottom-surgery' as he believes the process too invasive and hardly worth the risks involved. This soft-spoken gentleman had also participated in my previous research, which further enhanced our working relationship in terms of familiarity and a sense of ease within our communication. However, given Larry's Christian conservative background, I found that *certain* issues were not raised unless I explicitly asked, with the responses often deliberately (perhaps understandably) vague. This is not to imply that Larry was deliberately not forthcoming, but I sensed his intensely private and almost bashful personality made it difficult to candidly discuss specifics such as intimate and sexual relationships or 'penis' issues. I, however, did not feel this negatively affected my research process nor the findings, but instead heightened my realization that even though all the Trans individuals were open to research, some issues in spite of this, were still immensely uncomfortable to discuss. I also felt that his apparent lack of contradiction in representing himself was indicative of a secure sense of

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<sup>45</sup>This term usually refers to surgery for the construction of a male-type chest, but may also refer to breast augmentation (Green & Peterson, 2006).

<sup>46</sup>Official term for the removal of ovaries in order to prevent menstruation cycles ([www.health24.co.za](http://www.health24.co.za); last accessed 12/07/08)

self in light of circumstances that would prove taxing to any individual navigating society, which speaks to strength of character that is both inspiring and enviable.

Tony is a twenty-one year old black South African FTM trans-sexual, whose experience of South African society lies within the post-apartheid era. This is particularly relevant when one considers that both Chuck's and Larry's experiences under the apartheid regime informed their respective transition journeys. The participant is a 'pre-' in almost every sense of the word<sup>47</sup>. He has yet to undergo testosterone hormone treatments as well have any surgeries (hysterectomy, 'top-surgery', oophorectomy etc) which I believe makes his relation to 'transitional' masculinity more explicit and particularly interesting. Tony only recently discovered his trans-status two years ago and has been passing for over a year now. Tony's age as well as his overall outspoken nature contributed immensely to the interview process, and brought a fresh perspective to the conceptualization of my research focus. His open nature and use of frank language to illustrate his point or simply reacting to normally 'accepted' social phenomena was particularly interesting to observe and study long after the interviews. All in all, Tony's perspective proved invaluable to the research project, offering new insights to an old formula.

The research process drew on four weeks of ethnographic fieldwork and having participants from three races made for an introductory but nonetheless valuable approach to cross-cultural analysis within a politicalized Trans and racial location. This however does not mean that I presented my participants' lived experience as 'representative' of any racial category, nor do I presume that a participant's experience (either 'pre- or 'post' transition) within their specific cultural community speaks entirely to another individual's ('genetic' or Trans) reality within the same space. Admittedly, it was tempting to produce knowledge within a marginalized space that

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<sup>47</sup> From initial contact and during the entire research process

claimed to present a 'portal' into the lives of the *majority* of black, white and colored trans-experiences within South African society. However, my own disdain for works (academic or other) that claims to 'speak' for an entire continent or even community demanded caution in executing my own research process in an identical manner.

It was for similar purposes that I chose to focus on only three participants where a number of factors influenced the choice, with the first attributed to difficulty in access. Given the highly vulnerable position that trans individuals occupy within a societal context, many opt to simply go 'stealth' in order to avoid 'detection', further complicating the vulnerability one faces within a 'research' context. As I did not want to place anyone's identity at risk, I felt it prudent to approach individuals who were not only 'out' to their families and perhaps close friends, but also had no qualms about being identified as 'trans' male. My 'pool' was also influenced by the fact that there are considerably fewer 'out' FTM GDX members than MTFs

(<http://www.genderdynamix.co.za>). And as I had verified two of the participants from the previous year consent, GDX director Liesl Theron placed me in contact with the last individual. And as the organization was my focal point of access to trans-individuals, I essentially worked with what I had and my research was the better for it. I was also most fortunate to work with incredible individuals who continuously and candidly *interacted with me and the research* on variously complex platforms, subsequently leading to a richness of interviews and material<sup>48</sup>.

Given the intensely personal, exploratory and complex nature of the narratives and the demands this would make on both the participants and myself<sup>49</sup>, I was more comfortable working with a smaller group that would allow me delve deeper into the material obtained in order to do the

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<sup>48</sup>This might have proved impossible had I interacted with a larger 'sample'.

<sup>49</sup>As the one who would handle the sensitive data

research 'justice'. After all, due to the sparse theoretical landscape that African trans issues by an African researcher occupy, the innate responsibility within this research is apparent.

My open-ended 'first-round' interview questions (Appendix 'B') were inspired by a MTF transsexual who corresponded with influential gender-theorists/psychologists, Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1978), whose familiarity with the individual increased over time, from the beginning of her transition up until her full identification as a woman. The participant was a PhD student which greatly influenced her reflexivity and 'academic-speak' and other factors that equipped her with the tools to effectively criticize her position in a gender-based society. She however struggled with issues still relevant in present day trans experiences where she muses:

[In response to a questionnaire the researchers had sent her]

*What does it mean to be a woman or a man? It initially begins with where your head is, with your own identity, then internalizing, and reflecting those things that are consistent with that identity, and acting upon the world in ways that are consistent with those identifications. That's an ideal definition. Generally all the identifying and role playing is done for us, as we are socialized... the roles are very different. The masculine role in our culture [North American] is typified in isolation through competition, stoicism, aggression, etc... I am also more comfortable existing with expectations that our society makes of females than I am with male expectations... (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p.174; Emphasis mine).*

Therefore, by effectively dissecting the multiple layers she felt her own identity depended, on first as a man, then a woman and essentially transsexual, the participant enabled me to grasp the different realities one is expected to navigate to effectively be regarded, not simply as male or female, but as a certain 'type' of either identity. This is further complicated when one places this

in an African context, where our evolving cultural standards and identities play a tremendous role in the 'type' of men or women we present ourselves or are expected to be. A 'modern' man is expected to be liberal and simultaneously embody 'ideal' African masculinity; a woman should be 'modern' whilst taking on 'traditional' African 'roles' projected onto her Body<sup>50</sup>. These are the inspiring (and conflicting) views that influenced my themed interview questions.

I initially conducted a 'first-round' of interviews, each lasting an hour, with each participant. I outlined my research focus to allow the participants to feel part of the process. Issues around anonymity and 'what' the information collected would be used for in terms of my academic requirement, and the collaborative relationship with GDX were also discussed. The two participants I had previously engaged with were aware of my 'level' of familiarity with trans-issues, discourse and overall terminologies, whilst I brought the 'new' participant up to speed. I felt this was necessary to put the individuals at ease and also ensured that the narratives seamlessly 'flowed' from the very onset. The participants did not have to worry about my grasp of their processes (biological or other) nor be self-conscious of certain views or practices they held, that mainstream society classifies as 'deviant'.

My preceding research as well as personal (and genuine) interest I believe contributed immensely to the complex and rich material obtained from each interview 'phase'. After the first round of interviews, the hour-long 'follow-up' (at the next scheduled meeting) interviews consisted of questions<sup>51</sup>(see Appendix 'C, D, E') that emerged from an individual's first narrative that warranted further elaboration or roused more relevant questions. This resulted in richly multifaceted narratives, due to the vast differences stemming from generational attitudes

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<sup>50</sup> Here I refer loosely to issues of sexuality, motherhood and overall upholding notions of 'nationhood' attached to women's bodies across African contexts.

<sup>51</sup> From transcripts of the 'first-round' interviews.

and belief systems specific to each individual's experience. The unveiling of similarities across all three narratives also spoke volumes to societal processes upheld across varying cultures and contexts. I believe that using narrative interviewing contributed immensely to the overall richness of data as well as the enjoyment of the research process by both parties. During the narratives, I periodically made statements e.g. 'Uh-huh', 'Uhhmm', 'Ok' that proved useful in reassuring the individual of my understanding and continued interest in their story and of its 'relevance' to the heart of the open-ended question. Bernard (1994) cites this as the '*uh-huh probe*' which the anthropologist explains:

.... [can encourage one to]continue with a narrative by just making such affirmative noises...[as] the key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively--that is, stimulate an informant to produce more information, without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data....(1994, pp.215-17).

It is this richness of data acquired from each participant's narrative that compelled me to subsequently present the findings using extensive quotes within each theme and sub-theme. Whilst I acknowledge that presenting data in incredible detail is an unusual practice, I felt this practice adhered to the impetus of 'listening' to trans-individuals represent themselves and essentially 'create' grounded theory from these narratives. I also felt it prudent to fully exploit the opportunity for this small sample of trans-voices to be presented in an avenue that would contribute to a theoretical space however sparse. Given the small 'sample' of participants, I feel it is important to reiterate that I do not claim to 'speak' for or to FTM trans-communities. I instead simply integrate analysis and theoretical frameworks around similar issues with data obtained from the interviews, to present a 'portal' of sorts into the lived realities of specific

individuals who actively engage with gender constructions and ‘performances’ on cognizant and multifaceted levels.

Having previously discussed the silencing of discourse around ‘alternative’ states of being in the majority of African contexts (Ratele, 2001; Epprecht, 2004; Grame & Reid, 2005) to the issues of vulnerability and ‘detection’ within the trans community, it is important to place my ‘sample’ of participants within the appropriate context in light of the above issues. The mere fact that I gained access to trans individuals from a non-governmental organization (GDX) that upholds trans issues as a valid political entity already speaks volumes of the relationship that GDX members have with their own trans identities and more so with the general society. All three participants are GDX members and through advocacy regularly participate in conversations and other research avenues that constantly place them under a ‘reflexive’ lens i.e. willing to talk about their ‘transitional’ selves in whatever capacity was asked of them<sup>52</sup>. Therefore, I am not only interacting with FTM individuals who already exist in that ‘reflexive’ space, but also dealing with sophisticated individuals who are comfortable to be recognized, either as a ‘progress’(transitional<sup>53</sup> masculinity) or as a ‘final’ product (externally and internally aligned).

This state of ease or even concrete relationship with the self is by no means ‘representative’ of a trans community in an African context nor reflective of actual realities of living in the constant

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<sup>52</sup>It is important to note that while GDX believes in expanding Trans resources, visibility and overall discourse by inviting researchers and students to approach the NGO for collaborative opportunities. Before gaining ‘access’ the Director or board have to approve of the research focus/study to ensure that the research focus is first non-exploitative and secondly not driven by its own ‘agenda’. I also went through this ‘screening’ process and evidently passed! The organization also regularly holds ‘workshops’ (where members usually hold presentations) for companies, individuals and conferences seeking to educate and expand their own awareness of ‘Trans’ issues.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Transitional’ in this case refers to the fact that all three individuals acknowledge that there are certain physical limitations that they may never be able to ‘overcome’ (e.g. undergo phalloplasty) subsequently altering societal perceptions of their ‘maleness’.

fear of 'detection' with consequences as extreme as 'corrective rape'<sup>54</sup> or death<sup>55</sup>. The research participants having previously undergone numerous 'interview'/ research processes regularly explore their trans-related issues in such capacities, which undoubtedly contributed to the strong, self-reflective and very coherent discourse presented. This made it easier to immerse their narratives directly into an academic realm. It is this active involvement with GDX as well as the individual willingness to place their realities within a political space that positively enhanced the research process as well as the overall findings.

#### ❖ *Thematic Analysis.*

Thematic analysis was my preferred mode of analysis as it enabled me to create *grounded theory* which is most accurately described as "theory that is developed from the data, rather than the other way around" (<http://www.essortment.com/groundedtheory>; last accessed 10/04/08). Much of the same flexibility that my chosen methodology provides (as previously discussed), and the silences and gaps present within African trans-research is useful in bridging these gaps within African contexts. Thematic analysis allowed me to identify common threads of lived experiences emerging from the participants' narratives whilst remaining extremely vigilant of portraying the themes as essentialist. Given the intensity of the interview process and the detailed

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<sup>54</sup>This term is used to describe the act of men raping lesbian women in an attempt to show her that she is a woman and not a man. It's also believed to be linked to the notion that lesbians are attracted to women simply because they have never had vaginal sex with a man and therefore exposing them to sex, they will revert to being heterosexual. Although this is often carried out on butch/masculine or lesbian women, the threat still exists for Trans men who have not undergone phalloplasty (Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Keenan, 2006).

<sup>55</sup>Issues of violence against Transgender, lesbian, gay and other forms of 'alternative' states of being are common place within most African contexts, including South Africa (Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2001; Morgan & Wieringa, 2005; Keenan, 2006).

material obtained from the participants, a range of issues emerged directly from the narratives emanating from their initial transition journeys to their present-day identities as male. A large variety of possible themes therefore emerged from the experiences encountered in between the two stages. I therefore chose the themes according to their overall contribution towards addressing my research interest. I painstakingly went through individual interview transcripts and observed common (and notably contrasting) threads that emerged across all three narratives, essentially allowing the themes to emerge *directly* from the data. This process is further illustrated Aronson's (1994) article 'A pragmatic view of thematic analysis':

...from transcribed conversations patterns of experience can be identified (this can come from direct quotes or from paraphrasing common ideas)... the next step is to identify all data that relate to the already classified patterns. Themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985, p.60). Themes that emerge from the informants' stories are pieced together to form a comprehensive picture of their collective experience (1994, p.2).

In the light of the intensely rich and complex material obtained from the research participants, this mode of analysis proved the best way to organize the data to effectively undertake content analysis, where I attempted to illustrate and link the relationship between the participants' and the research question, to underlying societal processes influencing these realities. Aronson (1994) supports this process:

...once the themes have been collected and the literature has been studied, the researcher is ready to formulate theme statements to develop a story line. When the literature is interwoven with the findings, the story that the interviewer constructs is one that stands

with merit. A developed story line helps the reader to comprehend the process, understanding, and motivation of the interviewer (1994, pp.4-5)

❖ **Positionality:**

My positionality in terms of my research has been influenced in part by my 'outsider' status, not only in the South African context but also ideologically in my African context as well. I will discuss issues that arose during my previous year's research that often overlapped or converged into the current year's research process. My experience of living in a North American society for five years, in the city of Toronto that was heralded as a safe haven of LGBTQ communities exposed me to open communities of a sexually diverse society. This coupled with a government that recognized same-sex marriage (Canada was the fourth country in 2005) was indeed a far cry from my experience of Kenyan society. Given my ability to effectively navigate both societies and contexts, where my status as an 'insider' in one context often rendered me an 'outsider' in the reverse context, it became increasingly difficult to simultaneously occupy both positions in either context. This balancing act was influential in expanding my interest in studying the silencing of 'Others' within my own society, given the often glaring differences in levels of discourse and tolerance I encountered within the two social contexts.

Interestingly, it is this exposure to an open Western society that I believe, contributed to the way the South African trans-community<sup>56</sup> responded to me in my initial encounter during the previous year's research process. When the trans-community was initially confronted with my African identity i.e. coming from another African country, the initial assumption was often my

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<sup>56</sup> I am referring specifically to my experience at the *Transgender social* I attended on the 18/05/07 and the discussions I had with a number of transsexual individuals over the course of the night.

assumed homo/transphobia or my interest viewed as primarily voyeuristic. However, upon discovering my other Canadian 'roots', there was an almost instant acceptance and interest in my mindset (much like how locals interact with a tourist!). It is this interest or 'free pass' that I believe proved fruitful in my research process by perhaps eliminating the fear of judgment or expectation of being misunderstood. That is, individuals were more at ease interacting with me on social and research-based levels.

It would be unrealistic to ignore the fact that in spite of all the above factors that rendered me an 'insider', my gender identity automatically placed me as an 'outsider'. My identity both as a 'genetic' researcher and a heterosexual were factors treated with initial suspicion about my interests and intentions of my research. In fact, one of the popular questions I faced during the entire social was 'why' I was interested in a certain group's issues of which my own personal reality did not (and was unlikely to) interact? Why would I be interested in trans-research or trans-politics if I myself was not subjected to a form of oppression based on my gender (as a 'genetic' anyway) or sexual identity? However, upon explaining my positionality and inspiration derived from exposure to a tolerant society, my 'outsider' status was temporarily suspended. This was demonstrated in the ease with which I was immersed into frank discussions about Trans realities and overall social interactions with Trans lives.

Power relations were also an interesting dynamic in the construction of my positionality as all of my research respondents were interview 'professionals' having been interviewed countless times by other researchers, as GDX encourages and supports trans-friendly researchers and students into the community. It was therefore somewhat intimidating in terms of the interview process, hoping that my particular focus was interesting and stimulating enough without being offensive. However, with increased familiarity and socializing, especially before actual interviews and

introduction to my research process (e.g. friendly emails) this self-consciousness gradually subsided. This by no means implies that this year's research anxieties were inapplicable, although admittedly a rapport was already established with two of the previous year's participants.

Engaging with the 'new' participant was just as nerve-wracking. After all, I never had the opportunity to meet let alone interact with Tony, and I found my 'old' anxieties creeping in. Would I offend him if I reassured or 'proved' to him my 'insider' status within GDX? Would my over-eagerness to put him at ease on a personal and research level ultimately blur the imaginary boundaries between us and compromise the research? Fortunately, my interactions with Tony were fruitful, guided by his genuine interest in my research project and a willingness to share his life experiences. I also debriefed him on my previous research process and the fact that the other participants were *familiar acquaintances*.

Another feeling I had to quell was my intense awareness that I was exploring issues that were rarely discussed let alone researched, as I believed myself inadequate in pursuing research with sparse 'safety-nets'. The pressure of creating new knowledge based on an often misrepresented marginalized community was intense. I however managed to overcome this particular anxiety by remembering (and often citing) that the reality was/is whatever my research 'uncovered' pertains only to the experiences of the voices that spoke and not the silent ones. Looking back, I believe that one of the main reasons behind the 'anxiety' that stems from knowledge production and research processes originates from the colonizing of patriarchal definitions/conceptions around research that makes using 'alternative' theoretical frameworks (e.g. feminist epistemologies) or even research sites both challenging and 'bizarre'.

❖ *Ethics:*

The ethics of my research process also deserve consideration as I was working with members of a community that is frequently exploited. Despite my initial intimidation over my respondents' familiarity with interviews, I was still in control of how I would use their responses. It is always important to remember that as researchers, the potential of our work gaining ground and accessibility over a variety of locations and contexts (especially with the rise of the Internet as a research space), is much higher than our 'informants' (especially marginalized) ability to transverse similar locations just as well. Therefore even in my immense care of getting to know my participants a power dynamic still exists, as I am going to use their experiences to fulfill a certain goal, i.e. create a Master's degree. Their gains, on the other hand, lay in the knowledge that they had told their story (as many times before) which would hopefully benefit other Trans identified individuals or communities searching for identities or a community to belong to<sup>57</sup>.

Another concern lay in setting up of 'boundaries' as the more time I spent with the participants, the more I tried to distance myself from my 'researcher' stance, adopting one of a trans-activist who happened to need assistance fulfilling an academic requirement. At no time was my friendliness ever an 'act', nor did I feign affection or social interaction with anyone. I did, however find myself *torn* between hoping my familiarity would enhance my research process/findings and being a friend with the reality of a research project looming in the background. The question often at the forefront of my mind was '*could* I have my cake and eat it too?' Was there a middle ground I could safely occupy? Could I be a 'researcher' and a friend simultaneously? I was able to reach a form of compromise between my friendships and research.

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<sup>57</sup>This was the overall consensus that all of my respondents attested to when I unofficially asked why they agreed to participate in my research and countless others before me.

When the tape recorder was 'on' I would distinguish that time as 'research', and once the interview was over, I would switch the machine off and inform Chuck, Larry or Tony that anything we would discuss (or gossip about) henceforth was strictly 'off the record'. This process generated a lot of amusement, but was nevertheless reassuring and appreciated.

Fonow and Cook (1991) speak about ways emotional connection may not necessarily hinder but enhance one's research, as:

Many feminist scholars connect emotional intimacy between [female] respondents to the notion of reciprocity between the researcher and researched.... One of these benefits is the higher quality of information possible as a result of mutual disclosure.... This willingness to admit to the therapeutic value of participation in the research process is somewhat novel and may represent a unique contribution of feminist epistemology (1991, p.10).

It is possible that researchers' (and my own) fears of emotional connection with their informants may actually stem from a dominance of patriarchal discourse in mainstream research that demands a distance between the two. But if feminist research is serious about changing this domination, what better way than to implement research that places greater emphasis on genuine *interactions* between participants and researchers, and not strictly focused on 'obtaining' information that can actually lead to richer research findings?

The apparent blurring of boundaries between myself and the participants presented a need for sensitivity to the acute vulnerability of the participants' position, in terms of the information they were required to essentially regurgitate and place in an academic context. I personally often wondered if I could do the same i.e. relieve a traumatic experience and retell it to a stranger of

sorts who would benefit from it. I was often worried of the effect this practice would have on the participants, but the constant reassurances and the forthrightness of my research goals eased my discomfort. Another concern was finding ways to ensure that my position (researcher or otherwise) was not patronizing i.e. my 'eagerness' to paint myself as 'enlightened' and an 'insider' would make all those involved uncomfortable. This would in turn compromise the very state of ease central to narrative interviewing, affecting the knowledge produced. I decided to simply 'be myself', the 'me' who was genuinely interested in exploring Trans issues and happened to generate this interest into fulfilling an academic requirement.

#### ❖ *Challenges and Limitations.*

One of the limitations of my methods includes the extreme reliance of my research findings on respondents' narratives of their experiences, where often what we say and what we actually do varies tremendously. Jennifer Mason in her book *Qualitative researching* cautions "[do] not let the use of terms like ... 'real life events' allow you to forget that every narrative or representation is a *version* rather than an objective and neutral description..."(1996, p.130; Italics in original).

While I have no reason to believe that my respondents were untruthful or misleading, it is a methodological concern to rely exclusively on participants' assumed objective 'truth' especially when knowledge is created from these narratives. However, given my particular focus on an unquantifiable entity i.e. gender and performativity, there is little choice but to base my findings on their responses, as I am not seeking 'representative' views of transsexuals, but about 'transitioning masculinities' from particular trans individuals.

A limitation to my research process lay in questioning the use of two research methods that may have enhanced my overall research process: participant observation. As previously discussed, the fear of 'detection' amongst trans individuals is an understandable reality not to mention that blending in with 'genetics' is a crucial element of 'passing' within trans reality, with participant observation placing this success at risk. Although all three informants were 'out' to their families and close friends, their need for privacy and overall desire to go 'stealth' in various work, home even social circles was one that needed to be deeply respected. Therefore, having a stranger following them around, watching their every move undoubtedly raised questions that might be difficult to ignore or even lie about. I therefore felt it was unnecessary not to place the individuals in the uncomfortable position of asking whether I could 'observe' them in their personal worlds, as the desire to go 'stealth' in particular contexts had already surfaced within the interview process.

This chapter illustrates the often complex and yet seldom discussed issues often taking centre stage when undertaking research within 'marginalized' communities and what it 'means' for one whose own reality does not necessarily match the realities of those being 'researched'. The careful deliberations on methodological choice best suited for sensitive data and concerns over drawing 'boundaries' is a draining but necessary process if one is indeed serious about creating knowledge that directly challenges academic and societal norms. The chapter aims to illustrate the necessity of amalgamating two theoretical frameworks that seemingly work in opposing poles in order to affect academic discourse i.e. feminism and men's studies. After all, my own position which straddled both schools of thought albeit with difficulty was one I believed richly contributed to an intensely reflective research process, and an overall sense of accomplishment

by finding effective compromise and similarities between the two theories, with the research findings all the better for it.

University of Cape Town

## *Chapter IV.*

### *PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS.*

This research was aimed at exploring the gendered Performativities of 'transitional' masculinities within a female-to-male trans-sexual context, located within a South African space. This chapter aims to present a number of issues that emerged from the wealth of material obtained from the participants' narratives that covered a range of issues. These include their initial transition journeys to the conceptualization of their present-day identities as male, to the constant and often intense negotiation of prescribed embodiments of 'manhood' within their separate contexts. A large variety of possible themes therefore emerged from this expanse of issues from which I chose the following themes by their overall contribution towards addressing my research interest. In light of the rich material obtained from the research process, I simply allowed the narratives to 'speak' and observed common threads emerging across all three narratives, essentially allowing the themes to emerge *directly* from the data.

The first theme *Discernment of 'Difference'* explores the commencement of the participants' individual transition journeys by tracing the feelings of 'distress' each felt within their initial gendered 'female' physical bodies. It is this 'distress' felt separately by each man that indicated a form of disconnect between the 'internal' and external Self. This theme deals with the effects of early socialization and sex-segregation of gender 'roles' and activities that stratify society neatly into a binary system of gender. This in turn addresses the theoretical aspects of the research question, as it is this gender-segregation that leads to the 'performance' of the associated characteristics of the gender category one is assigned. The following theme *Recognition and*

form of disconnect between the 'internal' and external Self. This theme deals with the effects of early socialization and sex-segregation of gender 'roles' and activities that stratify society neatly into a binary system of gender. This in turn addresses the theoretical aspects of the research question, as it is this gender-segregation that leads to the 'performance' of the associated characteristics of the gender category one is assigned. The following theme *Recognition and Reciprocation* deals directly with issues of 'Public' masculinity and the multiple obstacles arising from attempts to engage with idealized masculinities. The former refers to the initial aspirations of the participants to fully embody culturally idealized notions of masculinity within their separate contexts. By subscribing to cultural representations and societal 'cues' around 'real' masculinity, the trans-men found themselves internalizing these very notions whilst simultaneously undergoing intense anxieties of falling short of embodying these ideals, when 'recognition' was withdrawn/ denied by those they sought to emulate.

The subsequent theme *Alternative vs. Hegemonic Masculinity* deals directly with issues emerging from the previous theme that led to a discussion on 'personal' masculinity. Here the experiences of engaging cultural ideals of 'manhood' led to the creation of this 'alternate' version of masculinity. Upon realizing the futility of internalizing these ideals, the participants arrived at their own conceptualization of their 'transitional' masculinities, effectively challenging traditional patriarchal notions of 'maleness' and the institution of gender. A number of key sites contributed to the evolution such as the 'absence' of a penis and the possibility of creating one's gender identity independent of the physical Body. This 'alternative' version of masculinity led to the straddling of both idealized and personalized masculinity, where all three participants

this theme effectively tie in all the above themes, as this is the one site that directly challenged the immense gains each man had made within his own conceptualization of manhood. The theme also stimulated discussion of the centrality of heterosexual sex within gender and the inextricable ascription of power to the phallic body.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I deviated from the usual pattern of exploring qualitative research findings which often works with micro-slices of the participants' voices to assemble thematic discourses. Instead of this, I first present fairly large segments of data within each theme so as to ensure the participants' words remain within their contexts. This has allowed me to remain true to my research principle where I allowed the trans-participants to tell their own stories with little interference from the researcher. I am moving towards drawing conclusions that also emerge directly from the data, by revealing the constructed and performative nature of gender to uphold traditional patriarchal interests. This aspect of gender, I believe, is best revealed by those who within their own life journeys, have undergone various processes of internalizing these constructions of gender but also effectively altered the projected (physical, societal, emotional etc) expectations of one gender, to embody those of another gender identity (FTM transsexuals). I will present these conclusions that also emerged from the data and analysis in the subsequent chapter.

I. *Discernment of 'Difference'*

❖ *“I’m Not a Girl”: ‘Distress’ of girlhood.*

The salience of this theme to my overarching interest in trans-men’s representations of their masculinity is rooted in theories which explore the socially constructed synchronicities between the physical body and perceptions of that body as located within one of two genders as a critical site of socialization (Lorber, 1994). I am interested here in exploring how my interviewees represented the role these synchronicities played within their own bodies essentially gendered at birth as ‘girls’ and their gradual awareness of this recognition as misplaced. In exploring this theme, it is important to interrogate the processes through which gender as an organizing principle functions within the micro-social institutional spaces of daily living (families, early schooling, early peer networks). As early as 1978, Kessler and McKenna explain the fundamental concept of ‘gender attribution’ as:

...a complex, interactive process involving the person making the attribution and the person she/he is making the attribution about... the process results in the “obvious” fact of the other being either male or female. On the one hand, the other person presents her or himself in such a way to convey the proper cues to the person making the attribution (1978, p.6)

With this in mind, it is important to focus on how the process of ‘gender attribution’ comes into focus, from a typically naturalized process to becoming gendered, but one which forms a distinct site of meaning for Trans individuals; whose own sense of self with regard to their external gender does not align with societal recognitions around them. In this theme, I present material from all three interviewees which illustrates their engagement with personalized routes to discernment of the misrecognitions around them. The misrecognitions occurred via the gendered expectations wrapped into gender attributions they did not consent to. In the presentation of

interviewee material in this section, I have chosen to represent the discussion of their early engagement with the social significance of their bodies in fairly lengthy passages so as to retain the context of their words. I feel given the interviewees' discussion of their early engagement with the social significance of their bodies, an effort to represent their representation of a 'full story' (so to speak) is pivotal towards an understanding of the overarching focus of my research. I have also chosen to present critical material for this theme from all three interviewees before initiating my analysis.

Chuck: "I think my childhood was pretty unremarkable!! *If it was remarkable, it was probably just how I didn't, at that stage, differentiate between male and female.* I think it must be one of the few communities where as kids we did so much together, *so it never crossed my mind that I wanted to do anything about my body, I felt extremely male, but I didn't press any significance on it, because I thought the other girls were feeling exactly the same!* Well, there were still very much the boundaries; the *group [boys]* would not let you forget that you were a female, but it didn't bother them [cause] if you were playing 'hard' games, you were a 'tom-boy'. [P: *Did you ever feel that there were expectations, even in that 'open' culture, projected onto your 'female' body?*] Yes! Oh yes! I was supposed to behave like a nice little girl, you learn to bake cakes, or cook. [Community-wise] there was 'Scouts' and 'Girl Guides', *and as much as I wanted to, I couldn't do the 'Scouts'*, I had to be in the 'Girl Guides'. Ok I got away with a little of it, I was terribly spoilt at school, cause I was small and rather clever. I think the crunch came for me, at the age of 17 or 18 when I was going through a bit of trauma, which made me realize 'Hey! You may feel this way but you're not this

way and as masculine as you may want to portray yourself, you have to accept that you're not'."

Larry: "Well as far as I can remember back, I didn't feel comfortable with myself and all I knew is that I would rather be on the 'other' side, rather be with the boys. But I knew from an early stage that I wasn't a boy and that somehow I felt like I could never tell anybody this because it's wrong of me to feel like that. And every time I sort of wanted to be *myself*, I had to feel guilty or I was reprimanded. When I had to go to school, it was like a nightmare, 'cause *we were sort of immediately split into [gender]*...and you know, "the girls you must to learn to knit, the boys you can play with clay". I just wanted to play with the clay!! *But I was not allowed to do that*. There was always this kind of 'set-up' rules that girls are *supposed to be like this*, boys are *supposed to be like that*, in everything [*like*] sports or the games that we played or anything...*it was always imposed on you, it was never a choice*".

Tony: "I would say from the age of 6 years, I already knew that there is a 'male' and a 'female', I knew that I was in a female body and I didn't like to identify as one. If we were in the school they would say, 'the boys queue here and girls queue there' then you have the understanding of 'ok, girls are those with dresses, or with boobs'. I *knew* that there was a difference between a male and a female; *you know the bodies and the roles*. When I was a child, I didn't really consider myself as a Trans person, or as someone different...just growing up normally and that was it. They [parents] were aware of my behavior they never gave it attention, but coming to 14 years, they were like 'Hey! You must know that you will have to

female, enabled Chuck to sharply gain perspective of the social and gender realities of his gendered physical body.

Another different orientation process in uncovering this 'distress' is seen in Larry's account of his own interaction with the conflicting feeling. He spoke of proscription when describing ("*it's wrong of me to feel like [a boy] and every time I sort of wanted to be myself, I had to feel guilty or I was reprimanded*") and prescription where ("*there was always this kind of 'set-up' rules that girls are **supposed** to be like this*"). Larry's own journey appeared to follow the more conventional route, where his internal self from the very beginning, was at odds with his external embodiment. This was further enhanced by his intense realization of societal mandates in place that restricted his desire to express his masculinity. More importantly, it was these restrictions that made him further and fully aware of the innate consequences of 'transgressing' from the expectations meted onto his gendered physical body.

Tony's orientation, however, took on an intensely complex and multifaceted orientation towards this 'distress' as well as general conceptualizations of gender with regard to the assumed alignment between one's external 'signifiers' and internal self. The participant accepted that he was indeed in a female body and although "*that was reality...I didn't take it like that*", but instead, whenever his parents attempted to remind him of the apparent contradiction his male identity would occupy, once his physical body began to undergo female physiological process, Tony staunchly maintained that he was "*a guy, can't you see that?!!*" I will discuss Tony's unique position/relationship to his own body and societal conventions around gender identity in subsequent sections. However, it becomes increasingly clear that all three participants' relationship and personal orientation towards the 'distress' of the misalignment between the

internal and external self speaks volumes into the specific societal practices/beliefs that uphold patriarchal beliefs on gender, the physical body and gender identity.

It is this discernment of the disconnect between their 'internal' self and external body that acted as an indicator of all three participants' initial conceptualization/engagement with 'Masculinity'. The *desire* for the exact opposite body served as a precise 'cue' into the role that societal expectations projected onto the biological body played in the assumption that one's 'signifiers' automatically identify one's gender 'identity' (Lorber, 1993).

The participants' scrutiny of their individual orientations towards the disconnect with their physiological bodies signaled the beginning of their own understanding of their bodies as *genetic*; entities that were to serve as static definitions of essentially 'who' they were, what societal 'roles' they were to partake, and how others would relate to them to confirm these identities. Larry ("*we were sort of immediately split into [gender]*") and Tony ("*the boys queue here and girls queue there*") both attributed their initial notions of 'gender' or rather the 'difference' between 'being' male and 'being' female to their experience of gender segregation in their various school environments. Chuck's awareness stemmed from being forced to identify with the 'Girl Guides' and not the 'Scouts' which he felt more predisposed to join given his internal feeling of being 'masculine'. One can take Chuck's experience of being denied involvement with the 'Scouts', even though he was a noted 'tom-boy', as an example of how the notion of 'gender' masquerades as an identity 'process', but instead, is in place to create distinctions between the sexes based on biological 'differences' which uphold patriarchal ideals within society. If Chuck had identified with the 'Scouts' even whilst his external 'signifiers' identified him as female, the transgression of 'boundaries' would have undoubtedly disrupted the 'natural' order of the 'gender identity' system.

Barry Thorne's article 'Girls and boys together...but mostly apart: Gender arrangements in elementary schools' explains how "throughout the years of elementary school, children's friendships and casual encounters are strongly separated by sex. Sex segregation among children, which starts in preschool and is well established by middle childhood ...is immediately visible in elementary school settings" (Thorne,1992, p.108). Chuck's experience recalled this idea, but as the site of politicized difference, rather than as any route into "typicality." Larry and Tony also represented experiences in which symbolic gender 'meanings' were embedded into activities, with the former barred from playing with clay and Tony queuing on the girls' 'side' and not the boys where he felt more comfortable. From Larry's expectation of playing with dolls instead of clay, to Tony's awareness that it was only girls' who wore dresses, and Chuck being labeled as a 'tom-boy' due to the fact that he enjoyed 'rough-play' whilst in a female body, the genesis of gender 'roles', determined by one's external 'signifiers'/physiology (which continue to manifest themselves in adulthood) can be noted.

Being more aware of the societal 'category' one is *expected* to occupy, coupled with specific 'roles' and 'performances' enacted further guarantees a permanent position within the gender category one is assigned. However, Tony's adamant disbelief that his body would undergo 'female' biological processes such as menstruation and breast development ("*but I'm a guy!*"), is indicative both of the level of symbolism attached to the 'biological' body (linked to expectations of the 'internal' self) and of his fundamental resistance to this 'inevitability.'" All three interviewees' accounts show how 'others' expectations projected onto their gendered bodies catapulted them into their respective transition journeys across an apparently unchangeable dichotomy.

❖ *“You’re not butch”: Body as a changeable entity.*

Given the power of the early expectations around each interviewee that their physical bodies would merge seamlessly into the gendered expectations of the “girlhood” ascribed to them, it is critical to explore not only the moments at which the interviewees discerned the force of these expectations but the varying ways each participant reached the unifying realization that they could alter/discard the ‘signifiers’ that oppressed them, taking on those they desired. Once again, I have chosen to present their material in large segments, to preserve the integrity of their narratives.

Chuck: “ I took it for granted that I was a *very, very butch lesbian*<sup>59</sup>, and I wasn’t ‘male’ as such, *I would have liked to have the body; but I didn’t know you could change* .[I thought] *you had to stick with what you had and make the best of it.* And I went through many years like that. When I really realized that you *could* change this thing, I had met a group of Transvestites, and they had a group called ‘Phoenix’, and I went along because I was a cross-dresser too. And it was at one of these groups that they mentioned, because I was cross-dressing from Female to Male obviously, so we...I figured that I was a butch lesbian, and also a cross-dresser from female to male...I discovered that ‘you’re not butch; you are what these [the group] people are calling a ‘Transsexual’. *You want to change your body and that makes you a Transsexual, you are now no longer a homosexual*’. And it took a hell of a lot for me to...to grasp this thing, and so for me it became important to

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<sup>59</sup>A person who identifies themselves as ‘masculine’, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label (Green & Peterson, 2006, p2).

me to have a sex change operation. I started out with a hysterectomy, I went on hormones, I was 'presenting' as a male, and everybody saw that. *I had my reproductive organs removed [because] to me that was the essence of being a female.* As long as I had reproductive organs, it meant that I was [female] and that I couldn't handle and that was my first step. The sooner I could get rid of them, the better for me, and I went for that in 1992 and immediately I went on to the testosterone [therapy]. Well it's taken, what, 16 years, but I'm finally having the mastectomy [smiles]...."

Larry: "I was hoping that Christianity or my belief would sort of 'calm' these longings inside of me: on the one hand, I wanted to be 'relieved' of this and on the other hand, I didn't want that because that didn't represent the gender that I would like or that I perceived myself as. *And I thought that I must be a [butch] lesbian and that most lesbians must feel like they wanted to be men.* It's only later that I realised that's not true, [because] when I get mistaken for a man I'm delighted; whereas, most lesbians [would] get very offended by it. [So] I thought 'maybe I'm just a different type of lesbian' [because] *you don't know about Trans, you've no knowledge of it.* [P: *And when you heard about 'Transsexualism'?*] *It was a big relief to actually have a term to describe you, rather than to think of yourself as just different and weird.* In 2004, I heard about the support group at Triangle Project and I heard terms like 'Transgender,' 'Transsexual,' 'Female-to-Male,' and I started research[ing] on the Internet. And [at] a church conference, I met the first Female-to-Male Transsexual [and] bought a book that he has written, and

when I read the book...I wanted to cry! *It [was] like: 'Wow, I know who I am now'. [Transition process] I [had] started some of the processes, even before I knew I was Trans, about fourteen years ago. At that stage I didn't think, 'oh well I'm Trans and I want to transition to a man' although it was always there in the back of my mind, but I didn't think it was possible so I just thought, 'I don't want these breasts, and if I can be rid of them I want them off'...they were always in my way and I never felt as free. I went for a hysterectomy as well, in that time, because another major thing for me [was] doing sport and having to cope with the menstrual cycle all the time. So [by the time] I started 'transitioning', it [was] basically hormones. I went for an 'ovaryrectomy' after I started hormones. [P: Do you have to do testosterone every day?] I do it, once every two weeks."*

Tony: <sup>60</sup> "I felt normal, I felt natural, I saw myself as a man and that's it! *There was a point whereby I would say 'I'm a lesbian' because of my behavior, but it really didn't fit. Because [identifying] as lesbian means you are a woman who was very happy with being a woman, but I wasn't happy being a woman; I wanted to identify as a man. [Transition process] there was a TV programme interviewing a Trans person, and they were like 'so you were born female and now you are a man?' and I was like [mimes shocked expression] 'what?!!! Is this possible? I mean this programme might be joking....so I went to OUT<sup>60</sup> and they kinda like explained to me, Ah! I was very happy!! I was very happy! Personally, it [had] a huge impact, because of as I was growing up, I was not aware of the Transgender thing, but immediately I got the word that this thing existed, I started to put in much more*

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<sup>60</sup>An non-profit organization dealing with LGBTI issues based in Pretoria

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<sup>60</sup>An non-profit organization dealing with LGBTI issues based in Pretoria

*effort in Transgender things. Now I started to be very masculine, so since I find out about the Transgender things, I started doing everything like...fully.*

Everything as a male; I went to the male toilets, I used to go to the female toilet, but because now I know that I am a man, I have to the right toilet, you know?

When I was identifying as a butch lesbian before, I was still looking at myself as a male, I was dominating on male, but since I [found out] I was a man I never identified as a lesbian [again], *I scratched out the word 'lesbian' and put 'Man' so that's how it changed.* I mean if there was no importance, then I wouldn't take the 'T'. But because of there is a necessity for me to take the T so that the way of thinking, it is very different, there is much difference between male and female. I mean male and female body structure is different, and a female body, it is designed for females, *so I want mine to be designed like a male- because I am a man.*"

The unifying feature within all three narratives lies in each participant's realization that not only were their 'discontent' feelings valid, but more importantly, there existed an actual possibility of undergoing a *literal* physical transformation. This is represented as a process that would essentially alter their 'signifiers' to that of their desired gender, finally aligning their external and 'internal' selves, taking on societal gender- specific expectations they were more comfortable 'performing'. A common thread that runs across all three men's narratives is seen in their various discussions of their attribution of the misaligned feelings to being 'butch lesbian'. Chuck describes how "*I took it for granted that I was a very, very butch lesbian*<sup>61</sup> *and I wasn't*

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<sup>61</sup> A person who identifies themselves as 'masculine', whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. 'Butch' is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label (Green & Peterson, 2006, p.2).

*'male' as such*" and Larry's conviction that *"I thought that I must be a [butch] lesbian and that most lesbians must feel like they wanted to be men"*, with Tony's account of *"when I was identifying as a butch lesbian before, I was still looking at myself as a male"*.

All three revelations unveil crucial if not telling assumptions or links between 'femininity' and 'lesbianism', where all three men acted as active reflections of societal and patriarchal ideals of 'femininity' which in this case refers to societal and popular culture stereotypical representations of what 'real' femininity embodies.<sup>62</sup> Each trans-man attributed his 'masculine' feelings and tendencies experienced whilst still in female bodies, as evidence of being 'butch lesbian' in light of the silencing around transsexualism within their specific contexts. It is this identification as 'lesbian' that fashions part of a typical transition for all three men into 'transitional' masculinity, invariably occupying an important space. Where this initial identification potentially sets up alliances with/within the LGBTI<sup>63</sup> community, rejections also arise be they political, social, and even personal ones within this same community. Holly Devor (1997) in her research with FTMs in the United States found that:

*...Participants who lived part of their lives as lesbian women were thus often in the position of having been drawn to lesbian identities on the basis of older definitions of lesbians as women who wanted to be men....* When participants tried to measure themselves against the more woman-centered images promulgated by lesbian-feminists they found themselves lacking ... when [they] compared themselves to both generalized and specific lesbian others, they were struck more by the contrasts than by the

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<sup>62</sup>Here, I am referring to popular depictions of 'girly' women inclined to the color pink, who wear frilly dresses and stiletto heels, worry excessively about their makeup and regularly remove all traces of natural body hair. Therefore in sharp contrast, 'lesbians' perhaps as a punitive measure, are often depicted as man-hating women who secretly have 'penis-envy' and refuse to shave their legs or armpits.

<sup>63</sup>A common abbreviation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex community (Green & Peterson, 2006, p.6).

previously discussed mutual exclusivity of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' embodiments. However, the television programme and the organization acted as effective discovery 'sites' for Tony to research and understand transsexualism, which he in turn responded to by simply inverting society's policing 'gaze', claiming a 'masculine' identity in spite of his female 'signifiers. By fully embracing and attaching *male significance* to his 'unaltered' signifiers, Tony simply "*scratched out the word 'lesbian' and put 'Man' [and] that's [the only thing that] changed*".

Therefore, even in light of the conservative Christian background (which essentially frowns on 'homosexuality') the participants share, they were all invariably convinced of the permanence and "naturalness" of their 'femaleness'. All three men initially identified themselves as 'butch lesbian' in their attempts to successfully subscribe an identity to their misaligned feelings, which as we have explored, further illustrates the political and discursive context around societal ideals of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. This served to attribute 'masculine' feelings and tendencies encased in a female body as a clear (rather assumed) indication of a lesbian identity. Such is the level of "naturalness" that gender as a societal category operates, that it is often unfathomable to conceptualize a reality separate from the characteristic binary system. The longevity of the concept is aided by the notion's filtration down generations, aided by individuals 'policing' each other to ensure conformity to prescribed definitions. By initially identifying as 'butch lesbians', all three participants continually operated within the binary system and ensured that the enactment of their 'roles' remained synonymous with their external 'signifiers' i.e. 'femaleness'= 'femininity'= 'female' gender identity (Lorber,1993). As this theory is largely modeled on heteronormative assumptions, the notion of 'transgression' by attributing (and

merely possessing) masculine feelings within a female body as a lesbian identity is virtually unavoidable.

Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's realization of their 'trans' status enabled them to challenge notions of genitalia's 'inextricable' link to one's gender identity, as all the participants either discarded their key 'signifiers' or simply supplemented them, to effectively transition into their desired gender. Where Chuck's and Larry's immediate response involved removing organs they attributed to 'femininity', Tony's own transition appeared to bear more 'cerebral' significance. Upon discovering his Trans status, Tony began to simply *think* and regard himself and his masculine feelings as indicative of his 'maleness'. He succinctly described how "*I started to be very masculine, [and] since I find out about the Transgender things, I started doing everything like fully*".

It becomes important to examine the underlying processes at work behind the participants' transitions, with relevance to how the *significance* attached to external 'signifiers' essentially 'maps' out different ways individuals relate to one another via assumptions linked to sex categories. This idea is seen in the first steps Chuck and Larry took to physically discard these 'signifiers' (albeit initially for different reasons) with Tony choosing to simply reject the 'female' significance projected onto his external body, and portraying and relating to himself as he saw fit. Chuck's immediate response to his 'newly-discovered' Trans status was to have his 'feminine' reproductive organs removed as to him "*that was the essence of being a female. As long as I had reproductive organs, it meant that I was [female]*". Larry on the other hand, initially removed his breasts and cervix as he felt undergoing feminine bodily processes detracted from his sporting activities. One can hardly ignore the enhancement to his overall understanding of Transsexualism (once he encountered the notion). Having already undergone

certain surgical procedures, he was perhaps in a better position to 'wrap his head' around the idea of 'altering' his body, having previously rejected certain aspects of it.

I find Tony's case to be particularly illuminating of the central role that 'signifiers' play in attributing gender identity to individuals as his body remains 'unaltered', and yet he still strongly relates to his 'signifiers' as male ("*so I have to go to the male toilets, because I identify as a male. I used to go to the female toilet, but because now I know that I am a man, I have to go the right toilet*"). 'Transsexualism' provided the participant with an 'explanation', rather a 'way out' of the presumed significance attached to his 'signifiers'. Where previously, his identity as a male was challenged by attributing 'female' characteristics to his 'woman' physical features, 'transsexualism' afforded him the opportunity to reject characteristics attributed to 'femininity', even whilst still residing in the body he was born into.

I conclude this section by pointing out my overall position/relationship to the research and issues addressed within this specific sub-theme I do not intend to present 'trans-sexualism' or other Trans related identities as a form of 'escapism', nor do I subscribe to traditionally pathologized definitions of Trans issues as evidence of 'disorders'<sup>64</sup>. In this theme, I have attempted to illustrate the extent to which gender as a social construct fails to accurately represent human 'identity' by basing 'difference' on biological factors, essentially limiting the capacity for variety. Raine Dozier in her article *'Beards, Beasts and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World'* supports this stating:

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<sup>64</sup>Transsexualism and other Trans identities were officially included in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III) in 1980 associated with the American Psychiatric Association. Further editions of the DSM-IV cite Trans identities as 'Gender Identity Disorder'.

The salience of this theme to my research interest in trans-men representations of their masculinity is rooted in theories which explore how males within society often (and constantly) assess, scrutinize and essentially ‘test’ each other’s manhood in the quest to embody cultural, political and social ‘ideals’ of masculinity upheld within their contextual society. ‘Masculinities’ theorist explains:

...I view masculinity as a constantly changing collection of meanings that we construct through our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with our world....Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness; it is created in culture. Manhood means different things at different times to different people (Kimmel, 1994).

In this theme, I present material that explores the ways the interviewees presented and related to notions of masculine ‘ideals’ within their own contexts, as well as observe how other males in turn responded and related to their ‘performances’. I feel that by observing what the participants felt was *central* to their presentation of ‘maleness’ and using genetic males reactions to them as ‘gauges’ of success is inextricably linked to how men<sup>66</sup> within society categorize and relate to each other (Kimmel, 1994). I will also present the converse reality of the ‘reactions’ of culturally hegemonic males, by studying the ways they and the participants themselves reject their attempts at embodying cultural ‘ideals’ of maleness, and how each trans man arrived at his own form of identity in light of these rejections.

❖ *“One of the guys”*: ‘Public’ Masculinity.

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<sup>66</sup>Culturally hegemonic males or others.

The process of presenting and being related to as the gender for which one possesses the externally associated 'signifiers' relies on a host of processes, from 'reciprocation' and 'recognition' to a form of 'dance' that we all participate in in our everyday interactions. It is here one begins to realize that the "stylized repetition of acts" of which Butler (1990) speaks is critical to the understanding of trans' success in 'passing'. It is important to note that the 'performance' of 'masculinity' or 'femininity' is often centralized on the process of 'recognition' and 'reciprocation'. This concept is more complex when one examines the FTM transsexual perspective, where in order to be regarded and related to as the desired gender, it is simply not enough to 'possess' the external 'signifiers' and enact societal 'cues' associated with culturally valid masculinity, but to avoid any skepticism from others about one's masculinity. This in turn, places other's recognition in heightened relationship to the construction of masculinity (as all masculinities are homosocially constructed) which has powerful implications for the *versions* of masculinity which can be aimed for.

Having already discussed the 'discernment' processes each participant underwent in relation to their biological bodies as changeable entities, I will now endeavor to illustrate through specific accounts from all three interviewees, how the conceptualization of their own 'masculinities' was undertaken as this process involved the 'recognition'/affirmation of 'others'. Robert Connell is considered as one of the authoritative voices in the study of masculinities, with his pivotal work *Masculinities* (1995) where the author is most widely known for the influential concept of 'Hegemonic Masculinity' which essentially changed discourse around the realities of 'manhood'. This 'version' of masculinity was described not only as the most dominant form of 'maleness', but the gauge in which all 'Other' types of men were measured up against (Connell, 1995, p.76). By presenting four different 'types' of masculinities (Hegemonic, Marginalized, Complicit and

Subordinated), Connell presents an overall understanding of the *stratified* nature of power functioning within the 'masculinities' structure. Kimmel (1994) further elaborates on this form of masculinity, when he describes:

...all masculinities are not created equal...one definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated.... [T]he hegemonic definition of manhood is a man *in* power, a man *with* power, and a man *of* power. We equate manhood with being strong, successful, capable...in control. The very definitions of manhood we have developed....maintain the power that some men have over other men... (1994, p.125; Italics in original).

I will present the participants' accounts concurrently before presenting my analysis in order to provide a clearer view of the similar processes the trans-individuals underwent in order to bring this conceptualization essentially to life by studying the complex and multifaceted layers in which contexts influenced all forms of 'hegemonic masculinity' in the men's lives.

Chuck: *'My friends were mainly male, heterosexual males...we drank together and we watched the rugby and cricket together and we took our women out in the group. Thanks to my father, I could speak their language...the rugby, soccer, cricket language! It never crossed their minds because I was doing everything they were doing. That was when it was very new for me, so I found that I ended up being the 'last one to finish the bottle. I think initially I probably did, to sort of overcompensate because I wanted to be 'one of the guys' so I had talk a little bit louder... [P: What do you think the old group's reactions would have been if they had found out your Trans status?] [Laughs] I have no idea and I don't even want to think about it! These days, apart from GDX, I don't have a social circle. And now*

I don't drink, and I don't feel I need it. I think that says a lot, cause it says, 'yeah, I wasn't comfortable with who I was and I needed... the 'oblivion' sort of, to forget the fact that 'you're not quite male' so in order to be one, you sort of get yourself all drunk.'

Larry: "What's nice for me is *to communicate or to relate to other males, even if I don't know them*. Like you walk into a pub or in a cloakroom and they make a joke, and somebody says something and you jab back!! You know that kind of thing....that kind of brotherhood. [In 'male' spaces] I can just be the man I am, I don't have to prove anything. But on the other hand, sometimes I feel a bit like a woman, now if I'm surrounded by a whole lot of men, most of them are bigger than me [and] in the beginning it's like 'Gee ok; he's longer than me, but most guys are longer and bigger, so I felt like, 'I'm really a tall, wimpy guy!' [laughs]...In the beginning I think [that] made me a little bit uncomfortable, but I think with age goes on, I think I'm starting to relax more. Now it's like 'oh well! There's 'all kinds' and I'm just one of the many!!'

Tony: "Because I was around guys and they didn't like make me feel that 'yeah, you're in a female body so you don't belong with us', they didn't make me feel like that. [Once] we were in a group of five, and we told ourselves, 'we are going to get ourselves girlfriends' [laughs] you know in a silly way!! And as we are passing by, we find this chick playing outside, and all of us wanted to talk to the chick. We said 'ok fine decide who you want to talk to' and the girl picked me! So she was interested in me, and it was nice and fun for me! It was something like it felt

it was the right thing to do at that time.... I don't know what was right with it, but it was for me to do."

It is clear that the process of 'recognition' and 'reciprocation' was central to each individual's notion of masculinity and more importantly, how each one was able to successfully 'pass' in their various journeys. From Chuck's engagement in typical male activity ("*we drank together and we watched the rugby and cricket together and we took our women out in the group*) to Larry's ("*you walk into a pub or in a cloakroom and they make a joke, and somebody says something and you jab back*) and Tony's ("*[Once] we were in a group of five, and we told ourselves, 'we are going to get ourselves girlfriends'*"). Here, one observes the participants' engagement with conservative versions of 'masculinity' from Chuck's initial involvement with sports and excessive alcohol, to Larry's notion of the 'brotherhood' of all men and Tony's interactions with competitive heterosexuality. All three participants illustrated the various ways each used their successful integration into 'male' spaces or inclusion into basic social interactions as a key area in their notion of 'public' masculinity. Kimmel (1994) explains how men "are under constant careful scrutiny of other men. Other men watch us, rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood...it is other men who evaluate the performance" (1994, p.128).

Chuck's performance of his own 'stealth'<sup>67</sup> masculinity illustrates this point, where his group of friends were a certain 'type' of men; the type of men who partook in the 'manly' activity of spectator Sports, treating their female companions to dinner as well as consuming copious amounts of alcohol. By partaking in these similar rituals, and apparently with as much 'gusto',

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<sup>67</sup>This term refers to when a person chooses to be secretive in the public sphere about their gender history, either after transitioning or while successfully passing. This is also referred to as 'going stealth' or 'living in stealth mode' (Green & Peterson, 2006, p.8)

Chuck represented himself as able to not only avoid 'detection' but also 'prove' himself to be the same 'type' of man as those in the group. It is interesting to note that his engagement with the overall notion of 'masculinity' was at a time when he was not yet 'settled' in his own identity as a man. Chuck was therefore extremely reliant on the acceptance of other masculinities' recognized as 'hegemonic' within his cultural space, as a successful indicator of his 'passing' and overall 'success' at performing male societal 'cues'. Chuck's report that he no longer consumed alcohol, and instead chose to interact mainly with other Trans men is indicative of how one's choice of 'displaying' one's male gender identity is in turn used to identify the 'type' of man one is.

This is mirrored in Larry's experience, where he too judged his 'manhood' in traditionally 'male spaces' e.g. bars. He suggested the recognition of his body as 'male' by other male strangers that he valued as his 'public' masculinity, where the apparent 'instant' feeling of 'brotherhood' contributed to his feeling that he did not need to 'prove' himself, although he was quick to admit that he still had doubts about this too. However, Larry was quick to point out that initially he used to "*feel like a woman*" as he measured his physical body/stature against those of the other culturally hegemonic males in such spaces. Interestingly, the common thread running between Chuck's and Larry's representations of 'public' masculinity centered initially on 'keeping up'/embodying (performing) their separate preconceived notions of what it 'took' to be recognized and related to as male/ 'masculine'. Chuck's notions, for example, involved being conversant with Sports and habitual inebriation ("*so in order to be one [man], you sort of get yourself all drunk*"), proved indicative of 'successful' masculinity. Larry's initial anxieties of his ability to be 'successfully' 'masculine' were gradually eradicated ("*but I think with age goes on, I think I'm starting to relax more*").

Another aspect of engaging in 'public masculinity' lies in the very discourse of fear that runs across all three narratives, with Chuck's and Larry's expressed more explicitly than Tony's. Where the fear of detection merged with those of attempts to embody cultural definitions of 'hegemony', it was a reality that although both men initially went 'stealth', both participants remained aware of the socio-political consequences of their gender identities and overall alternative states of being. I believe this fear could have been further exacerbated by the fact that both participants interacted with men who embodied culturally hegemonic standards, rendering any 'detection' more severe.

Masculinities theorists explain how the basic tenet of 'hegemonic masculinity' aside from being the embodiment of power, also includes an assumed heterosexuality attached fervently to homophobia. Connell (1995) explains: "gayness is... the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity..."(p.78) and Kimmel (1994) elaborates that "masculinity has been defined as the flight from women; the repudiation of femininity"(p.126). Whilst I am by no means suggesting nor referring to any of my participants' sexual orientation as homosexual<sup>68</sup>, one cannot help but wonder, in light of the above characteristics of 'hegemonic masculinity', is it any wonder that Chuck and Larry experienced fear, not only of detection but of the consequences of discovery by a group of 'hegemonic' men? And although Tony's fear did not necessarily stem from a similar sense of threat, his fear of the possibility of his male friends excluding him from their activities based on his female physical body, came across almost in the palpable relief in his description ("*they didn't, like, make me feel that 'yeah, you're in a female body so you don't belong with us'*"). Therefore in light of this 'fear', it is easier to get a sense of just how high the

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<sup>68</sup>I do intend this clarification to be taken as attaching a negative connotation to homosexuality, I simply mean as an indication of the link one may draw from the cited examples and my participants' sexual orientation, which they all cite as heterosexual.

stakes were in each man's engagement with 'public masculinity' as what each had to hide was very significant to the notion of 'masculinity' as a territorially guarded space.

Having essentially 'settled' into their own masculinities, recognition from culturally 'hegemonic' males was no longer central to Chuck's and Larry's conceptualization of their positions *within* the gender category. It appears that the initial overcompensation of both men's previous 'performances' were no longer central to the concept of what 'type' of man each was regarded in the 'public' sphere. Larry's *eventual* acceptance of his own 'stature' ("*now it's like, there's all kinds [and] I'm just one of the many!*") and Chuck's conscious decision to socialize with other trans-men paint a picture that perhaps being simply regarded and related to as one's desired gender is enough.

Tony's experience exposes a different aspect of 'public' masculinity, where although his own journey differed given that his body (at the time of the research process) remained 'unaltered', his overall relation to his body was one which assumed he was physically legible as "masculine". While the recognition from other culturally hegemonic males formed an important aspect of this relationship in spite of his female 'signifiers', Tony offered an interesting anecdote of where his masculinity was also recognized and affirmed by a member of the opposite sex (female in this respect). Pleck (1992) attributes this affirmation by women to an indication of how "men at each rank of masculinity compete with each other, with whatever resources they have [and] women are used as *symbols of success* in men's competitions with each other" (pp.23-4; Italics in original).

Hence, Tony's recognition, (much like Chuck's and Larry's) was affirmed both by culturally 'hegemonic' males (friends or strangers) and also by a heterosexual female's attraction to him. One begins to see the inherent power that heteronormativity holds within the 'recognition'

process in versions of masculinity, where patriarchal interests are upheld by the notion of heterosexuality which acts as a further extension of men's power over women's bodies (Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Kimmel & Messner, 1992, Connell, 2000). In this case, it is affirming to Tony's own masculinity to obtain the attraction of a heterosexual female, where her response to his performance as 'male' suggests the socially mandated/ sexual power he had over her and her gendered body. It is therefore important to note the various ways each participant's 'public' masculinity was enacted to conform to the various levels of the 'recognition' and 'reciprocation' process; essentially solidifying the trans-men's position within the stratified structures of masculinity, where men decide each other's 'manliness' and women in some cases, are used as further 'indicators' of 'manly' attributes.

❖ *'This is why I'm not...': 'Withdrawal' of 'recognition' and reciprocation.*

Having observed the different processes involved in recognition and reciprocation of 'public' masculinity, it is important to also observe the ways in which this 'affirming' process can also be withheld by the very forces that provide it. Pleck (1992) explains that it is important to understand that "patriarchy is a dual system, a system in which men oppress women, and in which *men oppress themselves and each other*" (p.25; Emphasis mine). In the following accounts, each participant describes their specific experiences within this 'affirming' process. Chuck's affirmation was withheld by intimate forces, namely his eldest brother who refused to acknowledge/respect his Trans status let alone his masculinity. Larry and Tony also described the different areas they found themselves 'wanting' in terms of their 'fully' embodying masculinity.

Chuck: . “My mother has come to sort of accept, my [youngest] brother and sister they both accept, but my eldest brother doesn’t. *He still insists on calling me by my birth name. I said to him ‘You can’t call somebody who’s got a beard that!’* You know before when we were teenagers, early twenties, he would crack a joke about it! He would say something like ‘I always thought I had a sister, but now I discover I’ve a brother!’ And then, seems like, the older he became, the more in denial he was, and he just won’t accept it; but it’s gotten to the point, we have very little contact with each other. [P: *Is his problem the ‘masculinity’ or the Transsexual thing?*]-It’s the Transsexual thing, as far as he is concerned, this is ‘all in the mind’.”

Larry: “I think my main issue is not money or job or status as such; my big issue is *body; because that was always my drawback.* And when you look at all male models, and these beautiful bodies then you look at your own, then it’s not so nice you know!! *It’s like ‘I wish I could look like that!!’* [P: *You described as a child, you got water paints and painted a moustache and beard on your face; was this symbol of masculinity to you at the time?*] Yes, yes definitely!! [P: *I notice that you’re not keeping one now; is this personal choice or do you no longer attribute it to masculinity?*] Yeah, definitely *not* personal choice!!! It’s just; I think genetically, I’m not a hairy person!! *I mean I shave but I haven’t got much facial hair, but its very disappointing, very disappointing...but I’ve made peace with it.*”

Tony: “Ok! *I don't have confidence!* I'm not saying that I'm not confident, or my esteem is very low, but it's not low, it's average, *it's not very high like a man is.*  
[P: *Do you think men have 'high' confidence?*]Yes!! For me, a guy would stand up and make a funny joke and everyone will laugh, but when a girl is supposed to do that, people might laugh or not laugh. I can't stand up and preach on something in front of people, in front of strangers...it's becoming hectic! I can't do it! Talking one-on-one is not a problem, but you know, in front of a crowd... even when I have to be very detailed and everyone should know what I'm talking about... that is difficult for me! So I'm hoping when I'm on 'T', I will be better, in confidence wise, then even though I will mumble, I will mumble in a way people won't notice, only me!”

Chuck, Larry and Tony encountered different 'affirming' processes that instilled confidence in their various abilities to 'pass' successfully and more importantly, in their overall 'male' status. The result is that their own conceptualizations of Self did not revolve *exclusively* around affirmation by other males as all three men at one point or another, struggled with issues of acceptance; from culturally hegemonic males to where their own 'version' of masculinity fit within these 'ideals'. The data presented shows a mix of issues around acceptance, self-acceptance and understandable doubts around one's attempted performance of 'hegemonic' masculinities. Eventually, the participants were able to conceptualize their own 'maleness' often independent of their previous concerns of escaping detection whilst simultaneously performing masculine 'ideals' within their specific contexts.

It is interesting, in all of these cases, to study the different representations/aspects of 'masculinity' the participants chose to illustrate the spaces in which they were denied or denied

themselves the 'embodiment' of their desired gender. Chuck's relationship with his elder brother is evidently strained to the extent where he reported having limited contact with the sibling; it is however, interesting to note the different ways his brother chose to 'withhold' his affirmation of Chuck's masculinity. The first instance involved using Chuck's 'feminine' name in spite of the fact that his younger brother possessed external 'signifiers' associated with maleness, i.e. a beard, and he was represented as regarding Chuck's trans-sexuality as pathological i.e. ("*as far as he is concerned, this is 'all in the mind'*"). Larry and Tony on the other hand, judged certain physical and personality traits, with the former comparing his physical body to images of male 'models', and the latter attributing his fear of public speaking to the 'deficiency' of testosterone in his system. Both participants uphold these traits as 'weaknesses' when comparing them to the overall concept/epitome of 'masculinity' or at the very least 'hegemonic' masculinity (Connell, 1995, 2000).

Where "hegemony refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life"(1995, p.77) both Trans men judged themselves by the culturally exalted ideal of what it 'takes' to be a man. Larry regarded his body<sup>69</sup> as a "*major drawback*" when comparing his physique to that of male 'models' in popular culture and bemoaned the fact that he had been unable to grow a beard which he regarded as a symbol of masculinity. This ironically was the very symbol Chuck's brother chose to ignore when withholding 'affirmation' from his sibling. Tony's 'withholding' meanwhile, did not involve the physical body, but stemmed from his fear of public speaking where he believed that 'real' men are 'naturally' more confident (perhaps due to testosterone).

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<sup>69</sup>It is important to note that Larry was not judging his 'body' with regard to his lack of a penis but in terms of literal physique i.e. muscles, broad shoulders etc. I will be discussing his *conceptualization of his Masculinity* with regard to his 'lack' of an appendage in a subsequent theme.

However, it is more interesting to note that Tony did not necessarily believe that 'real' men were better public speakers, but instead that people's reactions/respect for men appeared greater than that for women, public speakers or not. Illustrating how a crowd would undoubtedly laugh at a joke told by a man ("*people might laugh or not laugh*") if a woman attempted the same feat, Tony showed an overall conceptualization of masculinity in terms of an 'ideal' standard of a man: "*so I'm hoping when I'm on 'T', I will be better-confidence wise, then even though I will mumble, I will mumble in a way people won't notice, only me!*". Here, Tony appeared to reflect patriarchal portrayals of masculinity whilst attributing femininity (in this instance) to typical 'lower status'.

At this stage, it is important to note that I am by no means suggesting Chuck's inability to obtain his elder brother's affirmation nor Larry's or Tony's withholding affirmation from themselves implied that they were not or did not consider themselves 'men'. It is interesting to observe the way stratified levels of power operate within 'masculinities' to the extent that trans as well as 'genetic' men constantly 'rate' themselves and each other according to/ within the system.

Kimmel (1994) supports this point when he explains:

All masculinities are not *created* equal; or rather, we are all created equal but any hypothetical equality evaporates quickly because our definitions of masculinity are not equally valued [in] society.... What we call masculinity is often a hedge against being revealed as a fraud, an exaggerated set of activities that keep others from seeing through us, and a frenzied effort to keep at bay those fears within ourselves" (1994, pp.125-131; Italics in original).

❖ *'Boys Don't Cry': Engaging 'Hegemonic' Masculinity.*

As we have seen in Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's accounts, their previous attempts at 'performing' were closely linked to the extent to which culturally hegemonic men in society reaffirmed or refuted their conceptualization of their own masculinities. In the initial stages of transition, the individuals all attempted to adhere to an internalized 'hegemonic' ideal of masculinity, essentially 'performing' roles they perceived would guarantee them affirmation from other males. Segal (1993) explains, "Masculinity, as any type of inner essence, is a fiction, or set of fictions - however real, perhaps disastrously real, men's attempt to live out these fictions may be" (p.630). The perspective insight into the effects of struggling to attain certain 'position' within the hierarchical notion of masculinity affects not only 'transitional' masculinities but also contributes to the overall patriarchal interests of upholding 'gender' as 'difference'. All interviewees felt certain spaces posed a potential 'threat'/challenge to their initial efforts of 'living' up to masculine 'ideals' which would in turn affect how other males would regard or 'rate' their masculinities in transition.

Chuck: "I initially tried to look according to the way I thought that men were... and you know the film '*Boys Don't Cry*'? It was very much a 'stimulant' for me, and it was very difficult for me because I could 'switch it on' so quickly...I cry very easily. *And it was such a thing for me* because I thought 'Ag, man, why does that happen so easily?!' *I mean you [are not expected] to show any sort of emotion, except with anger* or something like that. And I wasn't strong, I didn't like getting my hands dirty! *So I wasn't sure whether I was presenting as [male]* I mean those are the things people expected from guys."

Larry: “I would say emotionally, I had a lot of conflict, because *I was quite an ‘emotional’ woman, you know, before transition;* so I used to cry a lot. And I always kept telling myself that I could never be a man because of that, so [when] I cried easy I thought, ‘*Well you’re never going to be able to be a man because you cry so easy*’. And that gave me sort of confusion and conflict. On the other side I felt, even though I cry easy, I don’t want to be a woman and I don’t feel like a woman. So it was kind of tricky for me.”

Tony: “*I’m an emotional person! I cry anytime, not easily but I am very emotional...whatever it might be emotional, I will feel it,* so that’s how I am. And I’m not the only guy who is doing this! My uncle is like this. I don’t really say ‘because I am in the female body [that’s why] I am like this’. No, no, no when I was growing up, I was kinda like bully!! So it wasn’t the area for emotional, like I would hit a guy and so...being emotional doesn’t mean that you don’t get hurt by anything, I am emotional, but don’t-mess-with-me!”

The first thread that comes out across all three narratives is the way they all attributed emotion, or rather the *expression* of emotion through crying i.e. a literal shedding of tears, to a ‘failed’ masculinity. Given that “masculinity [is] defined as the repudiation of femininity” (Kimmel, 1994, p.126), the mere notion of being emotionally connected to one’s feelings, in a visible and body altering way, was enough to make both Chuck and Larry question, not only their *ability* to ‘perform’ masculinity effectively, but their overall concept of their own masculinities (essentially successful ‘transition’). Tony’s case was similar. Even where his body remained

'unaltered', he sought to distance himself from expressive emotion which he also regarded as a sign of 'weakness' when performed through the male body. Instead, the participant perhaps in an effort to strengthen his image in light of his confession to being "*an emotional person*" quickly added "*but don't -mess -with -me!*" to reaffirm his masculinity in light of his 'unaltered'/pre-transition state. 'Men and Masculinities' theorist Joseph Pleck, in his research into the multifaceted levels of male and female 'interdependency', which ensure that patriarchal interests are upheld, explains that:

The first power that men perceive women having over them is *expressive power*, the power to express emotions... men experience their emotions vicariously through women. Many men have learned to depend on women to help them express their emotions, indeed, to express their emotions for them... (1992, p.21; Italics in original).

It is here one begins to see the internalization of gender 'roles' centered on the societal expectations projected onto male bodies which all three trans-men were more comfortable (in spite of their anxieties) living up to, than those in their initial 'feminine' bodies. This chapter has aimed at exploring how the 'recognition' and 'reciprocation' process initially proved essential to each participant's conceptualization and acceptance of their 'transitional' maleness. The ability to avoid detection amongst culturally hegemonic males formed a pivotal concept to the different ways each participant 'performed' their notions of manhood in order to attain 'ideal' status within the hierarchical structure of maleness. Whilst Chuck and Larry sought this inclusion in traditional male spaces, Tony once again, worked from a much more sophisticated theory of gender, as his maleness was reaffirmed mainly through and by the opposite sex. However, the participants' notions of manhood were also often under threat, particularly when the 'recognition' of their maleness was withheld by other males (often but not limited to hegemonic

males) and also from themselves. One may argue that it is this *withdrawal* of recognition that paved the way for each trans-male to arrive at their own 'alternative' version of masculinity, essentially overturning traditional hegemonic definitions of 'real' manhood, which I will explore in the following theme.

### III. 'Alternative' vs. 'Hegemonic' Masculinity.

In this theme, I will present material that I felt illustrated all three participants' views on the construction of their own 'versions' of masculinity in relation to culturally 'hegemonic' standards of 'manliness' within society. This theme builds upon issues raised in previous themes and recognizes this 'alternative' version of masculinity as still dependent on (and perhaps mutually exclusive) notions of hegemony. This in turn raises questions about internalized constrictions of 'definitions' of maleness the participants presented, that could be related to a lack of 'agency' that trans-men face within the gender institution. In this sub-section, I will address this problem via exploring 'alternative' masculinity in light of the question: where *is* gender 'agency' for trans-men? Previously, the participants cited their 'performance' of masculinities in 'transition' as initially geared toward attaining the 'highest' (hegemonic) level of masculinity within the stratified gender category. In this theme, I will explore how each participant revised this goal, by presenting individual 'reactions' to the process. The data reveals numerous factors such as the 'absence' of a penis, a revelation of 'personal' masculinity that differed greatly from previous 'public' masculinity, to a discussion of inhabiting somewhat contradicting versions of masculinity i.e. 'hegemonic' versus 'alternative'. All these factors

which I will discuss in detail essentially contributed to this version of masculinity. The discussion of these factors, I believe, will illustrate the 'niche' 'transitional' masculinities created within social definitions in direct opposition to societal demands on bodies and essential gender 'categorizing'. I have chosen to present critical material from all three interviewees first, before presenting my analysis.

❖ *"F\*#k that! I don't have a dick but I'm a man!": 'Alternative' perspective of Masculinity.*

By this stage of the research, it is clear that external 'signifiers' of the gendered Body plays a central role in the assumption of gender identity and subsequent gender expectations projected onto the entity (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Lorber, 1993; Dozier, 2005). In the case of the FTM individuals, this site of embodying 'maleness' whilst subscribing to and internalizing culturally hegemonic 'ideals' of masculinity was often a site of intense trauma, constant self-evaluation and the conception of 'gender identity' independent of the Body. I have chosen in this specific subsection to present the issues and journeys all three participants underwent, in their quest for 'hegemonic' physical embodiment and final acceptance and creation of 'alternative' masculinity. While I am by no means implying that the 'absence' of a penis acts as the *only* site the men engaged with in the conception of 'alternative' masculinity, it remains clear that the 'absence' of an appendage perhaps ignited their own empowerment towards 'transitional' masculinity and their location within it.

Chuck: "Well, initially, to me, *it was all about the penis!* It was like *'that I had to have!'* ...you couldn't be a male without it....but I think slowly and it took a long, long,

long time and a lot of therapy to accept my body as it is....sometimes it's still difficult, *but it's certainly not as important*, and as I said, *I can make use of what I have*, and that has probably come as a result of fairly successful long-term relationships [with heterosexual women]. [*P: Does it bother you that they haven't come up with a successful phalloplasty 'Op'?*] It doesn't really bother me, because whether they do or whether they don't; I can't afford it!"

Larry: "Well, at this stage it's very like, I'm in between a rock and a hard place....*I mean on one hand I would like to* [undergo phalloplasty procedure], but on the other hand, *I find it very intrusive, like the actual procedures*; and also....*I'm not so convinced that the end result is good... the risks are quite high...so there's a couple of things that make me wonder. I think, unfortunately, there isn't a perfect solution, because you do it, you might end up with a lot of disadvantages and a lot of advantages, or you don't do it and also end up with a lot of disadvantages and advantages... so I think every person must mind their own way of what to do there.*"

Tony: "*F#\*k that!!! I am a man, I don't have a dick but I'm a man!!!I can be a man without it. Like I'm saying now, I'm not on 'T', but I'm still saying I'm a man! ... Because I didn't have 'it' but I feel like a man, so I still feel strongly, like I can demand my space as strongly as a male, and my genetics [genes] will not really define me*; it might define other people. It goes with belief, opinion or different things ne? In terms of operations, the technology is really not good for the 'bottom' operation, *I don't want that for now*, 'cause it doesn't look like it, I just want to be like everybody else; so let me just keep it until maybe technology

improves. It ['absence' of phallus] never stopped me to believe that I am a man  
*and it will never stop me...because a human being without eyes is still a human  
being, then I don't have a dick, why am I not a man then?!!*"

Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's rejection of the assumption that genitals act as 'indicators' of one's gender identity, that theorist Dozier (2005) cites as central to gender's organizational element is two fold. The first rejection was of the very notion that their external 'female' bodies were 'indicative' of their internal gender identity; where even before encountering the term 'Transsexual', the participants rejected the specific societal demands attached to their external female 'signifiers'. By physically altering their bodies (Chuck and Larry) or simply *choosing* to reject the significance attached to his 'signifiers (Tony), all three men in their separate contexts presented 'alternative' perspectives towards the constructed (often 'hegemonic') notions/definitions of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'.

The second rejection involved the situation where although all men successfully 'pass', and have had their masculinity 'affirmed' from a range of sources, different sets of societal expectations remain projected onto their male gendered bodies; with the ultimate 'symbol' centered on the phallus. As already seen, Chuck's desire to internalize and essentially embody the hegemonic ideal of masculinity within his cultural context was of immense importance to him during his transition journey. From avidly watching sports to excessive alcohol use, Chuck's desire to possess a penis appeared to also emerge from these 'ideal' constructions of masculinity. Chuck described how "*it was all about the penis...you couldn't be a male without it*". It is evident that the penis was indeed upheld as the symbol of maleness, and perhaps in spite of numerous

ways/areas he was successfully passing and escaping 'detection' from hegemonic males in his group, Chuck still felt he was lacking the one 'signifier' that would cement his masculinity.

Larry also engaged this desire to possess a penis when he presented the conundrum he found himself in relation to this desire, undergoing an intrusive phalloplasty procedure with very low success rates. Larry described how "*I mean on one hand I would like to [undergo phalloplasty procedure], [but] I'm not so convinced that the end result is good, the risks are quite high*".

While Larry may not explicitly indicate his belief that possessing a penis would allow him to fully embody hegemonic ideals of maleness, it is evident that his struggle as to whether he should undergo the intrusive procedure was telling his internalization of institutional notions of 'manhood'. Larry's struggle (and eventual acceptance) with his decision is the first instance we see the evolution of a version of masculinity each trans-man went through.

Tony corroborated when describing his own awareness of the 'symbol' of the penis ("*I don't have a dick but I'm a man! I can be a man without it*"). Tony's positioning also indicates an awareness of culturally hegemonic standards of 'maleness' based on the presence of a penis but it is his 'reaction' to the standard that is striking. He adamantly staked his 'maleness' against other men even without an appendage. This is an indication of the central role the penis plays in notions of 'manhood' across contexts, as indicated in both Chuck's and Larry's admission for the initial desire for the appendage. Kessler and McKenna (1978), Lorber (1993, 1994), and Dreger (1998) have all examined the different ramifications of the 'genitals = gender identity' assumption in its masquerade as societal 'reality', a reality that the participants were all too aware of in their respective transitional journeys.

The participants' various relationships with this societal expectation of male bodies essentially debunks the majority of societal assumptions surrounding Trans individuals, as the Trans men's current realities present the notion of existing independent of societal and gender boundaries as feasible. All the participants' convictions that they did not *need* penises to 'make' them men, Chuck's ("*sometimes it's still difficult, but it's certainly not as important*"), Larry's ("*unfortunately, there isn't a perfect solution*") and Tony's ("*I just want to be like everybody else*"), effectively invert society's policing 'Gaze' back unto itself, by revealing the essence of this seemingly 'natural' organizing principle as *constructed*.

These men's 'transitional' masculinities therefore end up straddling compulsory notions of gender with their 'alternative' version of masculinity, excluding them from effectively embodying 'hegemonic' versions. However, one may argue that in spite of the 'absence' of a penis, the situation can be remedied if one applies psychologists Kessler and McKenna's theory on the 'cultural genital' where:

The cultural genital is the one which is *assumed* to exist and which, it is believed, should be there. As evidence of "natural sexuality", the cultural genital is a legitimate possession. *Even if the genital is not present in a physical sense, it exists in a cultural sense if the person feels entitled to it and/or is assumed to have it...* cultural genitals are attributed genitals... it is the penis which is either attributed or not attributed... it belongs to males *and is attributed by members as part of the gender attribution process* in particular instances (1978, p.154; Emphasis mine).

Therefore, all three participants continue to successfully 'pass' as male within their own contexts, whilst simultaneously allowing the notion of the 'cultural genital' to further solidify their overall masculinity status. By essentially overcoming the effects of socialization, and each independently reaching an understanding of the futility of completely internalizing the societal 'significance' attached to genitals, the participants effectively straddled the potential/ authentic nature of 'identity' as contextual and fluid, creating an 'alternative' version of masculinity as a gender category. However, Kessler and McKenna's (1978) position can be interrogated in light of the fact that the theory fails to take into account the anxiety the participants may face in their personal, intimate/sexual<sup>70</sup> areas of their lives. One may argue that the 'cultural genital' is denied power in the absence of the 'physical' genital in hegemonic discourse, thus the theory appears more convoluted in light of the analysis, which is thirty years old and considerably outdated but can still act as a scaffold into notions of masculinity.

I however, find while the participants' current standpoints prove illuminating and potentially influential, neither one of them exists in a social 'vacuum'. Kessler and McKenna (2000) in their article '*Who put the "Trans" in Transgender?*' ask "is [it] possible to alter, in practice, what seems to be the incorrigibility of the gender attribution process? Is this, in fact, what transgendered people want to do?"(p.1). Whilst the participants valiantly chose to reject notions of 'masculinity' in relation to its apparent 'inextricable' link to the phallus, it may be unrealistic, if not unfair, to expect a complete upheaval of their concession to *particular* aspects of societal demands on the body. After all, Butler (1990) warns us of the embedded nature of 'gender' within us all, which "compels' our belief in its necessity and naturalness" (p.190). Therefore expecting either or all of the interviewees to single-handedly take on an institution stationed at

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<sup>70</sup>I will discuss this aspect in more detail in a subsequent theme.

the epicenter of daily life is arguably idealistic. However, a small victory may be found in the fact that, all three men showed us that it is society that currently (or unwittingly) bends to their own *self-definitions* and individual circumstances<sup>71</sup>.

❖ *'For a change, society is going to listen to me!': 'Personal' Masculinity.*

The notion that gender can be created as distinct from the physical Body is a concept that completely overturns the very foundation of the societal construction of gender, with transitional masculinities illustrating the possibilities of such a revolution. By presenting the different ways each participant represented their own 'personal' masculinity, and how each arrived at their current definitions independent of societal definitions, it is possible to observe the emergence of an 'alternative' masculinity; in essence representing the contextual and fluid nature of the human condition in its entirety, emancipated of certain patriarchal interests.

Chuck: "But I think I'm a little more sensitive than a normal male, *I don't have this 'macho-man' thing about myself. I have to cook my own meals, or else I'll go hungry, I have to do my own laundry, so once again as when I was a youngster, the stuff sort of merge: you can be extremely masculine and still do the chores!*

The physical, the outer, it doesn't tell me anything, it's more your inner strengths...*So I've had to figure for myself, [what] my idea of 'male' is, and*

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<sup>71</sup> I am not engaging with nor addressing the medical production of Trans, as I already fully engaged with it in my Honours year's research. My Master's year research is disengaged from this approach to Trans- masculinity as I am interested in exploring the social construction of Masculinity and not its physical aspect.

because for I would say, a number of years, *I did look for the role-models and I didn't find them!* So I've had to create them for myself. Look, society will still probably tell me, 'you can't be a man, you don't have a penis' but I'm not listening to society anymore, I listened to society all my life and look where it got me! For a change, society is going to listen to me!!"

Larry: "I think, I'm like any other person, I'm unique... yeah... I've got my set of challenges, other people have their own sets of challenges, it's just the hand you've been dealt with...."

Tony: "I do washing!! I do cook! I think identifying as a male person doesn't really mean you have to keep away from going to the kitchen; when you have sex you have to be on top...no, no [shakes head] this is bullshit! And the things that are expected from a female, they can be done by everyone!! So as for a male they can be done by everyone! *So I don't really believe in expectations.* It's me, I live my own life! *But how I express it is different to others, so this body of mine, it might be a female body in front of other people, but I see it very differently.* But a man is not what you 'have'; a man is what you believe."

Each narrative indicates a thread between all three trans-men of how their masculinities in transition rejected societal expectations of the Body as well as the 'roles' ascribed to each specific gender category. Erving Goffman cites these 'roles' as 'gender displays' explaining that: 'If gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of

biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates' (1976, p.69).

Given the previous traumatic experiences of feeling 'trapped' by 'roles' attached to their initial 'feminine'<sup>72</sup> bodies, one might expect a certain aversion towards performing tasks that would not only remind them of the trauma, but might also pose as a 'threat' to the conceptualization of their masculinities. Both Chuck's and Tony's discussions of their current 'alternative' standing within the stratified gender category involved an amalgamation of the gender 'roles' ascribed to both 'masculine' and 'feminine' bodies. Chuck explained "*I have to cook my own meals, or else I'll go hungry*" and Tony reiterated that, "*identifying as a male person doesn't really mean you have to keep away from going to the kitchen*". These examples show how both men, in their individual way, have arrived at a form of cross-roads; they no longer felt they had to make a 'choice' between which 'roles' to reject or perform, but instead chose to simply operate within parameters (societal 'position' or in daily lives) they set out for themselves.

Interestingly, each man revealed his individual decision *not* to ascribe to projections made onto his physical body, Chuck ("*so I've had to figure for myself, [what] my idea of 'male' is*"), Larry ("*I'm like any other person*") and Tony ("*I live my own life! But how I express it is different to others*"), subsequently redefining the similar projections made onto gendered 'roles'. In light of these 'redefinitions, each participant was able to attain 'alternative' perspectives, not only of his 'personal' masculinity, but also created a platform for the overall conceptualization of the unrealistic gender binary system.

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<sup>72</sup> I use this term deliberately to emphasize on the 'femaleness' genitals='feminine' body='female' gender identity (Lorber, 1994) assumptions projected onto gendered bodies, which I have discussed at length in previous themes.

This is in sharp contrast to the participants' initial transition processes (discussed in previous themes) where feminine 'roles' acted as the 'indicators'/starting point of their 'discontent' in inhabiting a 'female' body. The Trans men now chose to embrace, not the *flawed* social *significance* behind daily chores (often mislabeled as gender specific 'roles') but instead, the simple and literal necessity of these activities in everyday life irrespective of gender categories. Gender construction theorists, Candace West and Don Zimmerman, cite influential sociologist Ervin Goffman (1976) when providing insight into this process I refer to as *significance transition*<sup>73</sup> explaining:

Roles are *situated* identities--assumed and relinquished as the situation demands--rather than *master identities* (Hughes,1945), such as sex category, that cut across situations...many roles are already gender marked.....Gender depictions are less a consequence of our "essential sexual natures" than interactional portrayals of what we would like to convey about sexual natures, using conventionalized gestures. Our *human* nature gives us the ability to learn to produce and recognize masculine and feminine gender displays-"a capacity [we] have by virtue of being persons, not males and females (1976, p.76 in 1987, pp.128-130; Italics in original).

In the light of the 'alternative' concept that transitional masculinity provides, it is clear that there are numerous operating systems that maintain gender's central position as an organizing principle within society. Transitional masculinities essentially deconstruct these various systems

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<sup>73</sup>I define this as the gradual process of regarding 'feminine' or 'masculine' attributed 'roles' independent of the gender specificity previously attached to them. For example, an MTF is gradually able to once again, change a car tire or fix a mechanical problem, whilst an FTM gradually becomes comfortable cooking a meal or doing laundry again without feeling one's current gender standing will be questioned or 'lost'. This process may initially appear to still cater to gender stereotypes, but I feel instead, that this process is simply a reflection of the 'roles' we are all expected to know and perform according to the gender identity to which we are assigned. I also do not assume that every Trans individual undertakes this process, I feel this process is affected by personality, transition stage and length of successful 'passing'.

by providing 'alternative' definitions of masculinity and 'alternative' perspectives of gender as defining categories for the unquantifiable entity of the human condition.

This chapter has aimed to explore the evolution of all the participants' initial determination to embody culturally hegemonic masculinities via various avenues such as the initial desire to possess a penis in order to cement one's masculinity, to the gradual acceptance of one's physical Body as male even without the appendage. This initial desire to embody 'real' symbols of maleness is directly linked to the trans-men's previous attempts ( as discussed in previous themes) at 'performing' activities, mannerisms etc that mirrored those of culturally hegemonic males ('public' masculinity), in a bid to gain recognition, not only as males but as 'hegemonic' males. However, as illustrated in this theme, the eventual realization of the futility of completely internalizing 'hegemonic' ideals of manhood resulted in the creation of a more 'personal' version of masculinity. Whilst this evolution was greatly facilitated by the 'absence' of a penis and the differing circumstances in which each man created and experienced his own 'personal' masculinity, these two factors acted as key lenses and active sites for seeking gender 'agency' for trans-men within the gender institution. Revealed in this chapter is not only the creation of an 'alternative' masculinity but also the apparent contradiction each trans-man inhabits in light of their positions within the different versions of masculinity (Connell, 1995). After all, all three men successfully 'passed' as 'hegemonic', all the while undergoing an acute awareness/anxiety over a 'lack' of full embodiment of symbolic maleness. I will address the complexity and multifaceted aspect of this apparent contradiction<sup>74</sup> when applied within some of the particular contextual concerns for contemporary South African citizenship.

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<sup>74</sup> Embodying both hegemonic and alternative versions of masculinity

## *Chapter IV.i.*

### *I. Race and Class in a South African Context.*

In this chapter, I present material from all three interviewees which illustrates their engagement with their societal 'position' within contemporary South African society, where given historical processes, race and class became central tenets to the development of the country. The apartheid system of social and political stratification based on 'Afrikaans ideology' of race and culture created a society where the State controlled virtually all aspects of societal existence; from education standards (the Bantu Education Act of 1953<sup>75</sup>), freedom of movement (the Land Acts of 1954&1955), geographical spaces (the Group Areas Act of 1950) and even the Sexuality of the masses (the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950<sup>76</sup>). It is perhaps inevitable that the foundation on which the South African society was built at the time, would play a major role in the conceptualization of masculinity in Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's own communities and effectively influence their own understanding of what it 'took' to be a 'colored', Afrikaans and black (respectively) man. It is this influence of South African history centered on marginalization along racial lines that the complex and often contradictory location all three participants personify in relation to discourses around 'hegemonic' and 'alternative' masculinities within a South African space.

The fact that each interviewee comes from various 'recognized' racial categories within South Africa serves to hint at diverse contexts which are pertinent to the issues discussed within this theme. It is important to note what is offered here is no more than a 'hint' – I am not suggesting

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<sup>75</sup>This Act established a Black Education Department in the Department of Native Affairs which would compile a curriculum that suited the "natural requirements of the black people".....Africans were to receive an education designed to provide them with skills to serve their own people in the homelands or to work in laboring jobs under whites. ([www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html](http://www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html); last accessed 22/07/08)

<sup>76</sup>This Act prohibited adultery, attempted adultery or related immoral acts(extra-marital sex) between white and black people. ([www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html](http://www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html); last accessed 22/07/08)

the masses (the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950<sup>76</sup>). It is perhaps inevitable that the foundation on which the South African society was built at the time, would play a major role in the conceptualization of masculinity in Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's own communities and effectively influence their own understanding of what it 'took' to be a 'colored', Afrikaans and black (respectively) man. It is this influence of South African history centered on marginalization along racial lines that the complex and often contradictory location all three participants personify in relation to discourses around 'hegemonic' and 'alternative' masculinities within a South African space.

The fact that each interviewee comes from various 'recognized' racial categories within South Africa serves to hint at diverse contexts which are pertinent to the issues discussed within this theme. It is important to note what is offered here is no more than a 'hint' – I am not suggesting that any of my participants should be seen as representative of their race and class categorizations in a crude way. I am simply attuned to the fact that each interviewee placed emphasis on what their separate cultural contexts contributed to their conceptualization of masculinity and as a result, affected the development of their own. Dover in Morrell (2005) explains that "the sexed body creates a common framework for cultural elaboration and for the performance of gender"(p.185). It is important at this juncture to state that given that there is only one participant from each 'racialised' group, my data can do no more than simply hint at these complexities, and is interested in reading 'race/class' contexts from *within* each interviewees' representation of his engagement with masculinity, rather than suggest any essentialized connection between all three cultural experiences.

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<sup>76</sup>This Act prohibited adultery, attempted adultery or related immoral acts(extra-marital sex) between white and black people.([www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html](http://www.africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalaws.html);last accessed 22/07/08)

As in previous cases, I have chosen to present critical material from all three interviews before initiating my analysis. I believe that by observing all separate accounts concurrently, one is able to note the similar threads running within each narrative, further strengthening the validity of the analysis as well as uncover the underlying processes at work. After all, the interviewees' embeddedness in specific race/class contexts deserves exploration through focus on their understandings of 'hegemonic' and 'alternative' possibilities. Connell (1987) supports this notion when he argues:

...whilst cultural ideals of masculinity may vary substantially, they do so in a fashion that consistently maintains existing relations of masculine domination, congruent with the peculiarities of the surrounding social structure (Connell, 1987, p.49).

❖ *“There were definite, definite ‘codes’: Masculinity ‘ideals’ within each racial/class category.*

Chuck: “[P: What was the ‘ideal’ man in your background; i.e. something to ascribe to?] He would be trained almost to be the head of the house, to be the bread-winner; that was the most important difference between the two sexes, and then, woman stays at home and raises babies.[P: Was the masculine ‘ideal’ influenced by your cultural background?] Oh yes! Very much so! Especially with my mother, there were *definite, definite codes* for the different sexes....The first time, at basically 18, I heard of the word lesbian, we lived in a very small community, a very *religious* community where you wouldn’t be expected to hear this kind of thing.”

Larry: “I’ve based many of my observations on my dad. [*Afrikaans’ ideal*] Well I would think like he’s the one making the decisions, he’s the one bringing in the money,

looking after the family, providing for the family... [*Society and media*] was controlled by the State, so in a protected environment [*it was harder*] to *experience anything other than what everybody sees as the 'norm'*! [Men]... had to be heterosexual; they mustn't like to do any sort of feminine stuff. I think when I grew up nobody ever spoke about any other type of relationship or about homosexuality...you never heard about people who are like that. It was only when I was much bigger, much older that I first heard about it and that time it was sort of seen as a sin or a disgrace to be like that."

Tony: "Ok, in my culture, *they mostly respect the men who can maybe stand for whatever it is, whether it's hard or easy, you must just be there, you must just support or whatever. They expect a man to marry a woman, whether you are working or not working but at least you must have a woman.* Well I would definitely say Zulu! I mean Zulu, they seem like, men to them is everything; 'men is wealth, men is life, without men you are nothing'. So they believe in Masculinity more than femininity, so if there is no father in the house, then there is no house! The Zulu males were the ones to be the soldiers of the country."

The main tenets of masculinity within each account illustrate an overall understanding of 'African' masculinities as a whole. Each interviewee explained that patriarchal notions of gender 'roles' were in turn ascribed to gender identities. Chuck described how one would be "*trained*" to 'head' the household, and Larry seconded this notion, whilst Tony explained how masculinity within his own cultural community was deemed as one who provides supports/strength in any situation ("*whether it's hard or easy, you must just be there*"). It is interesting to note the seamlessness between all three cultural contexts with regard to the assumptions projected onto

male bodies, in that, each interviewee in one way or another highlighted a direct link between the male body and patriarchal power. This link is most explicitly expressed by Tony's description ("*so if there is no father in the house, then there is no house!*") where he did not categorically state "no man" no house, his description of the paramount position Zulu masculinity occupies ("*men is life*") clearly indicates the direct link to power (earned or assumed) the phallic body is ascribed.

It is possible to draw links between all three interviewees' descriptions of the 'ideal' of masculinity within their respective cultural communities and the notion of 'hegemonic masculinity' that Connell (1995, 2001) pioneered in relation to the different 'versions' of masculinities that may function within a society. However, in light of cultural contexts, the notion of 'hegemonic' masculinity takes on a different perspective, specifically in the description of the 'roles' (ideals to ascribe to) men in Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's specific communities were expected to perform. It appears that the notion of masculinity defined in direct opposition to 'femininity' extended into the cultural 'roles' ascribed to each gendered body. The power that men are perceived to hold over women lies not only in physiological differences (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Lorber, 1993) but also in *activities* which serve to 'reaffirm' men's status over women. Therefore when all three participants described the 'head' of household 'roles' and overall dominant positions men were expected (or assumed) to occupy/perform in order to effectively embody the 'cultural ideal', one cannot help but notice that these 'roles' also functioned to place women's expected 'roles' as subservient.

The second thread uniting all three participants' accounts of cultural 'ideals' lies in the highlighting of heteronormative assumptions attached to male bodies. Given the traditional silencing of 'alternative' sexualities in the majority of African discourses (Reddy, 2001), the very 'obvious' notion that the culturally 'ideal' male would be heterosexual, acts as an indication of the level patriarchal interests are embedded in the daily lives of individuals. Chuck explained that he was only eighteen the first time he encountered the notion of homosexuality, Larry also attested to his unawareness of 'alternative' sexualities, whilst Tony described his own community's demands on the male body ("*They expect a man to marry a woman, whether you are working or not working but at least you must have a woman*"). In direct contrast to Chuck's and Larry's contexts, where a man 'providing' for his family was central to the notion of 'manliness', Tony's cultural context places more emphasis on a different aspect of dominance; where heteronormative assumptions centre on the male body in relation to *sexuality*. Ratele (2005) offers insight into this situation, citing it as a consequence of 'apartheid sexuality' where:

[in] heterosexual orientation...heterosexuality has been viewed as a kind of control males have over female bodies....heterosexuality fits snugly within the framework of patriarchy.[In] heterosexual sex...males sometimes liken the act of penetration to conquest, an extension of dominance, imperialism, colonialism, and power in general.....apartheid and antiapartheid became patriarchal contests with women being the stakes (2005, p.149).

Therefore, by focusing on sexuality to define 'ideal' masculinity in Tony's cultural context, this perspective offers a further look into the different ways the realities of race plays within SA culture with regard to access to resources and overall social mobility. Using Connell's (2000) framework, Tony's race substantially alters his 'type' of masculinity ("marginalized") as his cultural community can be defined as an 'oppressed' group within South Africa (historic and

contemporary) , and although Tony is middle-class, heterosexual and employed (essentially 'hegemonic'), his race rendered him "socially de-authorized" (2000, p.31). African masculinities theorists suggest that "[it is important] to distinguish meaningfully among different collective constructions of masculinity and to identify power inequality among these constructions" (Ouzgane & Morrell, 2005, p.4). In Tony's cultural context, historically social inequalities function beyond the individual's control, therefore redefining the definition of masculinity to focus on an entity within reach. This alternative focus ensures that patriarchal dominance over women and 'other' men remains intact but simultaneously counter-colonial, and therefore acting as the 'definition' of the cultural 'ideal' of what it 'means' to be a man within his context.

This sub-section includes discussions around the 'ideals' of maleness within each participants' specific cultural context. This discussion is important as these ideals served as 'models' of manhood for the men during their formative years, and shaped their conceptualizations of 'maleness' during their transition journeys. The data within this section reveals that Chuck's, Larry's and Tony's cultural 'ideals' mainly revolved around notions of power (earned or assumed) directly linked to the phallic body. It is therefore not surprising that all three men in their initial transition journeys based the 'complete' definition of their maleness on possessing an appendage. This notion of 'phallus-power' was then reinforced through sexuality, more specifically heterosexual sex/sexuality where penetration often symbolized power over women, or one's overall power (Ratele, 2005). It is therefore of particular importance to note that, however each individual man's cultural description of 'ideal' masculinity may have influenced their conceptualizations of manhood. No other force or reality affected the men's access to resources or social mobility than that of race within the South African context, as illustrated in the following sub-section.

❖ “*If I was a genetic sexually*”: ‘*Transitional*’ masculinities within cultural ideals’.

The different notions of ‘ideals’ that functioned within each participant’s cultural contexts revealed ‘ideals’ that served to directly link the male gendered body to power. It is therefore important to trace the ways in which these foundations of masculinity impacted the ‘transitional’ masculinities of the participants within their own transition journeys, i.e. where did the participants’ ‘fit’ themselves within the defined ‘ideal’?

Chuck: [P: *Did you ever try to model yourself on those ideals? Or did you ever find yourself wanting?*] I think I did, to both questions...I very much had that thing that, ‘you’re a male; this is what you do, this is what you don’t do’. But yes, initially I was envious of my elder brother; he was strong physically and that’s what I wanted to be and that I couldn’t be; and so ok when I couldn’t become strong, I decided to be strong mentally. I sort of had a downside there because I was psychiatrically disabled....and I was being made to believe that being psychiatrically disabled was not a ‘masculine’ thing but yes I did try to model myself according to what *I perceived* a man is supposed to be.”

Larry: “[P: *Where did you place yourself within this Afrikaans ideal? Was it an ‘impossible’ goal? Or was it something to ‘aspire’ to?*] I think it saddened me that I would not grow up to be a man. But I[initially] tried to push the limits of my ‘femaleness’ as far as I could, and still pursue my interests and things that I like, and see what I could ‘get away with’ basically. [But then] your mind expands...you don’t think in a little tunnel that’s set out for you....being aware of

different options, cause when I grew up I thought you only get 'A&B', you've never heard of 'C,D,E,F&G....'and so on!!”

Tony: “...By the age of 15, I had a ‘calling’ traditional healing, I went there and when I came back they realized that the ancestor, who wanted me to take this, was actually a *male* person though he didn’t know that I would be in a female body. And then in terms of ‘role-wise’ if people know you, sometimes they will doubt you to do something for them, *I mean in a cultural way, maybe if they say ‘a man’ should maybe ‘come and kill a cow’, they won’t call [me] because ‘[Tony] is not a genetic male’ and then ‘[he] might not do it right’; but if I was a genetic sexually then it wouldn’t be a question.*”

It is immediately clear that all three participants initially attempted to model themselves on the idealized notions of masculinity within their individual cultural contexts, seen in their recounting of specific instances where they tried to ‘measure up’ to the ideals. Chuck’s attempts were geared towards a desire to imitate his eldest brother who was an apparent embodiment of physical domination (“*he was strong physically*”). However, Chuck revealed that even his ‘alternative’ attempts to “*be strong mentally*” (a chance that might have helped him feel linked to the power associated with masculinity) were soon thwarted as he acknowledged having a psychiatric disorder<sup>77</sup>. This seemed to essentially nullify his initial conceptualization of his own ‘type’ of masculinity within the cultural ‘ideal’ (“*I was being made to believe that being psychiatrically disabled was not a ‘masculine’ thing*”). Larry on the other hand, whose current

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<sup>77</sup>I feel it is important at this stage to clarify that Chuck was not referring to his ‘psychiatric’ disability in relation to ‘Gender Identity Disorder (GID) which scientific discourse cites as the ‘cause’ of Transsexualism, but instead referring to a separate ongoing disorder for which he has been undergoing treatment, with no relation to his Trans status.

'position'<sup>78</sup> within SA society could be cited as the embodiment ('hegemonic') of his cultural context, was initially also unable to 'fit' himself within the definitions ("*you don't think in a little tunnel that's set out for you [as] when I grew up I thought you only get 'A & B'*"). Larry's location within this debate is further enhanced by recognizing that having been born in the seventies at the height of militaristic apartheid, the particular 'ideal' the participant experienced was situated in the historical social context of 'Afrikanerdom'.

The realization that his previously gendered 'female' body would never 'blossom' into a male one led him to attempt embodying masculinity ideals as far as he could ("*and still pursue my interests, things that I like and see what I could 'get away with'*") whilst still in a female body, all the while fully aware that he was 'pushing' rigid societal limits deliberately set up within the two genders. Tony's transition journey, in comparison simply rejected the *significance* attached to his external 'signifiers', effectively conceptualizing his masculinity as 'hegemonic'<sup>79</sup>. Yet other hegemonic males' perceptions of his male status have limited his ability to 'fit' within his cultural 'ideal'. Tony explained that other males who were aware of his trans-status may doubt his ability to perform the 'roles' that act as affirmations of masculinity and power in the overall sense. After all, cultural 'ideals' are often used to define gender boundaries as well provide 'guidelines' to one's 'position' within the gender categories in order to determine distribution of power. Lorber (1994) explains:

Gendered social arrangements are justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law, but the most powerful means of sustaining the moral hegemony of the

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<sup>78</sup>Larry: white, middle/upper class, heterosexual, employed and even athletic.

<sup>79</sup>In light of the fact that without any external 'intervention', Tony's personal as well as physical characteristics as successfully perceived as 'male', and is affirmed by other genetic males within society and 'reaffirmed' by heterosexual women.

dominant gender ideology is that the process is made invisible; *any possible alternatives are virtually unthinkable* (Foucault, 1972; Gramsci, 1971 in Lorber, 1994, p.5).

By subscribing (and relating) to the societal significance attached to Tony's external 'signifiers', other males within his cultural context essentially deny the participant's overall ability to 'fit' within the relevant masculine 'ideal'. Tony's position as an individual who underwent the 'calling' process is one of heightened respect within his cultural community, which in essence affords him a form of 'capital' that Chuck and Larry have no access to within their own cultural contexts. The fact that Tony, within his position as a respected 'sangoma' at least has the *option* of slaughtering a cow (e.g. if a group is not aware of his trans status), a task recognized as relegated *only* to men within the participant's cultural community. The mere fact that both within Chuck and Larry's separate cultural contexts, one's maleness is not judged by tasks similar to Tony's indicates the differing (and perhaps unequal) grids by which all three men's 'manhood' is measured within their culturally defined standards.

This section has explored masculinity 'ideals' within a racial/class category, owing to the fact that both race and class occupy pivotal roles within historical and contemporary South African society. It is this reality that influences not only one's position within society, but also affected the participants' experiences of ascribing to culturally mandated ideals of 'maleness' within their separate cultural communities. Both Larry's and Tony's cultural communities have specific notions of maleness and roles to perform as 'affirmation' of one's successful maleness, which as we discussed, often presents complexities when located within the trans-realities of each man. The realities of existing in post-apartheid South African society also played an influential role in the 'version' of masculinities each participant presented in light of racial and class categories that stratifies the country's society along these lines.

Revealed in this section was that although all three participants virtually embodied 'hegemonic' masculinity i.e. middle-class, employed and heterosexual, only one participant (Larry) was able to embody this version unobstructed, and also be related to and navigate society as such. The other two participants' Chuck and Tony who also successfully embodied 'hegemonic' ideals of maleness, their race (subtly or blatantly) socially disenfranchised them, preventing them from also being recognized and related to as 'hegemonic' males. It is this seemingly contradicting location that all three trans-men occupy within their racial, cultural and class contexts that lends itself to the 'hegemony' versus 'alternative' versions of masculinity debate. After all, do not all three men share similar experiences in light of the conceptualizations of their own 'manhood'? Is it possible that the participants' straddling of these two 'versions' of masculinity make it difficult and unrealistic to regard 'hegemonic' as an exclusive category? If race and class were to occupy a less pivotal role within South African society, would all 'versions' of masculinity (modeled on North American ideals of manhood) be rendered obsolete? I raise all these questions in an attempt to place the numerous influences on an individual's life that subsequently influence his or her overall experience of navigating society with rigid boundaries.

## II. *Complexity of 'Intimate' Relationships & Heterosexuality.*

The research thus far has focused exclusively on 'transitional' masculinities and the myriads of issues and complex locations each man has faced over his transition journeys. The socially constructed gender binary system consists only of two categories i.e. male and female, and it is perhaps accurate to uphold the categories as mutually exclusive. From physiological definitions, to be 'female' is to 'lack' what males possess (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Butler, 1990, Lorber,

1993) to the affirmation of a man's masculinity that females possess (Pleck, 1992; Kimmel, 1996). The question more pertinent to this research is that of the position South African women occupy within these theoretical and social musings. My interest in the 'intimate' relationships of the trans-men is inspired by the above theorists' work and the desire to explore the theoretical frameworks within the South African terrain. In that, how far can the women tolerate the notions of 'alternative' masculinities in light of the 'absence' a penis? Having discussed the historical and contemporary foundations of discourse around 'alternative' sexualities and identities within African contexts, is it possible for the South African female sexual partners of the trans-men to remain impervious to generational influences and definitions of 'acceptable' sex? If the women live within culturally specific expectations of what heterosexuality entails, is it possible for them to embrace the Trans men's redefinition of heterosexual sex and sexual acts?

In this theme, I present accounts from all three interviewees which illustrate their heterosexuality and how the sexual relationships with women influenced the conceptualization of their own masculinity when reinforced/challenged by their *intimate cis*<sup>80</sup>-gendered partners. The exploration for this theme is interested in the expansion of concepts explored in earlier sections such as 'recognition-reciprocation', hegemonic versus alternative masculinities and the dominance of heterosexuality within all 'acceptable' versions of masculinity. This theme explores a particular aspect of the participants' lives that proved most telling of the societal assumption that genitals = gender identity, as well as theorists' ideas of masculinities as a social construction (Kimmel, 1994). As strong links between 'gender attribution' and sexual orientation were exacerbated by the role the 'absence' of a phallus played on the various intimate

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<sup>80</sup>Refers to the opposite of transgendered i.e. one who is cis-gendered has a gender identity that agrees with their socially recognized sex or having a gender identity/ gender role that society considers appropriate for the sex one was assigned at birth ([www.geocities.com/cisgendered](http://www.geocities.com/cisgendered); last accessed 2/10/09).

relationships of the participants, I have chosen to present critical material for this theme from all three interviewees before initiating my analysis.

- ❖ “*I am with a man but get into bed with a woman*”: The phallus as ‘central’ to Masculinity.

The numerous ways in which the ‘phallus’ is upheld as the fundamental ‘symbol’ of masculinity in both Western (Kessler & McKenna, 1978) and African (Dover in Morrell, 2005) societies is contrasted with the different ways each participant reached an understanding of their own masculinities by essentially attaching ‘alternative’ significance to their ‘signifiers’ and gendered male bodies. However, as discussed, the ‘affirmation’ of others within society also formed an integral part of their experience of their own gender, and each participant spoke on their intimate partners’ ‘reactions’ to this ‘alternative’ significance.

Chuck: “As the years went by, I was having relationships with straight women. The downside is that, invariantly, [they] expect something more. Straight women wanna get married; they wanna have children, and one by one, after four, five, six years they leave. And I had to work through those, *because it is rejection*. They needed something that I couldn’t give them. Th[e] women wanted children biologically, *[and] they were not going to do[adoption] for as long as I was ‘female’*. I [was involved] with one woman and we were together for about seven

years; but it still came down to the same thing, she used to say to me *'You know, I can't deal with this: for a whole day, I'm with you, I am with a man, and when I get into bed, I get into bed with a woman.'* She wanted the 'whole ball of wax'! [In previous relationships] they all knew upfront [about Trans status], *but they all weren't aware of Trans men, all they saw was butch lesbian;* and it's the not being able to distinguish between the two, that actually broke the relationships up."

Larry: "....Since I transitioned I've only had two relationships with women and one Transsexual woman who wasn't completely transitioned... the persons I got involved with all knew about it; so I didn't have to do much explaining...*but there's still that doubt in your mind like 'why would they go for me if they can have a 'normal' man...or a 'perfect' man or whatever?'*"

Tony: "Like I would maybe approach a chick, and [say], 'you know what, I'm a genetic male' and that's it! Then when they find out [Trans status], the relationship gone! That was normal for me! [ *P: As you get older did the girls stopping seeing you after learning you were a 'female'?*] Yeah, *immediately*....not being honest is something! So I think if I was honest from the first time, maybe something was gonna happen, but I think myself not being honest with...that ruined everything...."

perspective of masculinity each participant brought to the table, but also the 'default' physical expectations each of the men's bodies was expected to typify.

The conceptualization of this issue is made more complex when one considers that all three men were in one way or another already perceived as 'male'. In Chuck's and Larry's case, their masculinity had already been affirmed via the 'recognition' and reciprocation process (described in previous themes), by culturally hegemonic males and by women within their specific contexts. And Tony's own assertion of masculinity (in spite of his 'unaltered' body) was also 'affirmed' by males as well as heterosexual females. The irony is that in all the above accounts, it is evident that the women involved in past relationships with the participants also added "masculinity-validating" power (Pleck, 1992) to the 'manliness' of each Trans male. After all, not only had participants approached the women as heterosexual males, but the women had in turn *responded* to them in a similar way, therefore solidifying all notions of 'masculinity' attached to the Bodies of the participants. The fact that in both Chuck's and Tony's case the women eventually or immediately (respectively) ended the relationships speaks to their own internalization of gendered 'meanings' to the bodies of the men as well as their own. The fear of 'transgressing' gendered expectations of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' appeared far more powerful than entertaining the possibility of remaining in a relationship that existed independent/contrary to these restrictive boundaries. Paechter (2003) explains:

It is clear, however, that someone who does not share with the full members of a community of masculine or feminine practice an understanding of what it is to be male or female in that context will be at best only a peripheral member of that community. *To be a full participant of the community, core meanings must be shared.* This is one reason why, for example, communities of feminine practice which share a view of heterosexuality as fundamental to femininity, *do not include lesbians as full members of*

In approaching this material, it is clear that the 'genitals =gender identity' assumption affects not only Trans individuals who find themselves on the periphery of the gender binary system, but also those who operate within it. This is evident in Chuck's description of the pattern of the majority of his long-term heterosexual relationships, which involved an initial understanding, and valiant attempts to set aside primary issues around his 'lack' of a penis, with the inevitable demise of the relationship based on this very issue. Chuck explained that in spite of the length some of these relationships lasted, the 'absence' of a penis caused his heterosexual partners to regard their 'male' lover as a 'butch lesbian' instead (*"and it's the not being able to distinguish between the two that actually broke the relationships up"*). Although Larry did not delve into detailed accounts of his relationships, it is clear that he was also apprehensive of a similar pattern emerging within them, as his fear revolved around being 'dumped' for a genetic male (initially or eventually) due to the 'absence' of a penis as well. He often wondered why his partners would even continue their relationships after disclosing his trans-status (*there's still that doubt in [my] mind like 'why would they go for me if they can have a 'normal'[or]'perfect' man?"*).

Tony's initial experience in heterosexual relationships followed similar routes to Chuck's and Larry's, describing his 'non-disclosure' clause (*"like I would maybe approach a chick, and [say], 'you know what, I'm a genetic male' and that's it!"*) Even before encountering Trans, Tony had already rejected the female significance attached to his external 'signifiers'. He chose to attach 'masculine' significance instead, therefore already identifying as male, making the relationships he sought heterosexual. However, once the women he was involved with discovered his 'lack' of a penis, Tony reported (*"immediately, the relationship gone [and] that was normal for me!"*). This is indicative not only of the overall 'reactions' to the 'alternative'

that community, and treat them as outsiders, as Other, as non-feminine or even in some senses non-female (2003, p.72; Emphasis mine).

The former intimate partners essentially concentrated society's 'Gaze' onto the personal and intimate relationships they shared with the participants, and began to question their own 'identity' and 'standing' within the ascribed definitions of 'femininity' in direct relation to 'masculinity'. The 'alternative' perspective their partners presented proved too much that they eventually chose to exist within societal ascribed roles of the 'prerequisite' of a penis to 'make' a man and the 'absence' of one to 'make' them women. In conclusion, it is possible to observe the influence of generational definitions around gendered physical body within sexual and intimate relationships. In spite of political rhetorics around 'alternative' masculinities and gender norms, the South African heterosexual intimate partners of the trans-men were unable to fully conceptualize and discard heteronormative notions of sex (disguised as 'natural' and 'traditional') projected onto their female bodies.

❖ *'I am a man, so you are not a lesbian!': 'Genital' attribution & sexual orientation.*

It is clear that the societal process of attributing genitals to indicate one's gender identity is one that engages virtually all aspects of the 'public' as well as 'private' lives of individuals' realities, as illustrated in the previous sub-section, to affecting intimate relationships of the individuals. Having observed the internalization of 'meanings' onto gendered bodies (cis- and trans-gendered alike) in the illustrations of how the 'absence' of a penis adversely (and inevitably) affected the intimate relationships of the three participants, it is important to attempt an understanding of the

underlying and far-reaching processes at work behind this overall notion. I present material from each participant which I feel illustrates their own thinking of this process when these ‘meanings’ were projected unto their bodies by their intimate partners. This essentially challenged the conceptualization of their masculinities in ways which cannot be revolutionized through Trans discourse. I have chosen to present the material before initiating my analysis.

Chuck: “I present as male, but obviously if I’m getting into bed with you, you have no choice but to know that I don’t have male organs. But you know it took [one] 6 years to ‘find this out’. *I think she felt for as long as she was going to bed with me, well she was doing the categorizing herself, but she was categorizing herself, not as the straight, heterosexual partner of me, but as a lesbian.* That is the basic thing it came down to, *because they [past partners] didn’t want to be seen as lesbian, that is the thing that got them most,* totally centered around the organ.”

Larry: “....Since I transitioned, I’ve only had two relationships with women and one Transsexual woman who wasn’t completely transitioned... the persons I got involved with all knew about it; so I didn’t have to do much explaining...*but there’s still that doubt in your mind like ‘why would they go for me if they can have a ‘normal’ man...or a ‘perfect’ man or whatever?*”

Tony: “ I think for some of them [ girls], the sexuality [orientation] is always in the background, and then immediately being seen with a ‘homosexual’ person, then it’s also going to be like, ‘you are also a homosexual person’. I think that was the reason they didn’t want [me]. [With] my current girlfriend [of] five years, I [had known] I was a Transgender for three months, then I met her. She is not a lesbian,

she's a heterosexual person, so she said 'No I can't go out with you because you *were supposed to be a girl, you are supposed to be dating guys!* But I explained [Trans] to her, I said 'look here, now you are talking of me; you are not talking of butch lesbians, I'm not a lesbian!' *She is still trying to tell people that she is not a lesbian[because] she doesn't see me as a lesbian.* She sees me as a man because that is the way I present myself, that's how I identify myself."

The issues discussed here form a key mainstream part of gender theory, where sex (i.e. external 'signifiers' on a gendered body) is linked to gender and in turn assumptions around sexual orientation. Given the patriarchal notions upholding the definitions of both 'masculinities' and 'femininities', it is no surprise that the only 'acceptable' form of sexual intercourse is the heteronormative vaginal penetrative sex; with the 'penetrating' male and the 'penetrated' female. This heteronormative formulation is somewhat naïve as the formulation has been used to deconstruct the sex = gender identity =sexual orientation debate that has been at the heart of 'queer theory' since the 1980s. Therefore, thirty years work still remains at the margins of discourse around gender and sexuality, adversely affecting overall understandings around sexuality and definitions of 'deviant' versus 'normal' sexualities/sexual practices within societies.

Chuck's and Tony's recounting of the numerous rejections by the heterosexual women they were initially involved with soon reveals another aspect of the genitals =gender identity debate. Chuck described that his partner began projecting societal expectations of male gendered bodies onto his body, eventually turning the 'gaze' onto her own (body) and subsequently their relationship.

By attributing 'femaleness' to Chuck's body by virtue of his 'lack' of a penis, the inevitability of her "*categorizing herself, not as the straight, heterosexual partner of me, [ but ] as a lesbian*" soon began to negatively impact the overall concept of her own sexual orientation, and the social 'meanings' within its narrow definition.

Tony on the other hand, whose experience with the rejection of heterosexual females was parallel to Chuck's, avoided rejection from his current girlfriend, by essentially deconstructing these 'meanings' in light of his trans-status . Explaining that whilst his current girlfriend accepted his 'alternative' perspective of masculinity, the societal 'gaze' now rests upon the meanings/definitions of their intimate relations, and more so, what those meanings 'say' about her own 'femininity' in relation to sexual orientation. Tony stated that his girlfriend "*is still trying to tell people that she is not a lesbian [because] she doesn't see me as a lesbian*". One may argue that this could possibly be the very reality previous partners of both Chuck and Tony were intent on evading, in their reluctance to prolong their relationships with the participants based on the 'absence' of a phallus. The question begs: is there an actual possibility of the separation of genitals =gender identity notion? Are there no practical lessons to be learnt by the transsexual's creation of 'alternative' gender categories, paving the way for the separation of sexuality from patriarchy?

Judith Butler in her article 'Gender regulations' indicates the need to:

... separate sexuality from gender, so that to have a gender *does not presuppose that one engages sexual practice in any particular way*, and to engage in a given sexual practice,

anal sex, for instance, does not presuppose that one is a given gender... gender itself is internally unstable, that *transgendered lives are evidence of the breakdown of any lines of causal determinism between sexuality and gender* (2004, p.54; Emphasis mine).

As discussed, the patriarchal definition of 'heterosexual' sex serves to ensure the superiority of the male/phallus as the 'signifier' of power across every conceivable context (possession of phallus =automatic power) while simultaneously drawing the boundaries of 'real' masculinity (and conversely 'femininity'). After all, one only has to consider Robert Connell's description of the 'embodiment' of 'subordinated' masculinity attributed to the homosexual male who "is the repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity, the items [including] receptive anal pleasure"(1995, p.79). It is clear that the presence of a phallus is central to the definitions of sexual *desire* i.e. 'where' one places it to fulfill this desire is 'indicative' of sexual orientation. And the 'choice' of an 'acceptable' sexual orientation is a key influence in determining one's 'position'/inclusion within society, with 'survival' based on making the 'appropriate' choice.

Another important issue that emerges from the data is the different ways the participants essentially constructed heterosexuality and the impact their various relationship had on their views on the notion. The overwhelming power of the penis within the space of intimacy and basic sexual encounters was paramount to the 'meanings' the participants' and their partners ascribed to their bodies and identities. Chuck explained that "*I present as male, but obviously if I'm getting into bed with you, you have no choice but to know that I don't have male organs*". Larry stated that "*the persons I got involved with all knew about it; so I didn't have to do much explaining*". Tony on his part felt that "*I think for some of them [ girls], the sexuality [orientation] is always in the background*". It is here one begins to see the various anxieties in which heterosexuality and overall sexual encounters with heterosexual women act as sites of

anxiety as well as revive fears of the withdrawal of the 'recognition' and 'reciprocation' process (as discussed in previous themes). This placed in jeopardy the male status the participants have achieved within their own conceptualization and by forces independent of them.

Chuck's and Larry's insights suggest there is often a continuous element of 'explaining' needed whenever the sexual stage of a heterosexual relationship/encounter is reached. Tony's experience of 'explaining' is different, where the 'explaining' centers around the sexual orientation debate.

The women did not wish to be affiliated with him on the grounds of their sexual encounters being classified as lesbian due to the 'absence' of a penis. It is these forms of 'interruptions' within the men's sexual lives that can prove to be points of anxiety, as although in the majority of spaces, the Trans men are able to 'pass' successfully. This is one site that constantly reinforces patriarchal notions of sexuality and sexual orientation both on the participant's body, and as we have seen, the woman's body as well. The participants' encounters here reveal not simply South African norms about heterosexual expectations, but some ideas about South African 'women' and their wrestles with permission for desire (i.e. it must be 'women-women = lesbian' or 'men-women = heterosexual'). The women's need to have their sexual identities fixed by the physical bodies of their chosen partners reveal a deep conservatism about issues of gender and sexuality.

This sub-section has attempted to explore the complex issues the participants face within their intimate and sexual relationships as all three men identified as heterosexual and are interested in pursuing relationships, sexual or other, with heterosexual women. The data reveals the difficult and often traumatizing experiences that the participants have undergone in their previous attempts at pursuing these relationships or the eventual termination of a relationship, often revolving on the 'absence' of a penis. The common thread running across the three men's narratives indicates a form of anxiety linked to the narrowly defined notions of sex and sexual

orientation that their sexual partners often internalized and subsequently projected onto their relationships with the participants. The reality that this site of intimate/ sexual acts often disrupted the organic flow of the relationships as often 'explanations' are sought or the realities of actual sexual acts redefined in light of the 'absence' a penis in spite of actively 'presenting' as male.

Although it is clear that the trans-men redefined the notion of 'heterosexuality' in light of their physical realities, the reinforcement of traditional definitions of sexuality and actual sex acts affected the majority of the women the trans-men encountered. At one point or another, all three men faced rejection on the grounds of the 'absence' of a penis in spite of successfully presenting as male. This indicates the reality that, within the sexuality landscape, the entire political power of gender is located within heterosexual sex and power (e.g. ownership, domination via penetration) dichotomy. The trans-men have been able to effectively challenge if not overturn, day to day definitions of masculinity, gender identity and culturally hegemonic ideals of manhood. Yet, the one place that remains a challenge conversely acts as the site on which maleness is often symbolized and constantly called upon to reinforce the irreversible link of notions of power (earned or assumed) onto the phallic body.

In conclusion, historical colonial influences that served to misrepresent the nature of diverse identities within South Africa and project ethnocentric definitions of African identities (Ratele, 2001) is evident in the issues presented within this theme. The silencing around 'alternative' states of being coupled with the invisibility of 'alternative' communities within African societies speaks volumes of their position within South African terrain. From defining their relationships with the Trans men as 'lesbian' due to mainstream heteronormative definitions of sex and sexual acts, to terminating a relationship on the basis of the 'absence' of an appendage. It is evident that

historical influences of 'acceptable' sexuality and identity within African contexts extends its tentacles into South African contemporary society. It is this historical factor that influences the debate of 'alternative' identities within South African identities, more challenging to 'cross-borders' of similarities within global discourses of trans-men's experiences.

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## *Chapter V.*

### CONCLUSION

The study was mainly concerned with investigating 'masculinities' as a route towards understanding the meaning of the construction, performance, transition and South African citizenship of manhood through a specific focus on the experiences of trans-men. When I started the research I thought that the participants' transition journeys would illuminate the numerous routes towards an achievement of 'successful' masculinity within their specific contexts. However, as I conclude I now believe that the research process, methods and findings uncover multifaceted and complex layers towards understanding the hierarchal structure of 'masculinities'. More so, my analysis reveals the complex and contradictory locations each trans-male (and 'other' men) occupied within this gender category.

The research process was both challenging and rewarding. It involved *listening* to life and transition experiences of three trans-men, with a deep reliance on the participants' recollection, reconstruction and retelling of their experiences within their separate narratives. Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) argue that "narrative inquirers usually only have access to lives as told... narrative identities are dynamic, partial, fragmented, and context dependent..." (pp.128-130). It is therefore essential to acknowledge that whilst the research has discussed complex and versatile perspectives on masculinities through a 'transitional' lens, the data and findings only reflect the experiences of the three participants and is therefore not representative of an entire Trans community.

The heteronormative construction of gender creates and projects patriarchal expectations onto gendered bodies within societies, where individuals are expected to successfully enact these gender 'roles' in order to acceptably embody their assigned gender identity. The research findings develop Lorber's theory of gender construction, who argues that "bodies differ in many ways physiologically, but they are completely transformed by social practices to fit into the salient categories of a society, the most pervasive of which are "female" and "male" and "women" and "men", neither sex nor gender are pure categories"(Lorber, 1993, p.569). My analysis confirms Lorber's theory in light of the initial disconnect the men felt within their 'internal' and external selves. This 'distress' was often indicated by an intense discomfort in subscribing to social expectations ('girlhood') projected onto their gendered female bodies. It was often this realization that ignited the men's particular transition journeys.

Butler's influential work on the physical body as an active site of the *performance* of these ascribed gendered 'roles' warned of the assumed 'naturalness' these roles were presented as a way of ensuring conformity to the societal definitions. This form of social surveillance "regularly conceal[ed] its genesis" (Butler, 1990, p.190), in effect creating the influential gender binary system that relegates 'alternative' identities to the periphery of social, cultural and political boundaries. The research uncovered the intense socialization processes embedded in childhood activities, clothing and other areas of performative identity. The process reinforced gendered roles from an early age where parameters were passed along generational lines, using numerous sites to emphasize the importance of embodying the prescribed gendered behavior in children. The 'naturalness' of gender binary categories is entrenched, paving the way for individuals to essentially regulate each other's position within the institution. These theories are by now

standard orientations to the significance and embodied gendered lives, and the participants' collective experiences of the surveillance over their desire to adapt the opposite sex gendered roles involved often harsh rebukes or persistent correction. The participants' various struggles with the initial recognition of their seemingly 'same-sex' desires further illuminates heteronormative assumptions entrenched within gender as a theoretical and social concept. The anxieties and awareness of 'differences' experienced by the trans men in light of their seeming inability to 'fit in' with gendered structures, further exemplifies the constructed nature of gender to maintain patriarchal status quo. The participants' experiences act as mirrors reflecting daily and common place struggles the gendered physical body of those functioning within and independent of heteronormative expectations undergoes.

The initial labeling of the transitioning men's sexual attraction towards other girls/women as 'lesbian' can be strongly indicative of innate patriarchal constructions of gender, and also sexuality. The anxiety that accompanied this unraveling of sexual labels was mainly influenced by the men's respective cultural, religious and social realities, each operating within their own definitions of 'man', 'woman' and 'gender'. Evidently, these separate entities of society placed gender as a central determinant of sexuality type and its 'rightful' place within society. This social process of gender construction is just as prevalent within 'genetic' gender, as the trans men experiences within this study (whilst relevant to a Trans reality) presented a deeper understanding of physical and sexual expectations projected unto gendered bodies as a whole. Where, these experiences need not only be experienced by trans men but points towards the greater reality of society where patriarchal structures around gender effectively place heterosexuality at the very core of its 'naturalness'. This socialization process in turn, places

identities such as lesbian, homosexual, or bisexual at odds with mainstream society with regard to equality e.g. legal recognition of same-sex partnerships, child adoption laws etc.

Connell's influential theories on the different 'versions' of masculinity within the hierarchical structures of manhood proved an effective starting point and an essential guide towards uncovering the complex experiences and positions each trans-male encountered within his transition journey. Connell's notion of 'hegemonic' masculinity illuminated the men's engagements with South African negotiations with masculinities in a post-democratic space, particularly in their separate attempts to embody specific characteristics upheld within the South African 'hegemonics'. The analysis revealed the numerous activities, external 'signifiers' and overall regurgitation of the culturally hegemonic ideals the participants internalized and strove to embody to gain recognition as male from other culturally hegemonic males. This process of engaging hegemonic masculinity paves the way towards an understanding of the location 'transitional' masculinity plays within the overall hierarchal structure of maleness and reveals the centrality of hegemonic maleness in the experiences of even those who fall within the binary's margins. In many respects the research findings on the numerous levels of engaging these hegemonic ideals leads to the creation of simultaneous 'alternative' versions of Masculinity. The research revealed that notions of alternative masculinities emerged from both the realization of the futility of internalizing 'hegemonic' expectations and from new sources of courage and reflection on the implications of masculinity itself.

Although some of the men's constructions and performances of 'ideal' masculinity were culturally influenced, they shared a common understanding of masculine heterosexuality (one

deeply rooted within conservative South African norms); they share ideas about the value of heterosexuality as a key facet of successful masculinity and they agreed on what intimacy with heterosexual women should mean. An obstacle each man faced towards a seamless occupation of his masculinity (albeit 'transitional') was the rejection or interruption of their intimate and sexual relationships with and by their heterosexual female partners. This is an issue the majority of literature on transgender does not discuss. The absence of a physical penis played havoc with the Trans men's engagement with intimate heterosexuality, and discussion of this was painful for all participants. This opens up a critical area for masculinity studies – the meanings of heterosexual and masculine desire in the absence of typically structured bodies. It is a question whose parameters extend beyond the concern of Trans men's realities; the question of 'differently embodied desire' applies to people who are disabled, people whose bodies do not match the terms of their gender identity and sexual desire, and in the end comes to reveal the conservatism of conventional notion of the interaction between 'a body' and 'sexual performance'.

The modified definition of heterosexuality the Trans men embodied created a complex situation in which the men faced the need to negotiate both 'cultural masculinities' and 'hegemonic masculinities'. Through this negotiation the men crafted their own relationships to an 'alternative' version of masculinity versus a 'normal' one, which primarily involved a performance in which they were happy to be simply recognized as 'men.' The research revealed the central role women occupy within the conceptualization or reaffirmation of maleness as numerous 'men' theorists' Pleck (1992), Kimmel (1996), Brod and Kaufman (1996) described women's role within the 'recognition' of masculinity as central. A particular aspect of the men's experiences proved most telling of the societal assumption of genitals as inextricably linked to

one's gender identity, an assumption also covertly internalized by those who comfortably function within the confines of the gender binary system.

Revealed was the negotiation of definitions of heterosexuality the trans-men engaged within their pursuit of heterosexual women, and the way that failed relationships threatened the conceptualization of their own locations within definitions of 'maleness'. Paecther's (2003) theories on masculinities and femininities as 'communities of practice' is confirmed in light of the internalization of heteronormative patriarchal classifications of sex<sup>81</sup>, where the women often (and eventually) internalized the 'Gaze' onto their own bodies, placing the 'absence' of a penis on their male partners' bodies at the centre of their personal sexual orientations. The research revealed the presence of a phallus as central to definitions of sexual desire and 'sites' of pleasure as well as overall conceptualizations of 'femininity' in direct relation to the men's 'masculinity'. The study revealed an undercurrent of the necessity of 'dominance' of one physical body over another, a further indication of patriarchal influences over sexuality. The apparent centrality of the phallus within the definition and actual process of sexual intercourse is clear in both trans and genetic men experiences of sexual relationships. Sexual penetration, specifically by a male penis, appears to lend credibility to having 'real' sexual experience /intercourse, setting the parameters of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as prescribed by the inherent heteronormativity of gender differences.

The contradictory reality of the location of 'transitional' masculinity within South African space was revealed, with all three men by definition, successfully embodying hegemonic masculinity and nonetheless being fully aware of the ways in which their lives as 'alternatively' masculine

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<sup>81</sup>In this case I am referring to actual sexual activity and intercourse.

had been created. This conclusion was reached as specific cultural 'ideals' within each participant's context directly linked the male gendered body to power. The realities of race within contemporary South African society were evident in the unequal power associated to the men's manhood in direct relationship to their different racial positions within the hierarchy of recognized races of South Africa.

The impediments, both within social and cultural spaces, reveal the fragile components of the hierarchal masculinity structure. As Kimmel (1994) reveals, they create a culture of competition for acceptable 'versions' of manhood, a reality seen in the experiences of the FTM participants. This leads one to question the various socially, politically and culturally defined obstacles towards hegemony that operate as a form of social natural selection with hegemonic notions placed at the apex, effectively allowing specific few access to power and resources within South Africa and other societal contexts.

This research locates itself within South African gender and sexuality debates, as theorists Murray and Roscoe (1998), Morgan and Wieringa (2005), and Keenan (2006) all explore the complex and often dangerous locations 'alternative' sexualities and states of being occupy within contemporary South African society. The oppression of 'alternative' identities has a historical foundation in the ethnocentric colonial representations of traditional (and pre-colonial) African societies as devoid of these identities. It is this misrepresentation that saw 'alternative' states of being deemed as 'un-African', resulting in the silencing of these voices whilst favoring oppressive heteronormative discourses and practices as 'traditional'. The men's anxiety of 'detection' within their own cultural contexts and social interactions, particularly when engaging with culturally hegemonic males, indicated the palpable risk of the punitive consequences their trans status presented. These circumstances speak volumes into the urgent need for research,

societal discourse and overall visibility of these oppressed communities within African contexts, as key to undoing continued neo-colonial influences and representations of African societies and the identities of its people.

This research has attempted to deconstruct the performative aspect of gender by focusing on experiences involved towards creating one's gender identity independent of the body. It also engaged with the notion of the physical body as a changeable entity, capable of internally transforming from one gender category to another. An exploration of external influences that project specific expectations onto gendered bodies was also considered, further highlighting an unrealistic binary system of classification that fails to take into account the contextual and fluid nature of the human condition. It is this reluctance to expand notions and categories of 'identity' that labels 'alternative' states of being as 'deviant' and in this research's location, 'un-African'. I argue that more research is needed towards actively addressing the classification of 'alternative' sites of identity as 'un-African' in light of the fact that there are currently large gaps in theoretical frameworks around (historic and contemporary) African Trans communities. After all, it is a reality that the majority of African 'history' begins from 'post-colonial' contexts, insinuating that Africa did not have specific histories prior to colonization.

Although I am aware of the difficulties involved in attempting research around sites of huge silences, I believe the immense importance of this kind of research holds with regard to 're-writing' colonial history around 'pre-colonial' African societies. Future research within the trans-community could begin with studying the conversely gendered Performativities of 'femininities' within male-to-female transsexuals, as this research revealed the complex mutual exclusivity between 'masculinities' and 'femininities' within a social location.

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### **Appendix A: Participation Consent:**

*This is the consent letter I presented each participant with on the first meeting. After verbally providing an overview of the current year's research project and explaining privacy protocols given the sensitive information needed, each participant signed the paper to indicate their understanding of the research project and consent to participate in the study.*

Please read before answering the questions:

1. I am undertaking research into the concept of Gendered Performativities modeled on the experiences of FTM Transsexuals in South Africa/Cape Town. This is both for my own personal interest as well as for my Masters Thesis (2008) at UCT.
2. I am working closely with Liesl Theron (of GDX) in a close collaborative research process and she will ensure that the objectives and benefits of the research are in line with GDX mandates. My research findings will be used to further GDX resources and hopefully provide useful information on Trans experiences over wider range of experiences.
3. Any interviews (both audio and written) will remain **STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL & ANONYMOUS**, the names and circumstances of the participants will always be confidential, unless otherwise stated.
4. Participating in any interviews gives consent to my using them in my research study (with anonymity reinforced)
5. Please let me know if you want updates of my research or research findings if anything beneficial should come up.
6. **I may need to conduct more interviews over a course of time and only if you consent to, and feel comfortable enough with me and my research study.**
7. Feel free to include suggestions, comments or general questions about this interview or my general research study.

**Thanks for your time and contribution!!**

## **Appendix B: Primary Interview Questions for All Participants**

*A presentation of the research questions for the 'first round' of interviews I conducted with all of the participants. The themes were influenced by literature on gender and masculinities over a broad range of theorists. The interview focused on stimulating and obtaining narratives from the individuals, primarily acting as a 'guide', as often the interviewees would cover certain topics in their own chronology, and some questions were already answered within certain narratives whilst others were pointedly asked. These questions proved 'effective' in stimulating the participants to provide detailed responses.*

### **I. Childhood:**

Please walk me through your experience: growing up in early years, family dynamics, socialization and the process of how you became aware of your 'difference' from your cis-gendered peers.

1. What were the external signals (i.e. society, school, parents, peers, media) you received that enabled you to make the connection from your own awareness to the 'signifiers' you were expected to take on?
2. How did you react to society's and other people's demands on your body?

### **II. Transition to True Self:**

Please walk me through (in as much detail as you can) your transition process.

1. Having been raised and occupying the body of a woman, did you ever notice a disconnect between your emotional personality and the stereotypical personality attached to the female body?
2. After you started using hormones i.e. testosterone, did you notice a change in your emotional state? If you did, do you feel that this was more of a natural alignment or was more on a conscious process on your part?
3. Does this impact on your personal relationships/personal life?

### **III. Masculinity created outside the body.**

Please walk me through the process you undertook/take in order for society to read your body as Male.

### **Appendix C: Chuck's Follow-Up Interview Questions:**

*A presentation of the 'second-round' interview questions that are specific to each participant. These questions are directly influenced by specific issues raised within the individual's 'first-round' interview and seek to either clarify topics/experiences raised in the previous interview or an elaboration of specific issues relevant to the research question.*

1. Last time, you spoke about how your psychologist explained that your masculinity never changed throughout your difficult periods. Can you describe any instances or how your masculinity changes according/across contexts during your troubling times?
2. Your feelings of initially identifying as a butch lesbian, where you state 'you stick to what you have and do your best'. Where do you think this perception of gender as being inextricably linked to the Body came from in your opinion? What parts of your body did you feel you needed to lose or gain in order to fully identify as male i.e. the correspondence between internal and external Self? Would it have been possible to have felt like a man even though you were unable to dispose of/obtain those parts?
3. Was society's reading of your physical body an essential component to your identifying as a male? If so, at what age was this crucial and what is your feeling now?
4. You state that when you began presenting as a male, you had several long-term relationships with straight women, which you reported eventually failed. Whilst in these relationships, did you ever conceal your Trans status, at least initially? What were their reactions?
5. One of your previous partners said that she felt she was with a man all day, but got into bed with a woman. What do you think she meant by that? How or what do you feel she was basing her distinction between you 'X during the day' as her partner, and 'X at night'?
6. You described your eldest brother as a 'manly man' and your younger one as 'gangly'. Do you relate the difference within the 'masculine ideal' and their varying attitude towards you?

In relation to this question; does the immediate physical 'form' form an integral part of your perceptions of masculinity? And more specifically, the 'right' type of man?

ii.) In your comparison between the two, do you associate their varying interests with the 'type' of man/masculinity they embody? That is interest in sports and health= manly, whereas watching TV, coach potato= 'less manly'? Please expand.

7. You explained how your dad was very accepting of you, can you please describe his physical appearance? Why do you think he was able to support you whilst your eldest brother didn't?
8. You stated that your old friends were heterosexual men, how did you feel you were able to avoid 'detection'? Did your masculinity ever change/vary in different settings? For example in bars versus at home? Where did you feel you 'fit' into the masculine ideal in terms of the group? What 'type' of men were they culturally, physically? What do you think their reactions would have been if they had discovered your Trans status?
9. Do you feel your life would have been different if you had acquired access to bottom-surgery' earlier on in your life? What areas of do you feel would have been different? Why?
10. You stated that even though you grew up in an 'open' culture, the 'group' you played with still wouldn't let you forget you were a girl'. Please expand on that.
11. During your various psychological traumas, you state that you were made to feel that having those types of problems was 'un-masculine'. Who in particular made you feel this way? And do you believe this is a widely upheld belief?
12. What do you think it 'takes' to be a woman? I am trying to get your views on femininity from a male point of view. Do you find yourself regarding women in stereotypical ways sometimes?

13. You state that you think previously occupying a woman's body has made you more sensitive than majority of modern' men. What do you think 'modern' men don't do that 'sensitive/enlightened' men do? Do you think it's socially or culturally motivated?
14. In your previous relationships, you said that the women left because they wanted biological children and marriage. Do you think there's a lot of focus on the genitals being the embodiment of a gender identity? If you had had 'bottom surgery', do you believe the women would still have left, seeing as phalloplasty does not enable one to generate sperm?

#### **Appendix D: Larry's Follow-up Questions**

*A presentation of the 'second- round' interview questions that are specific to each participant. These questions are directly influenced by specific issues raised within the individual's 'first- round' interview and seek to either clarify topics/experiences raised in the previous interview or an elaboration of specific issues relevant to the research question.*

1. Last time you walked me through your childhood experience and the process of discovering your 'difference' from your cis-gendered peers, and you said that 'But I knew from an early stage that I wasn't a boy'; can you go into how your awareness of being in a gendered body living in a gendered society? At what age was your awareness?
2. You describe your school years as one of the more stressful times of your life, and for example in relation to sports where you felt the games were gender cast, so to speak and were also imposed on you based on gender. Let's imagine a scenario where you would have been allowed to chose your own game/sport; what sport do you think you would have chosen at the time, and why? Does the choice reflect your actual affinity to the game or does it represent masculinity in a particular way?
3. You mentioned that when you were still struggling to find your own identity or what was 'wrong' with you, you tried to be a good Christian etc; what role does your belief system play now in your Trans status?
4. From our discussion last time around your experiences with T, where you actually noticed a change in the way you felt and expressed emotions, and you seemed to attribute a lot of

differences between men and women to their physiological and hormonal make-up. Do you feel this is where the fundamental differences between men and women come from? Please walk me through your opinions/thoughts on the role sex hormones play in our lives as individuals and gender categories.

5. Does your belief come from your own experiences in hearing about Trans, or its pathologized stance in society?
6. You stated that after using T, you noticed that you were 'cut off' from your emotions? Please describe to me how you became aware of this change? What does it feel like to be emotionally distant from yourself exactly? Is this a problem in your relationships, previous or current?
7. You said that you felt the gap between you and women widening and between you and me narrowing, i.e. you could understand men more; was this a gradual process or a literal overnight thing? You described it as 'weird', please describe to me how you now relate to men differently from women, if possible, using an example from your life?
8. You said that initially, you tried to model yourself or rather you modeled your idea of masculinity on external sources, especially magazines and you now feel like men are also being targeted in like pressure or advertisers' targets. How do you feel the focus has now also shifted towards men whereas, previously, as you rightly stated, women are prime targets. How do you find yourself responding to this increased attention paid to men?
9. You describe how as a kid you all got water paints and you went and painted a moustache and beard on your face; was this a symbol of masculinity to you at the time? I notice you don't keep one now, or even last year; is this personal choice or do you not place emphasis on facial hair anymore?
10. What do you place a lot of emphasis on in relation to symbols of masculinity?

11. Have you had or planning to have 'bottom-surgery'? If not, why? \*Do you had/have relationships with heterosexual women? How do you go about explaining Trans especially if they are unfamiliar with the concept?
  
12. In my research, I've noticed that across societies and cultures, the concept of 'femaleness' is based on the opposite of what 'maleness' is not, and in your description of Afrikaans ideals of both, this came out as well. Can you describe more on the expectations of both men and women in your Afrikaans cultural community, and how do you think these have changed?
  
13. You described your how the State at the time controlled virtually everything including all forms of media, how do you feel your life would have been different, or at the very least our Trans process would have been different, if the media and other societal influences were free flowing and uncensored?
  
14. You described how when you were younger, you and your father shared a special bond, which you linked to your tom-boyish ways, but when you got older and went to school, etc, there was a distance between you. Do you think your gendered body as a female contributed to the distance, e.g. when your body blossomed etc, it sort of 'changed the rules' of your interactions, or rather how society would interpret the interactions?
  
15. Any final concepts or ideas you want to share that you feel would represent you and your life journey?!!

**Thanks so much!!**

## **Appendix E: Tony's Follow-up Interview Questions**

*A presentation of the 'second- round' interview questions that are specific to each participant. These questions are directly influenced by specific issues raised within the individual's 'first- round' interview and seek to either clarify topics/experiences raised in the previous interview or an elaboration of specific issues relevant to the research question.*

1. Last time you walked me through your childhood experience and the process of discovering your 'difference' from your cis-gendered peers, and you said that by 6 years old you knew there was a female and male' and you knew you were in a female body' So can you please go through how exactly you were of these things at an early age?
2. You spoke about your family rather your parents being aware of your process but they didn't pay attention to it per se, i.e. they didn't restrict you nor did they encourage you. What do you feel would have made your life/transition experience different if they had been so example, very opposed to your experience/process? How do you think you would have reacted to that?
3. You stated that you are and have been in a serious heterosexual relationship for about five years, at what age did you start noticing girls? And how did you approach them in terms of your Trans status (or even before you knew you were Trans)? How did people in your community setting react to this?
4. You also mentioned that when you were dating and the girls would find out about your Trans and immediately 'leave'; what factors do you think contributed to their decisions to terminate the relationships? How many girls would you say you dated before finally meeting your current serious girlfriend?
5. When explaining how your parents tried to 'prepare' you for your puberty experience of the female body, you were particularly upset about their suggesting that you could fall pregnant if you weren't careful etc. Did you also know that you were not only a man living in a female body, but you were a heterosexual one? How?
6. From our discussion on what it is that triggered your awareness of your 'difference', you stated one of them being that you mainly hang out with guys; were you always accepted in male groups? Did they ever make you aware that you were in a female body? Did you ever try to explain to them your feelings?
7. Do you have a current 'group' of friends, male? What 'kind' of men are they? I.e. athletic, couch potatoes, straight, gay etc?

8. When we were discussing the different expectations projected onto men and women, and you said that you didn't know 'your role' or rather what you are supposed to do, let's talk more about that; what you feel you don't 'know'.
9. You also said that you don't believe in 'gender', tell me more about that.
10. When explaining how relieved and 'complete' you felt once you started learning about Trans, and you said you started doing everything 'fully' like going to male toilets etc; was the discovery of Trans almost giving you permission to be yourself or why did you have so much more courage after encountering Trans word/experience?
11. Our previous discussions touched on your strong belief system i.e. Christianity, how did you reconcile this to when you previously identified as a butch lesbian before you found out about Transgender issues?
12. How have you managed to avoid the pitfalls of placing a huge amount of emphasis on 'having a penis makes you a man' by society and even people in the Trans community?
13. Being a SA citizen, and living and navigating society as black SA man, which cultural community do you think has the dominant ideal of masculinity?> I.e. which black community in SA do you feel/see/hear about the most in terms of their men and masculinity?
14. In our discussions on what you expect T to change in you, you mentioned that your way of thinking would change; do you think this is true of genetic males and females, i.e. do you feel because of the different levels and types of hormones in each, men and women are indeed different?
15. Have you ever been 'discovered' by males who were not in your circle or who you were unfamiliar with?
16. If let's say that the technology for 'bottom' surgery would have been better from a while back, would you have gotten the procedure done? Do you feel any past aspect of your life would have turned out differently if you had had a penis from way back?
17. What factors in the 'technology' of the prosthetic penis would have to be present in order for you to feel comfortable enough getting the procedure done finally?
18. Any final concepts or ideas you want to share that you feel would represent you and your life journey?!!

**Thank you so much for your time and contribution!!**