

**Performing Gender:
Transgenderism as Critique**

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Abstract

Performing Gender: Transgenderism as Critique Jodi Weir

This study is a critique of the social construction of gender through examining its performative nature in terms of filmic representations which deviate from the expected gender norms. Focus groups were conducted on *M. Butterfly* (1993) and *Orlando* (1992) which were selected because they are recent examples of films which implicitly critique the social binary of gender. Some of the issues addressed in the course of the research include: the ways in which the "rules" of gender and the gender attribution process shape our interaction with others, the ways in which individuals interpret representations of gender which transgress normative gender and how this connects with social reality, how gender transgressions conflict with the gender attribution process, and how gender can be viewed as performance. The conclusions are formulated in terms of connecting the notion of the performative to both filmic and real life representations of gender, as well as in terms of future work to be done in this area. My principal conclusions are that the fluidity and multiplicity of gender identification are reaching the general public, as evidenced by my focus groups, both through the academic sources and the media; and furthermore that this public finds some sympathy for the rejection of the traditional binary and stereotypical model of gender, and instead look at gender in terms of a continuum.

Acknowledgements and Dedication

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents.

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Introduction

There is a story about two small children in a museum standing in front of a painting of Adam and Eve. One child asks the other, "Which is man and which is the lady?" The other child answers, "I can't tell - they don't have any clothes on". (Shapiro 1991: 248, original source unknown)

This story, cited in varying forms, reveals much about the way in which gender is constructed. When we first see an individual, we tend to draw clues from an individual's appearance in order to identify whether they are masculine *or* feminine.

Generally, an individual's gender is viewed as being *either* masculine *or* feminine on the basis of their physiological sex. Gender is constructed to such a degree that we presume it to be sex-linked. But what happens when our interpretation of a person's gender, based on their outward appearance; made up of, for example, clothing, hair mannerisms, and speech, does not match their biological sex? How does this effect our perceptions of gender?

Gender is a social construct, independent of biological sex. Because it is socially constructed, gender can be viewed as something that is, or can be, performed. It can be used as a masquerade of an individual's sex. Those individuals whose gender does not match their sex, those who fall into the grey zone between the genders, can be viewed as challenging traditional gender constructions.

In most instances, our outward presentation of gender is based on visual cues, on the combination of sexual characteristics, gendered behavior and clothing - but when these do not match, doubts arise around the meanings of "masculinity" and "femininity". What does it mean to go against traditional images of gender? How do individuals interpret representations which challenge, or confuse, gender? What do these sorts of bodily representations tell us about masculinity and femininity? Are gender meanings fluid? Does a person's clothing necessarily reflect their biological sex?

This research is an exploration into the representation of the grey zone between the two genders in order to further expand the focus of gender studies. By looking at the grey area of the "transgendered", we will be able to utilize this research to look at the social construction of gender - of masculinity, of femininity, and of those who fall somewhere in between the two categories. By "transgendered" I am referring to the following: masculinized women, effeminate men, ambiguous or androgynous individuals, transvestites (drag queens, cross-dressers), and transsexuals (pre- and post-operative). The grey area in between the blue (masculinity) and the pink (femininity), of the transgendered, is referred to in the literature in a variety of terms, such as: cross-gendered, gender blending, gender bending, differently gendered.

Much of the work being done in the field of gender studies fails to take into account those individuals who do not fit neatly into the *either/or* categories of masculinity and femininity. By taking transgenderism into account, we can provide a more accurate portrait on the genders in the real world.

In looking at gender in terms of performativity, through the use of filmic representations which transgress gender, we expose the way in which the outward expression of gender is an act. These representations expose the constructed nature of gender by showing that gender does not necessarily match the sex of an individual. Using film as an example of representation, more specifically in terms of representations that challenge, or confuse, gender, we open up the debate surrounding gender to a new perspective which enables us to explore masculinity and femininity, as well as use transgenderism as an example of the performative nature of gender. The two films selected, Cronenberg's *M. Butterfly* (1993) and Potter's *Orlando* (1992) are used as illustrations of this performativity, and as a means for going beyond the existing stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

Films which confuse gender are useful for study in that they question the social construction of gender. Seen in this light, transgenderism provokes questions in terms of "body, gender, gender identity and subjectivity", challenging the notion of fixed gender identities, showing the performativity and fluidity of gender (Kuhn 1994: 54).

Rather than look at the aesthetic dimensions of film, this study will examine film from a social perspective, like Turner (1993) and Humm (1997) have done, in order to "locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself" (Turner: 3). Due to the social and cultural significance of film, it is useful tool for examining representations of gender in our society.

The theoretical framework draws mostly from the literature that deals with the social construction of gender. It is necessary to understand this perspective and the performative nature of gender in order to expose the limitations of the oppositional gender categories. Much of the work on transgenderism falls into two main theoretical camps, the social constructionist versus the deconstructionist perspectives on gender in order to deconstruct gender, we must understand its construction. Furthermore, the use of filmic representations of transgenderism opens up the discussion to the way in which individuals interpret and react to those who do not fit our expectations of gender.

This research project is made up of two main parts - the literature review and the film analysis. The literature review begins by outlining the various definitions surrounding gender, and the process by which we make gender attributions based on outward presentations, drawing mainly from social constructionism, then outline Butler's theory of performativity - a deconstruction of the gender dichotomy. I then review the literature that deals with various aspects of transgenderism, such as transsexuality and cross-dressing. The next part of the literature review outlines Turner's use of film as social practice, and finish with feminist film theory.

In the methodology chapter I explain my use of data collection through focus groups, and the issues that came about during the course of my research project. I decided to utilize focus groups as a method of research, since I wanted to assess public perceptions of emerging transgenderism rather than simply comment on the films myself. The two film chapters focus in depth on two main films (*M. Butterfly* and *Orlando*) with two focus groups for each film. The data gained from the focus group interviews will be examined in terms of recurring themes within the groups regarding both gender and transgenderism - including the way in which individuals interpret gender transgressions. The analysis will look for agreement both within and between groups, as well as conflicting interpretations - finally tying their responses to the theoretical review.

By looking at gender in terms of performance, through the use of filmic representations of transgenderism, I am attempting to show the degree to which gender is constructed, and the influence that this construction has on our interactions with others.

Chapter 1 - Sex, Gender, Transgender - The Literature Review

The review of the literature will begin with outlining the definitions and theories about sex and gender, then move into the link between gender and gender signs, particularly clothing, and review the literature that deals with the various forms of transgenderism. By using social constructionism as a starting point, I am attempting to lay the foundation for Butler's (1990) deconstructionist theory of performativity. Although social constructionism is a response to biological determinism, it is more useful in this case to contrast this perspective with that of Butler's deconstructionist position

Because I am not interested in an aesthetic reading of the chosen films, I am using Turner's (1993) notion of film as social practice to guide the film analysis. His perspective is briefly outlined, followed by the feminist film theories which look at gender representation.

Part One - Sex and Gender

If we are to examine the role that transgenderism plays in destabilizing the social construction of gender, we must first define what we mean by gender. In most conceptions of gender, we often find that sex and gender are linked. Sex is defined as "one's biological status as having one or the other set of primary sexual characteristics, i.e. male or female" (Devor 1989: vii). It includes:

chromosomes, external genitals, gonads, internal sexual apparatuses, hormonal states, secondary sexual characteristics (Bolin 1988: 24, c.f. Stoller 1968: 9).

Sexual identity is "a person's acceptance of their membership in a particular sex category as either a male or a female" (Devor 1989: vii).

Gender, on the other hand, is defined as

the psychological, social, and cultural domain of being male or female. Gender is a social construction and system of

meanings with multiple dimensions including gender identity, both personal and social (Bolin 1988: 24).

Within our conceptions of gender, it must be noticed that it is an either/or relationship. Each gender is constructed in relation to being different from the other. Because of the fixed boundaries of the social construction of gender, we can see the importance of gender within human history and why it is resistant to change.

Garfinkel (1967) in Studies in Ethnomethodology, outlines a series of "common sense" rules about gender showing the concrete boundaries that surround gender.

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' 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). (Bornstein 1994: 45-50, c.f. Garfinkel 1967).

But as Bornstein comments, rules *are* meant to be broken. Exceptions to the rule, cross the border that is created between the genders (Bornstein 1994: 51-52).

Within the social sciences gender has been defined in many different ways. Within sociology we tend to examine the way in which gender is socially constructed. Gender can be seen as "something socially achieved, dramatically performed, a set of culturally produced practices of daily life" (Plummer 1996: xiv). If gender is something that can be constructed or performed, then one is not born gendered, one becomes gendered.

If gender "lies at the core of an individual's self-definition" then anything that questions the fixity of gender therefore threatens the fixity of self-identity (Ramet 1996: xii). Because of the strength of gender on our self-identities, we tend to look at people in terms of signifiers which identify the other person's gender (Ramet 1996: 5, Shapiro 1991: 248).

Gender is composed of gender identity, gender roles, gender socialization and gender attribution. Gender identity, as discussed in the preceding paragraph, is basically the answer to the question, "Am I a man or a woman or a what?" Gender roles are those roles that pertain to our "belonging or not belonging to a specific gender" which are easily identified by others, and gender socialization is the "process by which gender expectations in the society are learned" (Bornstein 1994: 24-26, Bullough 1993: 312, Andersen 1993: 35). The socialization process is what guides and control our gendered behaviors and gender attribution process. Andersen outlines the four ways that this occurs:

First, it gives us a definition of ourselves. Second, it defines the external world and our place within it. Third, it provides our definition of others and our relationships with them. Fourth, the socialization process encourages and discourages the acquisition of certain skills by gender (Andersen 1993: 36).

Gender attribution is the process by which we identify individuals according to gender. We treat others according to our attribution of gender, often based on a combination of clothing, movements, and mannerisms.

Devor (1989) outlines the process by which one's gender is communicated to others, by studying a group of gender blending women. These women were often confused as men, and "they used the gender attribution process to their own ends" such as gaining employment in male-dominated jobs, or to protect themselves from unwanted sexual advances (Devor 1989: 152). Like Goffman (1959), she describes this process as "impression management" in which an individual engages in,

by means of gender role characteristics and behaviors, the gender and sex which they wish to have attributed to them (Devor 1989: 147).

For the most part, impression management is largely on a subconscious level, but what is conscious are the "social 'facts' of gender identity and gender attribution" (Devor 1989: 147). This is further explained:

they know what gender they are and the genders of the persons with whom they interact. This knowledge tells them how they ought to behave and what they ought to expect from others (Devor 1989: 147).

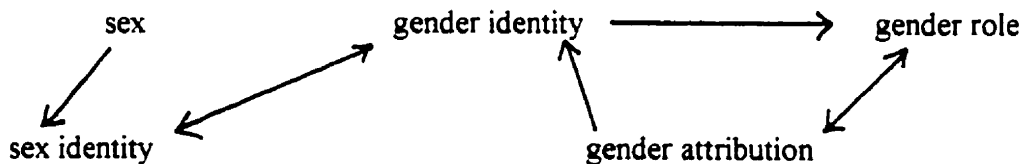
Therefore, in daily interaction with others, gender is often used as an indicator of an individual's sex, and act according to the gender attribution made (see figures 1 - gender attribution process, and 2 - gender identity/attribution cycle).

figure 1. GENDER ATTRIBUTION PROCESS



(Devor 1989: 148).

Figure 2. . GENDER IDENTITY/ATTRIBUTION CYCLE



(Devor 1989: 149)

Once a gender has been attributed to an individual, we assume that certain things will follow the gender, such as "dress and demeanor, sex object choice, occupation"

(Ekins 1996: 2). Most aspects of our social lives are organized around gender dichotomies. When gender lines are crossed - the gender dichotomy is threatened.

Devor develops an alternative to the current gender attribution schema based on gender blending. Gender would then begin from

a recognition that sex identity, sex attribution, gender identity, gender attribution, and gender roles can all combine in any configuration. ... Genders would become social statuses available to any persons according to their personal dispositions and their exhibited behaviors (Devor 1989: 153).

This alternative to gender attribution process is a "transitional step" between the masculine/male feminine/female gender split and a future where gender "would become obsolete and meaningless" (Devor 1989: 154).

Part Two - Gender and Gender Signs

It is possible to look historically at fashion as a means of examining the relationship between appearance and gender. Clothing styles are based on prevailing social norms, and on individual taste. Appearance is composed of more than the clothing chosen to cover the body, it includes "[p]ostures, manners, and body gestures", our appearance "constitute[s] identity, sexuality, and social position" (Shreier 1989: 2, Craik 1994: 46). Both appearance and gender are linked because there is an interplay between the two that "strengthen, modify, test, qualify and confirm each other" (Shreier 1989: 3-4). If we assume that a person's clothes reflects their gender, and if a person's gender reflects their choice of clothing, then what happens when one gender starts wearing the gender signs of the other? (Shreier 1989: 5).

Furthermore, our outward appearance does more than signify our identities as men and women, it signifies our public identities, the face that we show to the world (Steele 1989a: 6-8). At the same time, fashion is not stable. The only constant about fashion is that "distinctions will always be made between men and women" even if our conceptions

of gender change (Kidwell 1989: 126). What we believe is appropriate in matters of appearance for men and for women is based on "a powerful, complex, and pervading system of values about what is appropriate male and female behavior" (Foote 1989: 144). When one gender borrows the clothing from the other, it is often feared that the dividing line between men and women will be erased, that the divide between men and women is threatened. And if this relationship is threatened, it is feared that the "equilibrium of society" would in turn be threatened. When there are changes in the gendered mode of appearance, as attitudes toward men and women's behavior change, society tends to redefine "what it is to be and look like a man or a woman" (Foote 1989: 146).

Part Three - Presentation of Self, and Performativity

Goffman (1959) analyses social interaction from a dramaturgical, or theatrical, perspective. If we apply this analysis to the social construction of gender, we can see the ways in which gender is actually *performed*. The performance aspect of this analysis, is summarized by Goffman as

the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance (Goffman 1959: xi).

The impression that we wish to convey to others, or the impression that we gain from others, is drawn from certain information carrying signs. It is through these "sign vehicles" that we

glean clues from his conduct and appearance which allow them to apply their previous experience with individuals roughly similar to the one before them (Goffman 1959: 1).

The individual's public appearance, or "front", aids observers in interpreting the behavior (Goffman 1959: 22). The personal front includes both the individual's appearance and his or her mannerisms. For the most part, appearance and manner coincide - and we expect this to occur, for when they do not, confusion occurs (Goffman 1959: 25).

These sign vehicles are based upon socially constructed, often stereotypical, representations of appearances and mannerisms which shape our behavior and attitudes towards others. Any appearance or action that does not consistently match the expected performance, must be hidden if the performance of the social front is to be successful (Goffman 1959: 30, 35, 41).

This leads us to the issue of misrepresentation of the self - described as a "false" front, where the appearance does not match the reality of the situation. The false front is a dangerous performance, because at any given moment, the performance could be discovered as a fraud - "bringing them immediate humiliation and sometimes permanent loss of reputation" (Goffman 1959: 59).

Our interpretations of a person's appearance and behavior draw from existing stereotypes, a "common sense" framework for interpreting behavior along two lines:

the real, sincere, or honest performance; and
the false one that thorough fabricators
assemble for us, whether meant to be taken
unseriously ... or seriously (Goffman 1959:
70).

Social interaction is based upon our impressions of others, and the management of our own impressions. It is through these impressions that we gain information about others that we interact with socially, as a means of shaping our interpretations and responses to others.

Butler's theory of performativity could be seen rather superficially as reflecting Goffman's dramaturgical perspective, but a closer examination reveals that her use of performativity is a critical response to the social construction of gender. For her, the

gender dichotomy is a hidden relation of power that produces and reproduces the stability of gender based on the "heterosexual matrix" (Butler 1990: viii). By looking at gender in this way, Butler is interested in asking

What best way to trouble the gender categories that support gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality? (Butler 1990: viii).

In other words, how can we expose and disrupt the constructed gender dichotomy?

Butler's performativity is hinted at in her introduction when she describes Divine's female impersonation in John Waters' films as an example of the way in which gender is an "impersonation that passes as the real", when she asks:

Is drag the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established ?(Butler 1990: viii).

Gender is constructed to such a degree that we tend to assume it to be "natural ... original ... inevitable" and this is why Butler attempts to radically deconstruct the gender dichotomy through looking at the performative nature of gender.

Drawing from Foucault's genealogical approach, Butler is interested in exposing the politics which shape and control gender. Like the goal of feminism is "to understand how the category of 'women' is produced and restrained by ... power", Butler attempts to understand how gender is produced and reproduced by power because it is impossible to study gender without looking at the culture and politics that surround it (Butler 1990: 2-3).

Social constructionism initially was a response to biological determinism. If gender is a social construction then "gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex", furthermore, if gender is not sex, then "a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way" (Butler 1990: 6). Butler's critique of gender as it is constructed is based on the way in which it "suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings

inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies", a form of circular reasoning that infers that gender is doomed to follow biology as the body becomes marked by gender (Butler 1990: 8).

In this respect, gender "can be understood as a signification" that "exists only *in relation* to another opposing signification" (Butler 1990: 9). In other words, the gender dichotomy exists in relation not only to what gender a person is, but what gender a person *is not*. The construction of gender "requires that certain kinds of 'identities' cannot 'exist' - that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex" (Butler 1990: 17). Those who do not fit into the gender dichotomy "expose the limits and regulatory aims" of the construction, drawing attention to the subversive nature of the transgendered (Butler 1990: 17).

Compulsory heterosexuality is necessary for maintaining the stability of the gender dichotomy - the "hidden" power that produces and reproduces the oppositional categories of masculinity and femininity (Butler 1990: 22-23). Within the regulatory practices of gender, we can see that gender must therefore be performative - for Butler there is "no gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (Butler 1990: 25).

Taking de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born a woman, but rather one *becomes* one" as inferring that "no one is born with a gender - gender is always acquired" Butler takes this one step further:

if sex and gender are radically distinct, then it does not follow that to be a given sex is to become a given gender (Butler 1990: 112).

How can multiple gender identities challenge the opposition construction of gender? How can this be constituted as a subversive act? (Butler 1990: 125)

Butler explains her notion of performativity in terms of the way that the outward expression of gender is made up of

acts, gestures, enactments, generally constituted are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler 1990: 136).

Gender is performative in that these acts are the expression of "the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core" which serves to hide its own performativity by "maintaining gender in its binary frame" (Butler 1990: 136, 139).

Butler's (de)construction of gender concludes by stating that if gender is indeed performative then

there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender (Butler 1990: 141)

Thus the performativity of gender exposes the construction of gender as "fact" to be a false construction, a "regulatory fiction" which keeps us within the boundaries of the gender dichotomy.

Part Four - Transgenderism

The term transgendered or cross-gendered has been used to describe those individuals who are either gender ambiguous or gender fluid (Bullough 1993: 313). At the same time, most, if not all, people do not fit perfectly within the realms of masculinity or femininity, most tend to "have elements of the opposite gender identity in their makeup" (Bullough 1993: 313). Since so much of what we assign to masculine or feminine behavior "is socially and culturally derived" throughout the world, throughout the ages, the genitals are not "a universal or essential insignia of lifelong gender" (Bullough 1993: 360).

The early texts on transsexualism are often psychological-medical in nature. The main texts include: Benjamin's (1966) The Transsexual Phenomenon, Walinder's (1967) Transsexualism: A Study of Forty-Three Cases, Stoller's (1968) Sex and Gender, and

Green and Money's (1969) Transsexualism and Sex Reassignment. Recent researchers direct their attention to the transsexual individual within the broader context of society.

Some of the issues include:

such broad questions as the meaning of the transsexuals' transformations, the qualitative aspects of their experience, and what their experience reveals about American cultural norms (Bolin: 4).

These researchers include Kando (1973), Feinbloom (1976), Kessler and McKenna (1978) and Raymond (1979).

Brierly's (1979) work outlines the development of the psychological perspective on gender "disorders". He acknowledges the way in which "male homosexuals, lesbians, transsexuals and transvestites have sprung into public attention" (Brierly 1979: ix). He points out that the greatest development in this area of study is the removal of the notion of "sexual perversion" being equated with transgenderism. While the link between perversion and transgenderism is still used in the literature, the more appropriate psychological term is "gender dysphoria". Gender dysphoria is "a state of discomfort associated with the masculine or feminine role appropriate to the physical sex of the individual" (Brierly 1979: x).

There has been much work done on the topic of transvestism within the realm of psychology. Both Brierly (1979) and Docter (1988) provide a comprehensive review of the most important literature. The term "transvestite" was coined by Hirschfeld, a German sexologist in the twentieth century, in Die Transvestiten. In his study of cross-dressers, he found that transvestites were most often heterosexual. The large amount of research done on transvestism/ cross-dressing has been broken down into three main areas: fetishistic transvestism (sexual), non-fetishistic transvestism and transsexualism (Garber 1992: 132).

Stoller (1968), like Hirschfeld, sees transvestism as a pleasurable action for adult male transvestites, with the individual having a "relatively stable feminine gender persona,

in the context of desire to preserve male heterosexuality" (Brierly 15-16, Stoller: 1968). Similarly Walinder (1967) equates transvestism with a heterosexual desire. Unlike Stoller, Stekel (1968) views transvestism as a "mask for homosexuality", Mayer-Gross et al (1954) follows along similar lines, viewing it as a homosexual fetish (Brierly 1979: 16). The literature is mostly divided on the subject of transvestism as being one of three things: a heterosexual fetish, a homosexual fetish, or a fetish that can manifest itself in both.

Docter (1988) points out the social constructedness of gender:

One of the most explicit social rules of our society is that you are expected to present yourself in public situations in a manner consistent with your anatomical sex, and such presentation is expected to be unambiguous (Docter 1988: 4).

He explains the importance of gender identity in shaping the individual's outward persona. Gender identity refers to "those theories of ourselves that reflect masculine or feminine characteristics as judged within a given cultural framework" (Docter 1988: 82). Docter's psychological perspective is useful for supporting the argument that gender is socially *constructed* - not inborn. Within our culture, with its two-sided model of gender, connects to our view of society that gender identity must conform to an individual's sex, outward appearance and behavior:

that one's identity and behavior should be masculine if you are a male, or feminine if you are a female (Docter 1988: 82-83).

Those who do not fall into either category of gender are considered anomalies - and are subject to a deviant stigma. Some tend to be categorized as having gender dysphoria, and submit to gender re-training etc. (Docter 1988: 64-66).

Irvine's approach is from the sexology perspective - drawn from psychology. Her description of the goal of early gender researchers is

to understand and enhance heterosexual relationships. This would be accomplished in two ways: by seeking to understand the origins and development of masculine and feminine behavior and by attempting to explain gender "failures" (Irvine 1990: 230).

This approach serves to explain "normal" gender identities through an examination of "deviant" ones. The process of gendering individuals is based on individual gender and social norms, through which "transgressors face a dizzying array of admonitions regarding the proper conduct of 'real men' and 'real women' " (Irvine 1990: 231).

The rise in numbers of differently gendered individuals serves to

reveal the inadequacy of theories that unilaterally align gender identity, gender role, and sexual preference and instead demonstrate the varying permutations and combinations of sexual and gender expression (Irvine 1990: 235).

The wide range of gender possibilities and activities must be accounted for within any theoretical perspective.

Modern sexology's gender research places less emphasis on "examinations of male-female differences and more on areas such as homosexuality and transsexualism, which are deemed to reveal, indirectly, gender "truths" " (Irvine 1990: 237). Furthermore, the transgendered "represent a challenge to traditional notions of maleness and femaleness" (Irvine 1990: 270). Gender blended individuals show us that gender is not rigid.

Most of the non-psychological literature on the transgender identity has been in the form of autobiography, i.e. Jorgensen (1967) Christine Jorgensen: A Personal Autobiography, Morris (1974) Conundrum: An Extraordinary Narrative of Transsexualism, Richards (1983) Second Serve: The Renee Richards Story, Bornstein (1994), Gender Outlaws, and Rees (1996) Dear Sir or Madam: The Autobiography of a Female-to-Male Transsexual. In these autobiographies,

the authors deal with the problem of how to describe to others the need for an integrated and authentic sense of self, and the relief that comes through attaining this in sex reassignment (MacDonald 1998: 8).

The self can only become one with the body for most transgendered individuals with body altering surgery. But most importantly these personal accounts help us to understand the transsexual identity and the conflict that occurs between inner and outer selves.

Bolin's work concentrates on the social realities of transsexuals - with her research into a transsexual support group. She describes the identity of pre-operative male-to-female transsexuals:

These people are women who have male genitals ... living in the female gender for some time now. Their bodies have been feminized as a result of female hormones and they pass undetected in society as "natural" women. They fall asleep as women, wake up as women, and are women in all respects but one (Bolin 1988: 2).

Their gender identity becomes more important than the physical body that they are housed in. In order to feel truly like one's "true" self, the transsexual must go through the process of making their outer body conform to their inner body, their gender identity.

Transsexuals engage in the process of becoming a woman both "hormonally and socially" (Bolin 1988: 8). The transition from male to female encompasses more than a change in social identity, it entails:

the individual's role, performance, and others' perceptions of that performance but [also] ... personal identity (the individual's self-concept) (Bolin 1988: 8).

All of this occurs during the metamorphosis from male to female, or female to male, permeating the totality of interactions between the individual and society.

There is often confusion between the terms transsexual and transvestite, but Bolin distinguishes between the two:

It is the transsexual's feeling that she is a female trapped in a male body who cannot continue to live as a man that distinguishes the transsexual from the transvestite (Bolin 1988: 13).

While the transsexual dresses in women's clothing, they do so in order to match their appearance with their feminine gender identity (Bolin 1988: 14).

Bolin includes a description of transsexualism from one of her informants. A transsexual is:

a person whose mind, thoughts, feelings, soul if you will, are in opposition to his or her physical body. This person usually has a clear psychosexual identity, but the disharmony of body to this identity is endless frustration. The only solution is to have body altering surgery, thus matching as best as can be done the mind and the body (Bolin 1988: 14).

We can see the importance of an individual's own gender identity.

The self, or personal identity can "see the self through other's eyes" (Bolin 1988: 27-28). Personal and social identity interact in the presentation of self, much like Cooley's (1920) looking-glass self, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective (Bolin 1988: 28).

Bolin's work with male-to-female transsexuals has permanently changed her previous (mis)perceptions surrounding gender:

Nevermore would I be able to take gender for granted and assume that gender and genitalia were inextricably connected (Bolin 1988: 34)

Once an individual becomes aware that gender and genitalia are not linked, it becomes difficult to assume that every person will "fit" into the expected gender category.

The transsexual's act of dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex is not an act of artifice. Instead

the transsexual as opposed to the drag queen, has an inner female essence, covered by a male body. The transsexual is

therefore not engaging in an illusion but in a concrete representation of her inner self (Bolin 1988: 79).

For Bolin, it comes down to the individual's "true" gender identity. It's not a lie if the person is expressing their inner self on their outer body.

Like Bolin, Califa's (1997) Sex Changes examines the phenomena of transsexuality, gender dysphoria and transgenderism. Her approach is composed of interviews, autobiographies, socio-cultural analysis in order to provide a comprehensive view of the way

differently-gendered people's perceptions of themselves and the perceptions of those outside the gender community have evolved, and some of the complex political and social issues (Califa 1997: 1).

Califa, unlike the psychological-medical literature, does not view the transgendered as needing to be "cured" of their defect, instead, what needs to be fixed is "our fear and hatred of people who are differently gendered" (Califa 1997: 82). Furthermore,

Those of us who are not transgendered can hardly ever be trusted to make accurate judgments about transsexuals because we don't see them the way we see each other (Califa 1997: 116).

This is due to the strength of our belief in gender attribution schemas, where we assume that a person's outward appearance, or outward presentation of gender will accurately reflect their biological sex.

Drawing from this, Califa believes that it is

worth it to spend some time ... thinking about how your fear of transsexuality [and transgenderism] manifests itself, and how your fear of stepping outside the boundaries of "appropriate" gender conduct limits your life (Califa 1997: 117).

The transgendered reveal the limits of our "normal" gendered lives because they create

an alternative: to identify as transgendered rather than female or male, and question the binary gender system that generates these labels (Califa 1997: 225).

Those who do not attempt to fit into the "normal" gender categories often become activists for the transgendered because it

feels better to fight oppression, even though it is hard work, than it does to run away from it and try to hide (Califa 1997: 225).

Gender is more than just an individual issue, it is a highly political issue.

Wilchins, editor of In Your Face speaks of the importance of political activism for the transgendered:

Its about all of us who are genderqueer: diesel dykes and stone butches, leatherqueens and radical fairies, nelly fags, crossdressers, intersexed, transsexuals, transvestites, transgendered, transgressively gendered, intersexed, and those of us whose gender expressions are so complex they haven't even been named yet (Califa 1997: 242, c.f. Wilchins 1995: 4).

The "gendeRevolution" is an important fight, especially for the "genderqueer", to fight "against gender-based oppression - all the ways in which culture seeks to regulate, confine, and punish bodies, gender and desire" (Califa 1997: 243).

Transgender politics and activism is important because of the continual "questioning [of] the entire system of binary and polarized gender" instead of trying to "be perceived ... as a member of either gender" (Califa 1997: 245). The goal of transgender politics is to "insist on their right to live without or outside of the gender categories that our society has attempted to make compulsory and universal" (Califa 1997: 245).

Bornstein (1994) comments on the compulsory gender categories

The trouble is, we're living in a world that insists we be one or the other - a world that doesn't bother to tell us exactly

what one or the other is (Califa 1997: 245; c.f. Bornstein 1994: 8).

Bornstein's definition of transgendered is broad, including "anyone who might be dissatisfied with gender", and a potential transgender activist "dedicated to opposing polarized systems of 'opposite' sexes" (Califa 1997: 258).

Bornstein blurs the line between the "normally" gendered and those who are not, in order to erase the "stigma" of the differently-gendered (Califa 1997: 258-259). Bornstein defends this position:

nearly everyone has some sort of bone to pick with their own gender status, be it gender role, gender assignment, or gender "identity" (Califa 1997: 258-259; c.f. Bornstein 1994: 118).

Almost everyone has felt the constraints of their gender at some point in their lives, whether or not they attempt to do anything about it.

But, for Bornstein, it is not enough to be aware, a transgendered individual is "anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself" (Califa 1997: 259; c.f. Bornstein 1994: 121). Califa questions these same issues:

Why does our society allow only two genders and keep them polarized? ... Why do transsexuals have to become "real women" or "real men" instead of just being transsexual ... And why can't people go back and forth if they want to? (Califa 1997: 260; c.f. Califa 1983).

These are important questions for the study of gender. It points to the strength of gender beliefs within society. People like to be able to fit others into neat categories, they must be *either* one gender *or* the other. Anyone that does not fit, makes people uncomfortable.

While most individuals accept the term transgendered, not all do. For example, O'Hartigan comments on this:

Naming is power ... The beginning or end of freedom lies in the power to name ourselves - or others. There are names

for people such as I - transsexual, galla, changeling, male-to-female, sex-change. The names describe us (Califa 1997: 261; c.f. O'Hartigan 1993: 20).

Naming *is* power, and the ones who have the power of nomenclature, are the ones who insist on categorizing others based on what they are not, i.e. not "normal". Naming can be freedom, but it can also be used to judge and constrain others.

Unlike Bornstein, Califa believes that it is not necessary to get rid of gender entirely because

If the concept of gender freedom is to have any meaning, it must be possible for some of us to cling to our biological sex and the gender we were assigned to at birth while others wish to adapt the body to the gender of their preference, and still others choose to question the very concept of polarized sexes (Califa 1997: 275).

She challenges her readers by asking:

If you could change your sex as effortlessly in reality as you can in virtual reality, and change it back again, wouldn't you like to try it at least once? ... Are you able to imagine becoming a hybrid of your male and female self ...? (Califa 1997: 277).

Perhaps the reason why most people cannot accept that gender does not have to follow genitalia, precisely because they cannot imagine themselves as anything other than what they are due to the strength of our gender programming. Or perhaps they fear discovering something about themselves that will place themselves outside of the gender "norms".

MacDonald's (1998) essay focuses on the transgender identity and politics, and the treatment of transgenderism by feminists. She begins by commenting on the earliest feminist text on transsexuality by Raymond (1979), Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male (MacDonald 1998: 3). Raymond's position on transsexuality is clear when she compares the male-to-female transsexual to a rapist:

All transsexuals rape women's bodies by reducing the real female form to an artifact... Rape, although it is usually done by force, can also be accomplished by deception (MacDonald 1998: 4; c.f. Raymond 1979: 104).

While her position is extremist in nature, it "reflects a deep ambivalence in the relationship of feminism to the question of gender" and to the blurring of traditional gender categories (MacDonald 1998: 4).

We all recognize that gender is a social construct, but we tend to view it as "determined immutably by one's assigned sex" (MacDonald 1998: 4). For example, in most of the literature on gender

No thought is given to the unique perspectives that transgendered people might have to contribute to the understanding of gender experience, gender relations or of women's oppression (MacDonald 1998: 4).

The problem with ignoring the unique perspectives of the transgendered by feminist and other gender theorists is that it is often assumed to be a psychological-medical issue, therefore an individual problem. Due to this, the "transgender experience is effectively eliminated from political concern" (MacDonald 1998:4). MacDonald attempts to remedy this problem by examining the politics of transgenderism.

MacDonald's main argument is that transgenderism

specifically problematizes ... identity itself. Transgender identity is about identity experienced as problematic; the experience of being transgender problematizes the relationship of the self to the body, and the self to other (MacDonald 1998: 5).

One of the main reasons that the transgender identity is problematic is because it goes against the "normal" gender conceptions by having a body (sex) that does not correspond with the expected gender identity. The self, or gender identity is in conflict with the body

hence the transgender identity creates a problematic relationship both within the individual and within society.

MacDonald's conception of transgender is very broad, for her it

includes all those people whose internally felt sense of core gender identity does not correspond to their assigned sex at birth ... includes people who identify with the gender other than that assigned at birth as well as those who do not identify with any gender at all ... includes those who present themselves in their originally assigned sex, as well as those who present themselves in the sex which coheres with their actual identity (and therefore may include non- and pre- and post-transsexual people) and those who move back and forth between presentation as women and as men ... includes those whose gender presentation is ambiguous (MacDonald 1998: 5).

Gender does not always connect with an individual's sex. It is composed of a number of related variables such as assignment, roles, identity, status, relations, attribution and behavior (MacDonald 1998: 6).

The transgender identity has led to the idea of transgender politics.

Transgender politics

is often about how the categories of, and the boundary between, male and female, or masculine and feminine, are set at all (MacDonald 1998: 8).

This brings up the concept of "liminality". Liminality is

on the threshold, the edge, or the borders, where no rules hold, where contests over authority sometimes take place (MacDonald 1998: 9).

The concept of liminality is useful

for asking questions about what establishes the boundary limits of the categories we use, and for considering how these categories can be destabilized, or how these boundaries are transgressed (MacDonald 1998: 9).

Furthermore, by crossing the boundaries of gender, the transgender identity

provokes the question of how those [gender] categories are established. How are they maintained? How are the boundaries of what is normal "policed"? How can they be transgressed? (MacDonald 1998: 9).

Transgender politics point to ways of challenging traditional gender categories. Like many other types of identity politics, transgender politics "directly challenge the stabilization of category boundaries" (MacDonald 1998: 9).

In all forms of identity-based politics, including transgender politics,

it is in the nature of the identity itself to be problematic, contested, transgressive, and liminal. It is in the capacity of the identity to indicate spaces of liminality and difference *within itself* that presents new challenges to previous theoretical paradigms of identity formation (MacDonald 1998: 10).

Those that exist on the margins, on the borders of "normalcy" point to the possibility of transcending the gender dichotomy.

Another form of gender transgressive behavior is cross-dressing. Cross-dressing is the practice of wearing the clothes of the opposite sex. It is the umbrella term for a wider set of practices. The range of practices include:

simply wearing one or two items of clothing to a full-scale burlesque, from a comic impersonation to a serious attempt to pass as the opposite gender, from an occasional desire to experiment with gender identity to attempting to live most of one's life as a member of the opposite sex (Bullough 1993: vii).

Although some writers tend to use the terms cross-dressing, drag and transvestism interchangeably, they refer to different types of dressing in clothes of the opposite sex. Drag is often used to refer to a theatrical performance of cross-dressing, for example,

female impersonators, as a form of entertainment, whereas transvestism is often used within psychology.

Cross-dressing is not a recent phenomenon. It has its roots in the earliest theatre performances around the world - men, or boys, would play women's roles because women were not allowed to perform on stage. In other cases, women would play the roles of young men - for example, the role of Peter Pan, has almost exclusively been played by women (Garber 1992, Moore 1994). Now that women can and do play many roles in the theatre, why do performers still dress up in clothes of the "opposite" sex? Moore answers:

drag performances convey important truths about perception, gender roles, and sexuality. [They] played with sexual stereotypes to demonstrate that much of what we call gender is based on perception alone (Moore 1994: 2).

Drag performances compel audiences to question the boundaries that separate masculinity from femininity and vice versa.

Instead of blurring the separation between the genders, performers tend to shape their performances of the other sex based on "the essence of an 'ideal' man or woman", not on real life portrayals (Moore 1994: 2). It is a challenge for any drag performer, to meet the image of the "ideal".

Before delving into the theoretical literature that deals with cross-dressing, it is necessary to provide a short overview of the history of this phenomenon. Both Garber (1992) and Moore (1994) provide detailed accounts of the history of cross-dressing, using historical documents - newspaper clippings, laws, photographs, diaries etc., that chronicle the development and continued use of clothing to portray the gender of the "opposite" sexes - although neither seem to have discovered much about women who cross-dressed, unlike Bullough (1993), Dekker (1989), and Hotchkiss (1996), who focus on early cases of female cross-dressing.

Bakhtin's (1984) work on the carnivalesque connects with the subject of cross-dressing. During the time of carnival, many of the daily prohibitions become weakened. Everything becomes inverted, exaggerated, grotesque (Bakhtin 1984: 18-19). The mask, or masquerade, is an important theme of the Middle Ages and Renaissance carnivals. The mask is a symbol of "transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries" (Bakhtin 1984: 39-40). It can disguise, alter appearances. During the masquerade, it is acceptable for men and women to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex - cross-dressing becomes socially sanctioned fun (Bakhtin 1984: 410-411). The transvesting activities of the carnival are threatening to the everyday social norms which govern our lives. It threatens the very structure of society, offers an "unofficial truth" (Morson 1990: 453). The mask plunges the social world into the realm of uncertainty, contradictions within the social fabric come to light (Clark 1984: 304). Hence when cross-dressing occurs outside of the carnival time, it threatens the existing gender roles and norms that appear to be stable.

During the medieval and Renaissance times there were many sumptuary laws which were created to restrict the styles of clothing worn according to an individual's rank or social class. The role of these laws was, ideally, to make it easy to read a

person's social station, social role, gender and other indicators of identity in the world ... without ambiguity or uncertainty (Garber 1992: 26).

Many of these sumptuary laws which deal with gender are drawn from Deuteronomy:

The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment; for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God (Deut. 22:5).

Although there were sumptuary laws in effect, it did not stop cross-dressing in the sixteenth century (Garber 1992: 27-28). The biblical law against cross-dressing was used

by the Puritans to put an end to the theatre - in which cross-dressing was performed by young boys playing women's roles.

With the rise of King James I, the sumptuary laws began to be reversed, unisex styles of clothing began to be popular in Jacobean England (Garber 1992: 30-31). In 1620, writing began to appear on the social, moral and cultural implications of cross-dressing. Two of these in particular, Hic Mulier: Or, the Man-Woman, and its response, Haec-Vir: Or, the Womanish-Man were responses to the anxieties of the time - the question of whether or not "clothes, in fact, make the man - or woman" (Garber 1992: 31). It questioned whether fashion was *the* representative aspect of the self.

The theatre was the only place where the sumptuary laws of dress did not seem to apply. It was within this space where clothing that was forbidden by law to wear could be worn without fear of recourse. The most obvious example of cross-dressing in the theatre is Shakespeare's plays. Furthermore, it points out the role of the cross-dresser as "an index of category destabilization" (Garber 1992: 36). The transvestite threatens established cultural categories precisely because he or she is "both a signifier and that which signifies the undecidability of signification" (Garber 1992: 37).

Cross-dressing in the theatre is not just an Elizabethan phenomena. All we have to do is examine the theatres of the world: the ancient Greeks, the Kabuki theatres of Japan, the Chinese operas. In the Kabuki theatres, Japanese actors play women's roles both on-stage and off, "they are almost expected to become women" (Bullough 1993: 83). The use of cross-dressing in theatre shows that all actors are "impersonators" - that every character is a performance (Garber 1992: 40). In many cases women's roles were given to boys because "it was considered improper for women to be on stage" (Moore 1994: 1, Bullough 1993: 76). But in other cases, when women were allowed to perform on stage, they took the roles of boys, for two main reasons: the first being that the costumes of boys allowed them to bare more flesh than was allowed in everyday life, the second being that

young boy actors were often not skilled enough to perform certain roles (Moore 1994: 1, Straub 1991: 142, Bullough 1993: 82-83).

There have been many cases of real life cross-dressing as well. One notable historical cross-dresser is the Chevalier d'Eon, an eighteenth century spy and diplomat from France. While d'Eon was in England, he was surrounded by rumors that he was a woman, eventually the French King Louis XV ruled that he was in fact a woman, and forced d'Eon to wear women's clothes for the rest of his life. During this time, d'Eon never confirmed nor denied his gender. It was discovered upon his death, that d'Eon was, really a male. But why did he live out his final years as a woman, if he was in fact not? (Kates 1991: 167-184, Bullough 1993: 126-132).

In the case of female cross-dressers, it was not frowned upon as seriously as was male cross-dressing, because for a woman to dress like a man, it meant that they were trying to better their position in life (Bullough 1993: 46, Dekker 1989: 1-2, Hotchkiss 1996: 3). There are many occasions when it became acceptable for women to don men's clothing, such as "during carnival festivities, during riots, while traveling or in flight" (Dekker 1989: 6).

There is also the case of Billy Tipton, a jazz musician, who was discovered, upon his death in 1989, to be a woman. Not even his wife and children knew "his" true sex. His cross-dressing was explained: "Jazz musicians in the thirties, forties and fifties were almost all male" (Garber 1992: 68). His cross-dressing became "normalized", or explained away.

Similarly, in many films which have a cross-dressed character, the person dresses in clothes of the opposite sex in order to "disguise himself or herself in order to get a job, escape repression" (Garber 1992: 70). The cross-dressing is explained as a means to an end. In most cases, the cross-dresser in the film presumably returns to his or her "normal" state of dress. Garber suggests that the cross-dresser

opens up the whole question of the relationship of the aesthetic to the existential (Garber 1992: 71)

It serves to challenge and disturb traditional binary categories of gender. But by normalizing, or explaining away the transvestism, the transformative power of the cross-dresser on gender distinctions is removed.

In current times, transvestism is a recurring topic on talk shows. More times than not, transvestism is equated with homosexuality. This equation is explained:

if there is a difference (between gay and straight), we want to be able to *see* it, and if we see a difference (a man in woman's clothes), we want to be able to *interpret* it. In both cases, the conflation is fueled by a desire to *tell the difference*, to guard against a difference that might otherwise put the identity of one's own position in question (Garber 1992: 130).

This equation explains away the threat to individual identities rather than confront issues of gender fluidity.

Newton (1972) examines this connection between homosexuality and cross-dressing in terms of the gay drag (female impersonator) scene. The professional drag queen is viewed as a professional homosexual (Newton 1972: 3). In her research, *all* female impersonators were gay, for example, when asking a drag queen about this connection, the reply was:

In practice there may be a few [straight female impersonators], but in theory there can't be any. How could you do this work and not have something wrong with you? (Newton 1972: 6).

The word "wrong" focuses on the stigma that surrounds the homosexual transvestite scene. Newton's use of Goffman's theories of stigma and presentation of self are interesting, but at the same time, she excludes the possibility of the straight female impersonator, based on the assumption that "no one but a 'queer' would want to perform as a woman" (Newton 1972: 7). Perhaps this was the attitude at the time that this was written, but the exclusion of this possibility, leaves her work open to criticism.

Johnson (1997) follows Newton's lead in his ethnography of transvestite ("gay") beauty contests in the Philippines, while mostly descriptive passages about the gay transvestite life, makes some interesting points about identity. Identity is a "process of communication" about oneself to others (Johnson 1997: 19, c.f. Handler 1994). Furthermore, identity is "not a destiny but a choice" (Johnson 1997: 19, c.f. Weeks 1987: 47). Much like Goffman's use of "sign vehicles" in the presentation of self, we can choose to actively work to portray our gender identities (Goffman 1959: 1).

Transvestism/ cross-dressing/ drag acts to destabilize and challenge many boundaries:

not only "male" and "female", but also "gay"
and "straight", and "sex" and "gender"
(Garber 1992: 133).

Cross dressing challenges the dichotomies of both sex and gender, not in terms of erasing binary categories. Instead, it "denaturalizes, destabilizes and defamiliarizes sex and gender *signs*" (Garber 1992: 147).

Cross-dressing can be normalized or explained away as a means to an end; or even more damaging, it can lose its provocative potential, becoming a harmless form of entertainment, incapable of calling into question, "the limits of representation" (Garber 1992: 149). By examining the effect that cross-dressing has on sex and gender *signs*, "on *reading* and *being read*" leads to a deconstruction of the performance of gender (Garber 1992: 149). The deconstruction of sex and gender signs makes the phenomena an important area for theorizing the social construction of gender.

Cross-dressing, when looked at as a performance of gender, questions "the 'naturalness' of gender roles through the discourse of clothing and body parts" (Garber 1992: 151). Furthermore, Garber finds that the various forms of transvestism throughout history to the present day is a "critique of the possibility of 'representation' itself" (Garber 1992: 353).

That cross-dressing existed in the early days of theatre - from Shakespeare to Kabuki theatre in Japan - and its continued existence in drag shows and in films, "testifies to the primacy of cross-dressing as spectacle" (Garber 1992: 389). The practice of cross-dressing, through concealment and revelation, questions the very "truth" of sex and gender signs, of the construction of masculinity and femininity.

Butler (1990) views drag as the ultimate impersonation of gender. It is important to the study of gender because it

destabilizes the very distinctions between the natural and the artificial, depth and surface, inner and outer through which discourse about genders always operates (Butler 1990: x).

In other words, it crosses the boundaries that make up gender. Furthermore, she questions whether "drag [is] the imitation of gender, or does it dramatize the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established?" (Butler 1990: x). The outward expression of gender is made up of these signifying gestures which include appearance, mannerisms, behavior, all of which are performative

in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs (Butler 1990: 136).

In other words, gender is performative because the components that it is made up of are but expressions, or illusions, of an inner gender identity.

Butler comments that drag "effectively mocks ...the expressive model of gender" (Butler 1990: 136-137). Drag subverts our conceptions of gender as fixed. It exposes

the way in which the relationship between primary identification - that is, the original meanings accorded to gender - and subsequent gender might be reframed (Butler 1990: 137).

Drag opens up the possibility to see through the ways in which we identify with gender and classify others accordingly because it is a performance of gender that "plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (Butler 1990: 137).

Making a distinction between the performer's body and gender, Butler suggests that the drag performance creates "a dissonance not only between sex and performance but sex and gender, and gender and performance" (Butler 1990: 137). By looking at drag as revealing the performative nature of gender, Butler questions the "stability of the masculine and the feminine", opening up the possibility of multiple gender identities expressed through its performance (Butler 1990: 139).

Bullough and Bullough follow along similar lines, for them, cross-dressing is a symbolic journey "into territory that crosses gender boundaries" (Bullough 1993: viii). Their aim in studying cross-dressing is to provide a new understanding the social construction of gender:

It is not only important to understand why some individuals cross dress but why so many do not. What is it that encourages people to stay within the defined gender boundaries? (Bullough 1993: ix).

By studying cross dressing in this way, not only do we begin to see how much of gender is performed, we also become aware of how deeply ingrained gender is upon those who do not cross dress.

The notion of the image as a re-presentation or potentially false construction of reality is discussed in "Sexual Disguise in the Cinema". Kuhn (1994) questions:

What happens, though, when the masculine-feminine dualism becomes so prominent an issue that the very cultural stability proposed by the categories is rendered subject to challenge? (Kuhn 1994: 48).

In other words, what happens to conceptions of gender when gender becomes confused? The cultural stability of the gender dichotomy becomes weakened when gender becomes confused.

It is from this point that Kuhn begins her analysis of cross-dressing in film. She comments on the lack of work being done in this area of representation within film theory. Kuhn examines cross-dressing in terms of performance. Cross-dressing is a

play on a disjunction between clothes and body - the socially constructed nature of sexual difference is foregrounded and even subject to comment: what appears naturally then, reveals itself as artifice (Kuhn 1994: 49).

This leads us to question about how much of gender is "natural" versus "artificial".

The narratives of most films with cross-dressed characters often deal with mistaken gender identities, such as *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *Tootsie* (1982), *Victor Victoria* (1983), and *The Crying Game* (1992), which bring to light

questions about the ways in which gender is socially constructed: it may even subject to a certain interrogation the culturally taken-for-granted dualities of male/female and masculine/feminine (Kuhn 1994: 50).

Representations of cross-dressing draws on existing representations of gendered bodies (of masculinity, of femininity). Cross-dressing is constructed from pre-existing meaning and ideology that deals with gender. It can be analyzed along two lines - in terms of performance and of gender identities (Kuhn 1994: 51). The intersection of gender and performance combine a variety of meaning systems which are re-constructed through the practice of cross-dressing.

Cross-dressing plays on performance where gender becomes an act to be put on. It makes use of clothing - which is itself a signifier, most often of the wearer's gender. Clothing is "an outward mark of difference, of a fundamental attribute of the wearer's

identity" (Kuhn 1994: 53). But clothing is not a stable signifier of a fixed gender, it can be used "to disguise, to alter, even to reconstruct, the wearer's self", therefore opening up room to question whether gender is fixed (Kuhn 1994: 53).

The idea that gender can be fluid threatens constructions of gender as fixed dualisms of maleness and femaleness which shape so many aspects of our society. We expect that a person's appearance reflects their true sex. The truth can be concealed underneath the clothing, it can create a "distance between body and clothing, between 'true' self, the fixed gender of ideology, as assumed persona" (Kuhn 1994: 54). Cross-dressing turns this distance into a potentially transformative space - in which the stability of gender is weakened.

Not only does cross-dressing open up the space between the body and gendered clothing, it also creates a wider space of self-referentiality. Cross-dressing exposes the "conflation in ideology of body, gender, gender identity and subjectivity" (Kuhn 1994: 54). It threatens the fixity of the subject by questioning the fixity of gender identity. In doing so, it "has the potential, in consequence, to denaturalize the subject" (Kuhn 1994: 54). Cross-dressing serves to weaken the notion of gender and sexual difference - both of which are seen as "natural" differences.

Part Five: Film as Social Practice

Turner's (1993) text, Film as Social Practice is an introductory work which combines film theory with cultural studies to explore the social aspects of film. Unlike most film theorists which look at film from an aesthetic perspective, such as Monaco (1981), Giannetti (1993), and Bordwell (1990), Turner focuses on film as "entertainment, as narrative, as cultural event" (Turner 1993: 1-2). Turner aims to gain an

understanding of its production and consumption, its pleasures and its meanings, is enclosed within the study of the workings of culture itself (Turner 1993: 2).

By seeing film as a social practice, we can study film as one of "the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself" (Turner 1993: 3).

The cultural studies perspective of looking at film as social practice, looks at film "as a specific means of producing and reproducing cultural significance". Furthermore, while representations are open to interpretation, they do not enter into a realm devoid of meaning. Meanings pre-exist representation, representations always "enter a charged social and conceptual field" (Armstrong 1996: 10).

The main reason that Turner gives for wanting to study film is because it is "such a source of pleasure and significance for so many in our culture" (Turner 1993: 42). We have become a society in which "bodily experience, visual pleasure, and social discourse have become interconnected" (Armstrong 1996: 11). Due to this reasoning, he chooses to focus on the following relationships: "between the image and the viewer, the industry and the audience, narrative and culture, form and ideology" (Turner 1993: 42).

Beginning with the relationship between the image and the viewer, we must first look at the notion of film as language. Film is not an actual language, but because it creates meaning through the various filmic techniques, it is much like language. Since film creates meaning, it is a form of communication, which we can view it within the wider context of meaning creation within the culture itself (Turner 1993: 44). Meaning is defined in terms of the visual in this instance, images become "the representations of the real seen through the camera's eye" (Denzin 1991: vii).

Turner's classification of film as language draws from Barthes conception of language which "includes all those systems from which we can select and combine elements in order to communicate" (Turner 1993: 44; c.f. Barthes 1973). Language does not name reality, it creates reality (Turner 1993: 45).

The image, like words, carries meaning. Turner describes the language of the image:

There is a 'language' for visual representation, too, sets of codes and conventions used by the audience to make sense of what they see. Images reach us as already 'encoded' messages, already represented as meaningful in particular ways (Turner 1993: 46-47).

The process of analyzing a film involves discovering the way in which meaning is expressed through the film image.

The narrative of the film is often based on certain filmic conventions. Narrative conventions exist as a kind of "shorthand" or code as a means of getting certain messages across efficiently - and it is because of this, that existing conventions are difficult to break (Turner 1993: 83).

We cannot examine film as a social practice without taking into account the role of the audience. One of the problems in studying the relationship between the audience and the film industry is that it is difficult to determine which shapes production - audience preference or industry preference? (Turner 1993: 95-96). Any study which takes the audience into account tends to focus on psychoanalytic theories of the filmic gaze - in this case, the gaze, or look of the audience, or spectator. Within Freudian analysis, the look becomes important "since it part of the individual's self-definition and relation to his or her environment" (Turner 1993: 113). The position of the spectator, is that of the voyeur, one "who 'makes an object of " the images of the gaze (Turner 1993: 113).

Turner disagrees with the notion of the spectator as voyeur, because the audience knows that the actors and actresses know that they are acting in front of a camera - therefore the act of watching a film cannot be a voyeuristic experience. Instead, he believes that the audience tends to identify with the images on the screen (Turner 1993: 114; c.f. Metz 1982).

Identification with the characters aids the spectator in interpreting the images on the screen. It is through this process that the filmic apparatus (the camera, the projector) "becomes our eyes" (Turner 1993: 115). We can begin to see the role of the audience in interpreting the image. The viewer engages in "active interpretive strategies":

A part of ourselves disappears into the screen, and we rediscover that part in a different way. This is inevitably a self-reflexive process, a strategy of displacement and replacement, with the aim being to discover more and more about who we are and why we feel what we feel (Burnett 1995: 202).

We become drawn in and absorbed by filmic representations, returning to ourselves at the end of the film, not only with our subjective interpretation but with greater self-knowledge. The idea of multiple readings, or interpretations of films is useful for studying the image from a spectator's point of view, unlike some theorists who deny the viewer an active role in creating meaning. Furthermore, the process of identification is like that of Lacan's mirror stage of identification where the screen becomes " a mirror of ourselves and our world" (Turner 1993: 115). Since the image interpreted in terms of both personal and social meanings, it is not surprising that we find commonalities and differences between viewers' interpretations, due to the investment of social meaning upon images, the personal meanings that we derive from representations are strongly shaped by cultural norms.

The meaning generated by the film is as much dependent on the film text as it is on the audience. It is necessary that we understand that the film text contains within it a wide variety of meanings - therefore meaning cannot be considered to be "fixed" - it is open to a wide variety of audience interpretations. "Audiences make films mean; they don't merely recognize the meanings already secreted in them" (Turner 1993: 123).

Turner goes on to examine the relationship between film, culture and ideology. For him, unlike Humm, film "does not reflect or even record reality", instead, it "re-presents" or re-constructs reality (Turner 1993: 131). As film

works *on* the meaning systems of culture - to renew, reproduce, or review them - it is also produced *by* those meaning systems (Turner 1993: 131).

To study film in terms of representation is to study the relationship between film language and film ideology.

The film text - made up of both its production and its reception - is always linked to ideology. They must

work to resolve social contradictions symbolically, what they must deal with are those existing political divisions or inequities between groups, classes or genders which have been constructed as natural or inevitable within our societies. Films, then, both as systems of representation and as narrative structures, are rich sites for ideological analysis (Turner 1993: 133).

By looking at the ideological content of films, it opens up the analysis for understanding the relationship between film and society (Turner 1993: 147, Mayne: 20-21).

Part Six: Feminist Film Theory - Representing Gender

Humm (1997), in Feminism and Film, expresses eloquently the reason why we must include feminism in film studies

because all representations, visual or otherwise, are what make gendered constructions of knowledge and subjectivity possible. Without representations we have no gender identities, and through

representations we shape our gendered world (Humm 1997: vii).

This is an important point to think about since it answers questions about the nature of the social construction of gendered bodies. Humm describes film as reflecting "social power structures at large" - that "film acts largely as a social mirror" (Humm 1997: 13).

Most of feminist film theory focuses on the notion of the "male gaze" - so it is necessary to begin with Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). In this essay we are introduced to the filmic gaze. Her premise is that:

the film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight,, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle (Mulvey 1975: 14).

Mulvey describes the gaze as masculine, reflecting patriarchal structures. This in turn shapes our "ways of seeing and pleasure in looking" (Mulvey 1975: 15).

The pleasure that film gives us derives from "its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure" (Mulvey 1975: 16). One of these pleasures is scopophilia - pleasure in looking. Freud connects scopophilia with the visual objectification of others, "subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (Mulvey 1975: 16). Scopophilic pleasure exists on a continuum where, at its most extreme, it becomes a perversion - voyeurism. Mulvey focuses on the "objectification of the female star for the voyeuristic gaze of the spectator" (Stacey 1994: 10). The audience's scopophilic pleasure becomes a narcissistic pleasure in looking at the human body in which

curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world (Mulvey 1975: 17).

This connects with Lacan's mirror stage of identification. We identify with the screen image when we engage in active scopophilia. Mulvey separates the pleasure of looking into binarisms - active/male and passive/female - where the male gaze objectifies the female image (Mulvey 1975: 19). Filmic conventions create the (male) gaze where women become objects to be consumed visually.

Mulvey's approach to the gaze can be questioned on many points - the main ones include her insistence that voyeuristic pleasure, or direct scopophilia, is only a masculine pleasure in which women can only be the object. The other problem with her analysis is her claim that the gaze is always male - what about the female gaze? How can she explain the enjoyment that women gain from watching films?

Mulvey's essay has sparked many debates surrounding the issues of the filmic gaze and visual pleasure. The premise of her essay is that "the male protagonist of a film provides a vehicle for identification on the part of the male spectator" (Mayne 1993: 26). Her theory of identification follows along the traditional gender binary - that men identify with men on the screen, and women identify with women, leaving no room for cross-gender, or even genderless, identification (Mayne 1993: 26).

One of the questions that Stacey poses toward Mulvey's conception of the filmic gaze is: "If the images we see on the cinema screen are produced for the 'male gaze', how do female spectators relate to such representations?" (Stacey 1994: 9). Central to the debate surrounding Mulvey's treatment of the filmic gaze is her conclusion that the gaze is always a masculine one (Stacey 1994: 20).

Feminist film theory is caught in a dilemma - faced with the realization of the visual pleasure that both men and women gain from watching films, versus the issue of the representation of women, and the exclusive focus on the male spectator, they must find a way to account for the female spectator (Mayne 1993: 30).

Stacey criticizes the use of psychoanalytic frameworks because "they theorize identification and object choice within a framework of binary oppositions (masculinity/femininity: activity/passivity) that necessarily masculinize active female desire" drawing on the idea that female spectatorship differs from male spectatorship, but not because their perspective must be masculinized in order to gain scopophilic pleasure from the cinema (Stacey 1994: 27). Instead, she discusses the various forms of readings and identifications that women make during an active reading of the cinematic text, where each woman draws from her own experience in interpreting what she sees (Stacey 1994: 30).

In contrast, Cowie (1984, 1989), argues for "multiple positions of cross-gender identification" through which both men and women draw their identification. She calls for a re-theorizing of the ideas behind "the scopophilic pleasures of voyeurism and fetishism" since the traditional ideas of voyeurism and fetish are both directed at women as the object, denying the possibility of enjoying either (Stacey 1994: 30). Mayne also suggests that we should not view cinematic identification as being gendered - instead, this identification should be viewed as fluid:

[f]rom this vantage point, positions may well be defined as masculine and feminine (or both), but they are taken up by spectators regardless of their gender or sexuality (Mayne 1993: 71).

Judging from both Cowie and Mayne, we should find that respondents will engage in multiple-viewing strategies, regardless of gender identity.

One of the main problems with the feminist conceptions of the (male) gaze is that it fails to take into account Cowie and Mayne's notion of multiple viewing strategies. Furthermore, what happens to the gaze in the case of filmic representations of gender transgressions? And is the notion of the gaze even viable in this case?

Chapter Two - Methodology

My research is composed of four main parts - the theoretical, the literature review, and the methodological, and the practical application. In deciding to use film as an example of gendered representation, I began by screening a number of films, and selected two for the focus of the practical application of theory. The two films, *M. Butterfly* (1993) and *Orlando* (1992), were chosen based on their representations of the grey area of gender in terms of transgenderism, in order to show what these representations say to us about masculinity and femininity. Focus groups seemed to me to provide the most viable methodology for the research of gender.

While there are other methods of collecting data, such as surveys and interviews, these forms are more useful for collecting quantitative data in order to "give the researcher a picture of what many people think or report doing" by taking the data gained and then "generalizes results to a larger group" (Neuman 1997: 31). Survey research is more suited for "research questions about self-reported beliefs or behaviors" and measured on a series of variables and test their hypotheses (Neuman 1997: 228-231). Face-to-face interviews, on the other hand, unlike survey research have the advantages of observing "the surroundings and can use nonverbal communication", but at the same time this can be a disadvantage as well. For example, the "appearance, tone of voice, question wording" etc. can impact the participant (Neuman 1997: 253). Field research, also known as participant observation, or ethnography, is often used for "observing and interacting in the field setting for a period from a few months to several years" (Neuman 1997: 32). This form of research is viable "when the research question involves learning about, understanding, or describing a group of interacting people" (Neuman 1997: 344). Unlike questionnaires, focus groups are cheaper to conduct, and they are better suited for producing "insights on

why people feel as they do about a particular product or issue or behavior" (Bernard 1994: 226).

The focus group method of collecting data was developed by Lazarsfeld and Merton in the 1940s at Columbia University. Bernard discusses the resurgence of this method:

While the focus group method was a commercial success from the 1950s on, it lay dormant ... for more than 20 years. This is probably because the method is virtually devoid of statistics. Since the late 1970s, however, interest among social researchers of all kinds (Bernard 1994: 226).

One of the main areas that focus groups are used is in marketing and advertising research (Babbie 1995: 249).

Both Neuman and Babbie describe focus groups as a useful means for collecting data for exploratory research because the "group dynamics that occur ... very frequently bring out aspects of the topic that would not have emerged from interviews" (Neuman 1997: 253, Babbie 1995: 250).

There are many advantages and some disadvantages to using focus groups in research. Babbie, drawing from Krueger (1988) outlines the main advantages and disadvantages of using this method of data collection. I will present each of Babbie's points and comment on them based upon my experience with the four focus groups used in this research project.

The advantages include:

1. the technique is a socially oriented research method capturing real-life data in a social environment.

This is a strong point to consider when choosing any research method. The format of focus groups enables participants to freely express their opinions, their interpretations of the films, encouraging discussion between group members.

2. it has flexibility

The format's flexible nature is conducive to free expression of ideas. Because of its open ended nature there is plenty of room for discussion, for disagreement etc.

3. it has high face validity

Because of the flexible nature of the focus group, you can take what is said during the course of the focus group session to reflect their attitudes and perceptions of gender.

4. it has speedy results;

The focus groups were approximately four hours long - which included viewing time and the interview sessions which were about ninety minutes long. If you include the transcription time, however, it does not exactly have speedy results.

5. it is low in cost (Babbie 1994: 250, c.f. Krueger 1988: 44-45).

Relatively speaking, it is low in cost, depending on one's financial means. It cost me approximately 20\$ to 25\$ per group - which includes the film rental, coffee or tea, juice and snacks, plus 15\$ for the cassettes. So this research endeavor cost almost 115\$.

The main disadvantages include:

1. focus groups afford the researcher less control than individual interviews

I did not find this to be a disadvantage. In fact, the lessening of control took a large amount of pressure off the participants, and off myself. Both the informants and I were more relaxed, and the participants felt more free to discuss the issues that came up during the discussion.

2. data are difficult to analyze

I do not understand why focus group data is difficult to analyze. Qualitative data can be examined in terms of recurring themes, agreement within and between groups, as well as disagreements. It provides interesting, dynamic information.

3. moderators require special skills

Perhaps if the issues at hand are potentially of risk to an individual's physical and psychological well-being, but when it comes to interpreting films, the main skill that a moderator needs is that of patience and a willingness to listen. It was not extremely difficult to moderate the groups - in fact it was even fun.

4. differences can be troublesome

I found that any differences that arose during the course of the focus groups to be extremely interesting. Differences are good. If everyone all thought the exact same thing, what would be the point of social research?

5. groups are difficult to assemble,

It was not difficult to recruit people who were interested in participating in the focus groups, but it was difficult to get the groups together due to the differing schedules that each person had.

6. the discussion must be conducted in a conducive environment (Babbie 1994: 250; c.f. Krueger 1988: 44-45).

To me this point seems more like good advice than a disadvantage. Of course any form of research that involves human subjects must be conducted in a conducive environment. That is why the focus groups took place at my apartment, and snacks and beverages were provided in order to make everyone more comfortable. Before starting each film I made sure that everyone was introduced to one another, and outlined the procedure of the focus groups and gave them time to ask me questions about the project - both before and after the session began. As well, I offered them the option of how they wanted to be identified

in the data. I wanted everyone to be comfortable with participating in the project - and I believe that it shows in the data.

It was decided that I have two focus groups per film because often

more than one focus group is used, since there is a serious danger that a single group would be too atypical to offer any generalizable insights (Babbie 1995: 250).

The focus groups were to be composed of six individuals (three male, three female), on one occasion there were only four people in a group and I decided to go ahead because this group was extremely dynamic. On two occasions, in focus groups three and four, there were individuals that did not talk very much, except to agree with statements that the more talkative individuals made - their voices were almost non-existent on the taped sessions.

Each group was required to watch the selected film, then participate in an hour and a half long discussion of the film, and other related aspects dealing with gender. The form of the focus group was open, beginning with getting the informants' initial impressions of the film, then connecting the film with gender within society. My role within the focus group was that of a mostly silent observer, occasionally posing questions, or asking for clarification. The initial sample was based on convenience, and then the other informants were recruited through referrals from initial participants (see tables one to four for breakdown of the groups).

table 1. FOCUS GROUP ONE - M. BUTTERFLY

SEX	AGE	INITIALS
M	28	B
F	22	C
M	27	T
F	27	D

table 2. FOCUS GROUP TWO - ORLANDO

SEX	AGE	INITIALS
F	22	B2
F	23	C2
F	25	P
M	27	A
M	27	R
M	28	D2

table 3. FOCUS GROUP THREE - M. BUTTERFLY

SEX	AGE	INITIALS
M	28	R2
M	28	A2
M	24	B3
F	26	C3
F	22	H
F	22	S

table 4. FOCUS GROUP FOUR - ORLANDO

SEX	AGE	INITIALS
M	27	A3
M	26	J
M	28	B4
F	23	A4
F	25	J2
F	23	J3

My main goal in using the focus groups is to get a broad range of opinions and interpretations of the films and the informants' attitudes about gender. My belief is that gender is so ingrained in us, that the informants will often confuse the culturally shaped gender with that of biological sex, and this should come out during the course of the discussions. When talking about gender, especially in terms of masculinity, femininity and the grey area in between, of transgenderism, there is often confusion with regards to the language used to describe gender - with that of biological maleness and femaleness. For example, the use of the term "it" to describe an ambiguous or cross-gendered individual.

For the most part, the group discussions would start out fairly slow, until someone said something disagreeable, until the point where, long after the taping finished, people would still be debating various issues brought up in the course of the discussion, to the point where informants would call me and wish to further discuss the selected films. For the most part, the talkative individuals requested that I start a film discussion group, or include more films in my analysis.

The data gained from the focus groups will be analyzed in terms of its content, both for comparable and contrasting opinions. The information culled from the taped sessions will then be used in conjunction with theoretical work that has been done on the subject, and on the films themselves.

Chapter Three - *Orlando*

There can be no doubt about his sex, despite his feminine appearance that every young man aspires to (voice over, *Orlando* 1992).

Gender is an issue from the beginning of the film. Swinton's androgynous looks "draws attention to the instability of traditional gender motifs" (Humm 1997: 165). The film *Orlando* (1992), based on Virginia Woolf's book, follows the life of Orlando from the 1600s to the present, beginning with his life as a man, and then following her life as a woman. Woolf's novel "shows that the categories by which we locate ourselves (gender, identity, history, language) are perpetual performances, proliferating self-reproductions" (Schaffer 1994: 26). Orlando's change from man to woman is described by Woolf:

Orlando had become a woman - there is no denying it. But in every other respect, Orlando remained precisely as he had been (Woolf 1928: 138).

Garber describes this transformation as a "transsexual procedure ... without the necessity of surgical intervention, through what is in effect a pronoun transplant" (Garber 1992: 134). The pronoun transplant carries with it a radical change in the clothing, mannerisms and social roles that come with masculinity and femininity. Costumes, like gender, "are selves and thus easily, fluidly, interchangeable" (Garber 1992: 134, c.f. Gilbert and Gubar 1989).

The costuming and sets provide a lush backdrop for this film which follows Orlando's journey through time and gender switching, commenting on the societal constraints surrounding the genders in each historical period shown. Throughout the film, despite the gendered costuming, Orlando remains fairly androgynous. Androgyny, like masculinity and femininity, is manifested in and on the body, it is not either gender, but a fusion of the two. Orlando is the perfect androgyne - both as male and as female, Orlando

is neither overly masculine nor feminine - with the exception of his/her costuming. Swinton's own androgynous looks aids in making Orlando's androgyny more believable.

Bruzzi comments:

In the genderized costumes ... clothes were indeed reflective of the dominant, established and unquestioned sex of the wearer (Bruzzi 1997: 149).

Clothing is gendered to show others which gender any given person is - both the novel and the film "is about costuming precisely because costuming is what gender is all about" (Schaffer 1994: 36).

Based in part on the storyline and the androgynous character and looks of Orlando, it is not surprising that the initial reactions to the film is often one of confusion. The most common reaction was that of questioning "whether it was always a woman, or if it was a man and then transformed into a woman" (C2, focus group two). This issue of Orlando beginning as a woman or as a man is due to casting Tilda Swinton, a female actress, in the double roles of Orlando as both male and female. One informant stated this problem well: "I struggled with believing it was a man in the beginning because I knew it was an actress. I thought a lot about the period in history - it was really feminized" (B2, focus group two). The problem of categorizing Orlando is a common problem that the participants discussed in both focus groups. Furthermore, in the second group, two individuals stressed that it was irrelevant which gender Orlando began with, it was the *change* from one sex to another that was important. For example,

it would have worked either way. Whether he, she or it had started as either a man or a woman. But given the times in which it was a man or a woman was rather neat because there was always this... conflict with the world around them (P, focus group two)

The next problem that my participants expressed about the film was the long time period encompassed by the film. The film spans approximately 400 years of history - explained

best by two of the informants: "It made a bit of a statement, where she was finally able to find a period where Orlando could exist where the gender roles weren't so defined" (A4, focus group four), and "and exploration of gender through history" (B2, focus group two).

One individual asked the others if he had interpreted the film correctly:

I'm still trying to figure out what exactly the statement it was making. Was it making a statement about how gender is, and how sexes are pretty much the same and that each one is a victim and also a persecutor? ... you know, even though she changes roles.... (B4, focus group four).

In the early stages of selecting the films to use, I spoke with a number of individuals who had commented that this film is easier to follow if viewed for a second time because the gender issues become clearer.

The film is a beautiful example of the use of spectacle and masquerade - especially in terms of the costuming - which changes as Orlando's gender changes, and according to the historical time being portrayed. The use of clothing can be seen as pointing to the fluidity and performativity of gender (Kuhn 1994: 235). One of the discussants commented that it was the most historically correct costuming that they has ever seen. Both the novel and the film version examine gender in terms of its "social repressions and transgressions" (Humm 1997: 144).

One of the initial reactions to the film from the other focus group points out the theatre tradition of cross-dressed characters, but at the same time the discussant does not realize that there is more than one cross-cast character in the scene that he is talking about.

I thought it was a kind of comedy at first, because in English comedies, often the hero is played by a young woman, and the sort of buffoon character is played by a man who dresses up as a woman. And I thought the Queen was a guy... So I thought it was some kind of British farce... (J, focus group four).

When pointed out that the role of the Queen was played by a man, there were two main reactions: "The Queen was extremely powerful and extremely outspoken and it was interesting that they chose a man to play the role" (A4, focus group four) versus the historical linkage of cross-dressing in the theatre:

they also did have the players on the stage, which of course all of the players were male ... In all the Shakespearean plays ... of the time, all of the actors were male (P, focus group two).

The scene in which the Lord Orlando is watching actors in Shakespeare's *Othello* illustrates this point as well as showing the way in which gender is a performance.

The film itself highlights that "personal identity is independent of gender" (Humm 1997: 161). This is most evident in the scene where, upon waking, Orlando stands nude in front of a mirror, transformed into a woman, and says: "Same person. No difference at all. Just a different sex". Personal identity in this instance is separate from gender identity. The self remains the same despite the shift in gender category. One informant sums up Orlando's journey throughout the film:

Most definitely it was a search for the self. (P, focus group two)

The switch from one gender to the other provoked the largest amount of discussion.

The gender-changing antics of Orlando allow Woolf [and Potter] to explore the rather different ways in which men and women perform their genders (Schaffer 1994: 27).

As in the novel, the film version shows Orlando's transformation from male to female as "an easily painless process" (Bruzzi 1997: 196). Orlando's gender ambiguity even when he is male to when she is female shows the degree to which we tend to attribute a gender to

mannerism and behavior, when they are just as likely to occur in either gender. For example, Orlando's masculinity and femininity as male and as female is described:

I don't think it was when Orlando was male it wasn't very clearly male, just as much as it wasn't clearly female on the other side - a couple of differences in mannerisms and stuff was brought out ... it was much more of a gradual change than a sort of very specific change when he woke up and looked in the mirror (P, focus group two).

Again we can see the strength of the myths surrounding gender when the participants continue to speak about Orlando's two genders:

The funny thing was when she was a man, she was a weak man, when she was a woman, she was a strong woman. And that was the only thing about the personality, ... because when she made the change, she said "same person, different body" but it wasn't really the same because she was a much stronger character... (B4, focus group four)

In the other group, Orlando's gender versus his/her sex does not seem to match in the way that this informant had expected, for example:

I think he started out very feminine at first, ... sort of subservient ... sort of got more male and then flipped and was sort of very female and then became less female. I found toward the end of the movie, so there was almost a double flipping (P, focus group 2)

Orlando is described as an effeminate male and as a masculinized female - but it makes one wonder whether they are being influenced by behaviors attributed to either gender or by the differences in costuming. The "common sense" rules of gender are the basis of our gender attribution process (Garfinkle 1967). Gender attribution is made based on our interpretation of others' outward appearances and behaviors and this "knowledge tells them how they ought to behave" (Devor 1989: 147).

A pivotal point in the film before Orlando becomes a woman is when the Archduke Harry comments about a wounded man: "He's not a man, he is the enemy". Potter comments on Orlando's reluctance to take up arms:

What Orlando is doing as a man at that point is facing the ultimate test every boy grows up holding somewhere in his psyche, that he may have to go to war, fight, kill, or be killed. That is the moment Orlando realizes he cannot, will not be a man in the sense he is being asked to (Humm 1997 163-164; c.f. Dargis 1993: 42).

The switch from male to female occurs shortly after this scene. The change in Orlando's body leads to an adjustment in Orlando's gender identity, "made up of different signifying practices" (Humm 1997: 166). She must learn how to be a woman, maintaining the same sense of self - the core of Orlando remains the same. Why Orlando undergoes this transformation is debated - not just in terms of Potter's comments, for example:

the switch itself, ... there's no reason for it, its not really explained - it just happens and that's why this whole sort of butterfly, sort of caterpillar, in that it just sort of happens, Orlando wakes up, looks in the mirror, and 'same person different sex' (P, focus group two).

In fact, some individuals outright disagree that the gender change was even related to the scene:

C2: But I'm not convinced that the moment of the war was the time that caused the change.

P: Not necessarily caused it, but it was one additional straw, it was another key point. I mean, the change definitely, was definitely going towards there (focus group two)

Orlando's calm reaction to discovering that she has become a woman is explained by one of the participants:

While we kept saying that the change itself ... sort of happened and all that stuff, but it didn't really seem to affect Orlando that much ... but there's a very real change happening. Just in terms of even just one sort of awareness about one's own body, the actual physical changes. As well, if, as we established earlier that the change was something that had happened before that, and the physical change was just the final chapter to that. Although I don't think that was the final change... (P, focus group two).

This statement seems to support the idea that one's internally felt sense of gender identity is separate from one's physical body.

One scene in particular highlights the social attitudes surrounding women and femininity, the scene of the Lady Orlando's first social outing after the change. We find her at a writer's salon, where ideas and poetry are discussed. The focus groups discussed the meaning, and reasons why this scene was important to the film's overall message about gender:

J2: I think it had to do with the hypocrisy. The poets are always talking about their muse, talking about love love love, and the eternal beautiful woman and stuff, and then their real attitudes are, you know, that they [women] should be stupid, they should be this ... I think that the whole point of including all the references to poetry was because when Orlando was writing about his broken heart, he was writing about his feelings, he wasn't writing about feelings that weren't there. Whereas the way the poets in the writers salon were, you know, talking about their poetry, which was all nice nice nice about women, but their real personal attitudes is that "they're basically overgrown children

A3: Yeah, she said that "you refer to your muse in the feminine but listening to you talk, its not... true (J2, and A3, focus group four)

In the other focus group, there was barely any discussion of this scene. One individual summed up the message of the writer's salon, to complete agreement:

it was just blatantly obvious how men saw women then (R, focus group two).

This scene, showing the social attitudes surrounding gender is juxtaposed with the film's overall message about gender. It shows Potter's commitment to Woolf's original premise "to treat with indifference the notion of sexual difference" (Bruzzi 1997: 192). Furthermore, drawing from Woolf, Potter writes:

we're born simply as human beings ... and that mostly its how we're perceived by others that makes the difference, rather than what we are (Bruzzi 1997: 194, c.f. Potter 1993: 16).

The end of the film highlights

that even if there is nothing essential or fixed about gender identity, the pressure to be defined, in social terms, as either male or female remains; and that the gender identity assumed brings its own, often momentous consequences (Kuhn 1994: 235).

"Orlando's costume reveals her gender, while her gender determines her costume choice" (Schaffer 1994: 37). When Orlando returns to England as a woman, not only do we see the constraints of femininity in her dress, her house is taken from her because the law had decided that one, Orlando the man was dead, and two, she was a woman, which was about the same in the eyes of the state, neither dead or as a woman could she possess property (Kuhn 1994: 235, Humm 1997: 144).

Potter's choice of casting Tilda Swinton in the role of Orlando, and of Quentin Crisp as Queen Elizabeth I, is interesting in that both actors are known for their cross-dressed roles. Both Potter's film, and Woolf's novel, are about transcending gender - hence the use of cross-dressed, or cross-cast actors (Humm 1997: 157, 161). The implications of going beyond gender is that it enables us to see that individual identity is separate from

that of the gendered body. This is highlighted in the scene where Orlando addresses the camera after looking in the mirror, and says:

Orlando: same person. No difference at all. Just a different sex. (Potter 1994: 40).

This scene shows the "arbitrariness of gender" (Humm 1997:164). From the opening of the film we can see this through the casting of Swinton in the role of Orlando, with her "studied performance of a non-masculine yet non-feminized male draws attention to the instability of traditional gender motifs" (Humm 1997: 165).

The short relationship between Orlando and Shelmerdine is significant in that it is based on a "mutual acknowledgment of the self in the Other" (Bruzzi 1997: 198). Bakhtin's "I-other" relationship connects with this. For him, this would be the ultimate stage in the relationship between individuals, where we view the other person as another subjective self, another "I" (Bakhtin 1990: 24). To fully experience understanding with the other, the "I" must project into the other in order to see the world as the other person does (Bakhtin 1990: 24). This point is supported by the participants in focus group two. The discussion, quoted at length, shows that love is something that goes beyond our sense of gender, that it is the person, not the gender, that is important.

D2: In the one conversation that she had with that man from America ... it was very interesting how they both put themselves in the other's perspective around the same issues

P: But I think the whole thing is, its not the getting together with Zane's character [Shelmerdine] to have a child, that's besides the point. It was the whole thing of to be with someone like that.

R: To be with someone of a like mind, male or female (D2, P, and R, Focus group two)

This discussion reflects both Bakhtin's I-other relationship as well as Bruzzi's point about seeing the self in the other. One individual explains this relationship further:

I was thinking for a long time that Orlando was basically thinking "can I ever find someone - someone like me, someone who can be like that" and you definitely find it in that dialogue, ... he is a lot like her, just in the fact that they get that sort of male female sort of getting into the opposite person's, the mind-set of it (P, focus group two)

The end of the film, with the singing angel, triggered a debate as to its significance. Most people were confused by the appearance of the singing angel dressed in gold lame. One person saw it as a sign that Orlando was finally able to die (A4, focus group four). But the most interesting interpretation of the angel came from an individual that had seen the movie previous to the focus group:

The song, the song was saying that, it seemed to me to be saying that very much, living in the moment, this is freedom, being born and dying, we're sharing the same face of humanity, that kind of thing... The freedom of living in the moment, of existing like that, was referencing the beginning with that Russian Cossack [Sasha] - which is what she said at that point and she seemed very content in that (A3, focus group four).

The lyrics referred to must be quoted because they reveal much of what this participant is talking about:

I am coming! I am coming!
I am coming through!
Coming across the divide to you
In this moment of ecstasy
To be here, to be now
At last I am free -
Yes - at last, at last
To be free of the past
And of a future that beckons me.

I am coming! I am coming!
Here I am!

Neither a woman nor a man -
We are joined, we are one
With a human face
We are joined, we are one
With a human face... (Potter 1994: 62).

Another person pointed out that it was Jimmy Sommerville playing the role of the angel. He explained that Sommerville is a British pop singer, and gay activist (B4, focus group four). So perhaps, the choice of using the angel stems from both the song lyrics and Sommerville as a gay icon for those would recognize his work.

The rise in the number of films containing transgenderism, i.e., androgyny, transsexualism, and transvestism, is viewed by Humm as "commercial interest in a postmodern collapse of confidence in fixed gender roles" (Humm 1997: 162). Some of the participants spoke of the use of cross-dressing in films - of the way that cross-dressing tends to be represented:

A4: It seems generally in movies when there's cross-dressing going on that it's also extreme cross-role playing as well. And this is probably the first movie where that hasn't occurred, where the extreme shift in the role didn't happen with the shift in the entire sex.

J2: And also in a lot of films that use cross-dressing, it's always like either a joke or a disguise, or a ... theatrical performance ... where this one is just that this person changes and they deal with it in their own way ... There was always an explanation, a reason, a justification (A4 and J2, focus group four)

People are starting to notice the way in which films approach the representation of cross-gendered characters. The point about justifying or normalizing cross-dressing in films is discussed by Garber. By explaining away cross-dressing in films, the potential power to challenge gender conceptions is removed (Garber 1992: 70).

When asked to imagine oneself going through the same transformation from one's original sex to the other, the response was curiously interesting in that although everyone seemed to agree that it would be an incredible experience, that most individuals in society would not be capable of going through, or even accepting this:

A: I think generally people ... don't think about switching roles, they don't consider these things, they don't take to heart what they learn. Like they can intellectually understand, but they can't feel it. I don't think that the average person, regardless of how open minded they are, has the capacity to do that. If people did, then the lines that are drawn would be completely different, because there would be more reasonability between genders in terms of defining this and that and how they interact

P: I think the gender aspect of getting into other people's minds is just one aspect of it in general. I think that if you basically put yourself into other people's heads, even you don't necessarily agree with the way they do things, you can figure out a way ... to get a better rapport with the person if you're talking about communication.

B2: Maybe it all comes down to that we don't learn enough to change genders (A, P, and B2, Focus group two).

The androgynous individual is a "blurred sex", with a "blurred sexuality" (Bruzzi 1997: 175). Androgyny is the "fusion" of the two genders (Bruzzi 1997: 176). Androgyny blurs the lines between body and symbol, "male and female, straight and gay" (Bruzzi 1997: 176). The line-blurring is referred to in the following passage:

See for me though, just the theme of androgyny is something that I have difficulty feeling comfortable with because I don't relate to it all that much. I can relate to comparisons of genders, and of sexuality easily, but still, I personally, I feel more like a woman, and I feel rather separate from feeling androgynous. So its hard for me to relate to a character that is so androgynous, so contrived to be androgynous, to be discussing gender (A4, focus group four).

She continues her explanation of why androgyny is difficult for her to talk about:

I don't know how to debate it within the context of debating sexuality and gender. I don't know because it doesn't represent either to me. [...] The few androgynous people that I've known are androgynous acting and looking. They have either been bisexual and obsessed with variety, or rather non-sexual, which Orlando was pretty non-sexual (A4, focus group four).

While most people agreed that Orlando was fairly non-sexual, Bruzzi writes of the "eroticism" of androgyny in *Orlando*, but Orlando's androgyny

is not grounded in the blending or blurring of subjective identification and identity according to sexual difference, but in a disinterest with that very mode of classification (Bruzzi 1997: 192).

I can understand Bruzzi's description of Orlando's androgyny as a disinterest in classification based on sexual difference, but I cannot see Orlando's androgyny as being eroticised. It is understandable that androgynous characters can be, and sometimes are, eroticised.

Orlando's androgyny, like masculinity and femininity, is marked upon his/her body. Even when wearing the clothing of either gender, Orlando does not appear to be "masculine" when male, nor "feminine" when female. The androgyny within the film proposes a "radical reassessment of the relation between the gendered image and its interpretation" (Bruzzi 1997: 192). In other words, androgyny calls into question our criteria for gender attributions/ gender interpretations.

People respond to androgynous or ambiguously gendered individuals in a variety of ways. It is often difficult to deal with because individuals just do not know how to react. This response is explained:

J: It confuses people if you don't fit into the mold of what they expect.

B4: It scares them because they don't know how to, it's like any situation when a situation comes up and you're not prepared, people don't like that.. I think sexuality is pretty important and when you can't decide what it is, and when usually that's how you go about how you interact, before you talk to someone if you know they're male or female ... it throws them off (J, and B4 , focus group four).

The gender attribution process aids us in our everyday social interactions, so it is understandable that gender confusion would make some people uncomfortable.

More and more people are questioning sexual and gender identity, and this questioning "has led to a sense that we really don't know any more what it is to be a man and what it is to be a woman" (Bruzzi 1997: 194, c.f. Potter 1993: 16). The informants in focus group two comment along similar lines about the film:

J2: I don't think that the movie had anything to do with sexuality at all, I think its just about gender and ...

A3: humanity

A4: Gender as opposed to sexuality.

J2: Keeping the two completely separate. (J2, A3, and A4, focus group four)

The "common sense" rules of gender are slowly being weakened. Previously most individuals would not have been able to separate gender from sexuality, in the same way as the notion of genitals determining gender is being weakened, with the rise of awareness that gender is not just an *either/or* concept. The following quote illustrates this point:

I think that a lot of people are probably having talks like we are, and they're talking about it, whereas if you look at society as a whole, it still may not be happening, so it really depends, if there's any change happening at all and just in the way people are talking and thinking and so on, its really a question of scale (P, focus group two).

As people become more aware of the multiplicity of gender identities and their expression, so too will our conception of gender change. We can no longer assume that an outward presentation of gender reflects a certain sex. Furthermore

The theory of gender performativity also opens up the possibility of political action to alter gender identities (Schaffer: 35).

This statement connects with Bolin (1988), Califa (1997) and MacDonald (1998) in their description of the need for a transgender politics in order to open up the concept of multiple genders. It also reflects Devor's (1989) alternative to the gender attribution schemas. Similarly, in the next chapter I will be examining the film *M. Butterfly* (1993) as an example of the performative nature of gender.

Chapter Four - M. Butterfly

Cronenberg's film, *M. Butterfly* (1993), follows the twenty year affair between Rene Gallimard and an opera singer named Song Liling. Not only do we discover that Song is a spy for China, we discover that she is really a man, playing the part of the "perfect woman" (*M. Butterfly*). The film, based on Hwang's play, is another example of the way in which gender can be viewed as performance. The original play is loosely based on real-life events as well as on the opera "Madame Butterfly" by Puccini. For Hwang, the idea of a man being fooled by an Asian spy is a perfectly plausible occurrence "given the misunderstanding between men and women and between East and West" (Hwang 1989: 98, Garber 1992: 237). Both forms of misunderstanding - between the genders and between East and West are based on the stereotypes between the two dualisms. The deception of Gallimard is based on his stereotypes of Asian versus Western women and between Westerners and Asians in general.

The real -life event as it was reported by the New York Times:

A former French diplomat and a Chinese opera singer have been sentenced to six years in jail for spying for China after a two-day trial that traced a story of clandestine love and mistaken sexual identity ... M. Boursicot was accused of passing information to China after he fell in love with Mr. Shi, whom he believed for twenty years to be a woman (Garber 1992: 235; c.f. New York Times, May 11, 1986).

How could this be possible? Boursicot stated that he had no idea that Shi was really a man, because their sexual relations always took place in the dark. In Britain, they believed that Boursicot really did know the difference, and was in denial of his homosexuality. The French, on the other hand, were less upset about the charge of treason than they were about the idea that Boursicot, a Frenchman, could not tell the difference between men and women (Garber 1992: 235; c.f. Pincher 1987). Perhaps his deception occurred because there is no real difference, perhaps Boursicot/Gallimard fell in love with the person

regardless of gender. Or, he was so blinded by the idea of the submissive Asian woman that he failed to notice that Shi/Song Liling was presenting a masquerade of the "perfect woman" (*M. Butterfly*).

People magazine managed to interview both individuals involved with this scandal, and commented on the "apparent" gender mistake:

Shi says he kept himself covered with a blanket in a darkened room and never let Boursicot touch his crotch. He hid his genitalia by squeezing them tightly between his thighs. Even today [Boursicot] still cannot explain why sex with Shi seemed "just like being with a woman". [...] In any case, Boursicot stresses, they had sex only rarely (Garber 1992: 236, c.f. *People*: 1988, 96-97;).

It was not the fact that Boursicot had fallen in love with a man, or had been tricked into becoming a spy for China that disturbed people at the time, but that Shi, an actor, a spy, Boursicot's lover, was a transvestite - calling into question "the cultural representation of gender" - which could not easily have been explained away (Garber 1992: 236). The transvestite character destabilizes our notion of gender as being fixed, as reflecting our biological sex. It makes people uncomfortable because it threatens our ability to trust visual cues - how we interact with others based on our interpretations of others appearances.

The play, *M. Butterfly*, which Hwang based on this real-life happening, does more than just question the cultural representation of gender, it questions "the identity of 'the transvestite' " because, at the end of the play, it is not the character of the Chinese actor who becomes the cross-dresser, it is the diplomat who becomes "M." *Butterfly* (c.f. Hwang 1989, Garber 1992: 236).

Garber's reading of Hwang's script of *M. Butterfly* stresses that the cross-dressed character is descended from a long tradition of both Chinese and Japanese theatre, "a mark of gender undecideability and as an indication of category crisis" (Garber 1992: 239).

Man/woman, or male/female, is the most obvious and central of the border crossings in *M. Butterfly*, but the fact that the border is crossed *twice*, once when Song Liling becomes a "woman", and the second time when Rene Gallimard does so (Garber 1992: 238-239).

The most obvious category crisis is that of masculinity and femininity, but it also deals with the category boundaries of acting (performing what one is not) and of spying (performing what one is not for political ends) (Garber 1992: 239). Border crossings of this kind connect with MacDonald's use of "liminality" to discuss the transgender identity (MacDonald: 9).

Hwang's final comments on "M. Butterfly" reveals the overall message of the play:

I consider it a plea to all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception, to deal with one another truthfully for our mutual good, from the common and equal ground that we share as human beings (Hwang 1989: 100).

The following passage, quoted from the play, appears in a similar form in the film, is a discussion between Song Liling and a member of the Chinese Communist Party:

Song: Miss Chin? Why in the Peking Opera, are women's roles played by men?

Chin: I don't know. Maybe, a reactionary remnant of male -

Song: No. Because only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act.

(*M. Butterfly*: 2.7).

This passage sums up the entire film - from Song Liling's artful, calculated performance of the perfect woman to Gallimard's blind acceptance of his/her masquerade. It reflects stereotypes that men have about femininity, and that women have about masculinity. One participant talks about how this scene relates to real life:

When I was in Vancouver I knew a lot of transgendered and transsexual people who would have agreed with that statement quite a bit. That only a man would know how a woman should behave (D: focus group one)

Another individual comments on this statement:

Or to put it another way, just because it makes for the perfect theatrical role, you become exactly what the audience wants because you've seen that (B3, focus group three).

This statement conforms to the notion of gender as performance - if you were to carry this individual's statement a step further, in accordance to the line quoted from the play, one could infer that an individual could become any given gender, based on seeing others act in a given way.

According to Hwang, Gallimard's downfall came about due to his love for a "symbolic representation of Oriental femininity", a constructed image based partially on stereotypes drawn from Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" (Bruzzi 1997: 164). Hwang describes the relation of stereotypes within society to his play "M. Butterfly". The stereotypes range from that of Asian women:

I knew Butterfly only as a cultural stereotype; speaking of an Asian woman, we would sometime say, "She's pulling a Butterfly", which meant playing the submissive Oriental (Hwang 1989: 95).

to that of stereotypes of gay white men:

Gay friends have told me of a derogatory term used in their community: "Rice Queen" - a gay Caucasian man primarily attracted to Asians. In these relationships, the Asian virtually always plays the role of the "woman" (Hwang 1989: 98).

and finally stereotypes of straight white men:

Similarly, heterosexual Asians have long been aware of "Yellow Fever" - Caucasian men with a fetish for exotic Oriental women (Hwang 1989: 99).

When asked what this film was saying about gender, the responses varied both within and between the two focus groups. Focus group three viewed the film more in terms of East versus West, with gender being secondary to the Western misinformed stereotypes of Eastern cultures.

C3: I thought the gender part was subordinate to the race relations, .. like Western preconceptions of other cultures. I thought that was an added element to it that reinforced more that theme.

B3: More about the individuals, say it looked more at the character of Rene, that any gender issues, even when it came to the fact "didn't you know he was a man" ... when he [Song Liling] says "you still want me don't you?", and the guy has to explain that "no I fell in love with the lie" so it wasn't, gender became almost unimportant at that point. He fell in love more with the person, the individual, what that person had created, this fictional character ...

C3: Which was based on his opinions of what Orientals were like. (C3, B3, focus group three).

Similarly in focus group one, one individual interpreted the film along colonialist lines:

It just all came across as really choreographed about an idea about the imperial, or some kind of colonial .. having, like, all things that he did and the way he approached the relationship all just seemed really choreographed to make a point about this man from, this Western man and the idea of the Western colonial getting its hand in the pot and sort of wanting what he can't have ... (T, focus group one).

The other participants in focus group one found that the film did say something about gender:

It was misogynistic. It was like saying ... men want an idea of women and that's all that men can truly love (B, focus group one).

While initially the participants of focus group three did not think that the film contained a message about gender, during the course of their discussion, they did talk about gender.

Well, maybe in terms of gender, it, the movie really pointed out that gender is secondary. It became almost irrelevant at that point and when he kills himself he's able to switch as well.... You can create your own world where things don't matter as much (B3, focus group three).

This point triggered a discussion about the way in which we think about gender and the consequences of these notions.

C3: Now that I think of it, gender is really the same way, people have their own preconceived notions of what someone of a certain gender will behave like. They live in their own vision of that and never pay attention necessarily to what that person is actually doing. So its like actually working on two levels, its an allegory ... like east-west, male-female.

B3: And again where the two will never meet, east is east and west is west, and they're just so different, and yet, the same can be said for gender, is that if you keep these uneducated notions that you never fully understand each other or become equals (C3 and B3, focus group three).

Stemming from the debate on the film's message about gender, the participants brought up the reason why they believe that gender is such an important and stable aspect of their lives:

B3: There's something very pleasing about our preconceived notions of gender ...

C3: Its hard to break.

R2: Its comfortable... (Focus group three).

This discussion helps to explain why it is that our gender attribution process is so resistant to change - because it is comfortable. Anything that does not fit into our preconceived notions of gender threatens the stability of the gender attribution process (Devor 1989: 147).

The question of whether Gallimard fell in love with Song Liling or with the idea, the image of the perfect woman ties in with the line from the film which states "only a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (*M. Butterfly*). This question seemed to generate agreement within and between the two groups, for example:

D: It was completely the idea of her, it was about power more than anything.

B: ... he didn't really love her, he loved the whole notion of her and whole idealism of her (D, and B, focus group one).

In focus group three, an analysis of the link between power and gender came out during the discussion. The participants are engaging in a critical reading of the act of cross-dressing in terms of gender as a form of power.

R2: Its always been about power, not about gender. And gender is a tool that's being used for or against you in power struggles.

B3: Gender becomes a very great tool for power. The whole switching thing ... its a tool for power, it gains the upper hand when dealing with that situation. It forces things out.

C3: And they have the luxury of switching back and forth. (R2, B3, C3, focus group three).

That there are misconceptions about the term "drag queen" which refers solely to gay cross-dressers - not including all transvestites/cross-dressers or transsexuals living in their chosen gender - is apparent in the following discussion:

B: ... drag queens and stuff and not that they're freaks or that they're bad people, but they are freaks statistics-wise. Like if you were to look at, like if you were to take a thousand people, how many would be drag queens?

D: Well, how many would admit to it? (B and D, Focus group one)

This discussion shows that individuals underestimate the numbers of individuals that engage in any form of gender transgressive behavior because the only individuals that are counted in the statistics are those that admit to it, making it problematic for gaining an accurate number.

The prevalence of transvestism and knowledge - even misinformed - about gender transgressive behavior in our lives is noticeable:

B: but if anything what it is showing is that society is now getting more acceptive, acceptable to these kinds of things.

C: and that's why it's coming out.

B: Yeah because they've always been around. Men have been cross-dressing for centuries (B and C, Focus group one).

The discussion then turned to whether or not transgenderism would become "normal" in society:

B: But do you think that it will ever come to the point where it is so accepted... even if it did, even if it was okay, do you think that they would still choose? ...

D: I think that the number would probably increase.

B: It'll increase, but do you think that it will become almost..

D: To mainstream culture?

C: I think it would (B, D, and C, Focus group one).

The discussion surrounding the use of terminology with reference to transvestites and transsexuals was brought up by one of the participants in focus group three. This is important in that it reflects societal attitudes surrounding the belief that gender is supposed to be in sync with a person's biological sex. The informant, quoted at length, comments on this, with reference to social reality:

B3: It's funny that we still use, even with this conversation,... that we're using these terms "became a woman" as opposed to "is" and now it seems to me that if a person is going through the whole process of becoming a woman, then chances are, he was a woman to begin with, and just wanted to change the body ... Well if you mean just genitalia, then yeah, he became a woman, but if woman is a personality, as we're saying, a gender is a whole part of your personality, the way that people perceive you before you speak, ... then no, he was one to begin with (B3, focus group three).

He continues with this idea, linking this notion with that of the film:

I think watching the movie, I have no doubt in the scenes where he/she is Butterfly [Song Liling] that she is in fact a woman. I mean its just, she seems to believe it, so then the case is, she acts it.... she definitely wants to be a woman, so she is.... Ideal situation is to love the person, not the gender, regardless... (B3, focus group three).

For the pre-operative transsexual who has gone through years of counseling, hormone treatment and living in their chosen gender, and post-operative transsexuals who have

undergone body-altering surgery, naming becomes very important. It is an acknowledgment that their outward appearance finally matches their gender identity.

One individual put forth the question of bias:

A3: To me all these gender terms, like I understand it all, but if you're brought up as a male or female, how can you look at things any other way? (Focus group three)

This is an interesting point to consider, especially in light of the next question posed:

A3: I'm more inclined toward those ideal notions because of looking at it from a human point of view, why is it that things are the way they are? Its because of the way that we're brought up in our society (Focus group three).

We view gender, we act gender, our bodies, our lives are gendered - we do not even necessarily have to be aware of our socialization to have been shaped this way.

Almost every aspect of a person's appearance is a visual clue - for example, when you look at an individual you can usually be fairly sure if they are male or female. But when a person is unsure, they often get unnerved. The impetus to know which gender to place an individual in is described:

look at how long Pat [an androgynous character from Saturday Night Live] went. She went and got her own, he, it got its own movie (T, focus group one).

The whole premise of the skits and the film was to find out which gender this character was.

After reminiscing about the various schemes used to discover "Pat's" true identity as male or female, the curiosity and discomfort with ambiguous or cross-dressed individuals was theorized:

B: But do you wonder ... is it for the fact that you're uneasy because you don't know if the person around you is male or female

or are you uneasy because ... you can't make sense of it...

T: Or even just because you're so used to knowing how to approach people or deal with [them]... (focus group one)

This discussion went on for quite a long time, following Devor's gender attribution theory - the participants attempted to explain the reasons why knowing which gender to attribute to an individual is so important to social interaction (Devor 1989: 148):

We want to be able just to identify and let things slip along like reflexes. As soon as you have to stop and think about something then there's work to be done (T, Focus group one).

Furthermore, when an ambiguously gendered individual is encountered,

T: You don't have a set of constructs to deal with the situation.

C: Because there's no frame of reference that you've ever learned in you life to deal with somebody who was ... (T, C, Focus group one)

It is interesting that their discussion reflects the gender attribution process outlined by Devor (1989). The focus group participants attempted to explain how an individual can come to accept that not everyone will fit into the expected categories.

T: It comes down whatever once you see what it really is, and that its not anything that's going to destroy your self-being.

B: [...] and once you realize that its no longer strange and no longer odd, then you can accept it because its not threatening

because its not unknown (Focus group one).

It is exactly this point that connects directly with one individual's experiences:

D: I spent the past five years of my life living in a gay community in Vancouver. I mean basically if I was going out shopping and if I didn't see a guy wearing a dress I'd be confused.

B: Right. But that's the society that you lived in (D and B, focus group one).

The second informant summed up the gender attribution alternative - if you live in a society where "anything goes" with respect to outward presentations of gender, then the "normal" gender attribution schema is no longer valid.

Butler questions how multiple genders can challenge the traditional two-sided conception of gender:

If the multiplication of gender possibilities expose and disrupt the binary reifications of gender, what is the nature of such a subversive enactment? How can such an enactment constitute a subversion? (Butler 1990: 125).

Within a community where there are multiple gender identities for it to have a subversive effect on the gender dichotomy, it must be seen within the context of the masculinity and femininity in order to constitute a subversion. By actively challenging the construction of gender, the stability of the gender dichotomy becomes weakened - hence a subversive political act.

Chapter Five - Conclusion

As we have seen from the previous two film chapters, the data from the focus groups shows the way in which some individuals are thinking and talking about representations of gender and gender transgressive behavior, as well as the way in which their interpretations of representations carry over into social reality. Both films, *Orlando* (1992) and *M. Butterfly* (1993) attempt to dismantle the traditional conceptions of gender by using characters which change genders. *Orlando* uses gender switching as a means of showing the impact of the switch on personal identity with the statement that Orlando makes upon discovering the change "Same person, different sex" whereas *M. Butterfly* deals with performing gender as a means for power, at the same time reflecting the relationship between gender and identity, when Song Liling says "I'm not just a man, don't you remember?" - reminding Gallimard that he fell in love with the person underneath the gender.

Both films provide a subtle critique of the "common sense" rules of gender and offer alternatives to this construction, much like Devor's alternative to the gender identity and attribution process, in *Orlando* through the exploration of gender in the historical imagination and in *M. Butterfly* through a fictionalized account of a historical occurrence (Devor 1989: 153). These films challenge our conceptions of what it is to be a man, or a woman, or even cross-gendered. The discussions which came out of the four focus groups illustrate some of the responses to these two films as we have seen in the preceding chapters.

By studying gender through the lens of transgenderism - by looking at gender through representation of those who do not neatly fit into the categories of masculine or feminine - we can see that the differently gendered can provide us with insights into gender due to their unique position in the gender continuum. By viewing gender in this way,

taking into account the experiences and perspectives of the transgendered, we can begin to study gender in a more holistic fashion.

What started out as an examination of the way in which representations of transgressively gendered characters in films are interpreted, and an examination of the way in which we tend to attribute gender, has been shaped by the theories of transgender identity politics (MacDonald 1998, Califa 1997 and Bolin 1988). For the most part, most films, especially Hollywood films, reproduce the traditional gender binary of masculine and feminine, often to an exaggerated degree - with its hulking male heroes and beautiful heroines waiting to be rescued. In this respect, Hollywood films tend create extreme versions of the gender dichotomy, reproducing and reinforcing gender ideals.

The rise of the new gender bending films can be interpreted as critiques of this tendency. While small in number, the other tendency, possibly due to the hold that Hollywood has on what is and is not produced, is to portray gender bending as comedic, for example *Some Like It Hot* (1959) and *La Cage aux Folles* (1979) as early examples, and more recently in *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993). Few of the films that deal with gender transgressions approach the level of critique as *The Crying Game* (1992), *Orlando* (1992) and *M. Butterfly* (1993). These films expose and challenge our gendered realities as well as comment on the filmic representation of gender.

As we can see from the focus group data, the awareness of the importance of identity - be it masculine, feminine, blended, ambiguous, or transgender - these issues are reaching the public, whether they realize it or not. It could be due in part to the prevalence of transgendered individuals on the talk show circuit (i.e. the Jerry Springer Show), while most of the time these individuals are viewed as "freaks", they still have the "potential to shake up people's perceptions", and perhaps educate them, by showing them as human beings, just differently gendered ones (Herland: 1999).

For some individuals a fixed gender identity is comfortable, for others, gender is necessarily fluid and multiple. But all of us are inscribed by the social marks of gender. There are no aspects of our lives that are not shaped by gender - whether we realize it or not. Our interactions with others are guided by the process of gender attribution - where we draw information from visual cues, such as appearance, mannerisms, and other bodily behavior, and act according to the attribution made, assuming that what we see accurately reflects the biological sex of the individual. But looks can be deceiving, as we have seen in both *M. Butterfly* and *Orlando*, and furthermore, as my informants have discussed, this translates into real life social encounters.

We know how those who fit into the "normal" categories of the two genders are influenced by their gender, and process of gender attribution, and have begun to investigate the transgender identity, but this area needs to be investigated further in order to fully begin to understand the social construction of gender(s) and the identities that stem from this.

Filmography

Some Like it Hot (1959), Billy Wilder.

La Cage aux Folles (1979), Edouard Molinaro.

Tootsie (1982), Sydney Pollack.

The Crying Game (1992), Neil Jordan.

Orlando (1992), Sally Potter.

Mrs. Doubtfire (1993), Chris Columbus.

M. Butterfly (1993), David Cronenberg.

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994), Stephan Elliot.

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