2009

Gender Fluidity and Youth: Examining the Space In Between

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GENDER FLUIDITY AND YOUTH:
EXAMINING THE SPACE IN BETWEEN

(Spine title: Gender Fluidity and Youth)
(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

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Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

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Gender Fluidity and Youth:
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is accepted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Education

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Abstract

This thesis examines youth's engagement with gender fluidity or variance through their observations of gender expression. It draws on feminist, queer and transgender theories to highlight important issues about the impact of gender binaries and regulation of gender expression on youth in secondary schools. A qualitative methodological approach was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to select a group of students interested in talking about gender variance in one secondary school in South Western Ontario. Data collection included focus group interviews, individual interviews, writing responses, and drawing responses. The research found that students ranged in their negotiations of gender binaries from resistance to acceptance. Students articulated their ideological position through a reflection on stories about embodied gender and gender regulatory practices. The research contributes to a necessary ongoing discourse about gender variance in schools. It encourages student voice and asks for educational policy to include a competency about gender variance.

Keywords: gender fluidity, gender variance, gender non-conforming, heteronormative regimes, gender regulation, gender binaries, embodied gender.

Acknowledgements

My husband and daughter for their unconditional love and helping me to juggle it all: without both of you I would not be able to do any of this.

My parents and in-laws for their unwavering support and professional-grade child care.

My professor and supervisor, Dr. Wayne Martino, for his unrelenting encouragement and guidance.

The two local coffee shops for being my home-office-away-from-home: love the electrical outlets, the decaf coffee, but hate the stale coffee smell that permeates my computer keyboard for hours after.

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Preface

Process is a theme that has resonated for me since a dream years before my graduate training began. I am appropriately beginning another process of becoming, since I have recently entered motherhood. As Simone de Beauvoir said, one 'becomes a woman' (1949); I believe so too must a woman become a mother: neither identity is innate. I have witnessed my body's evolution and departure from my own control. Probably due to sleep deprivation primarily, I can feel beyond myself. It is as if much is happening to me and I am desperately trying to catch up. My body is no longer my own: it has become the property of medical personnel who poke and prod, strangers who comment on my bulging and bloating, and the baby who needs sustenance and comfort. I can relate to those who feel a dissonance between the body and the self.

But the stage of infancy is poignant because it is here that gender identity begins. In the womb, a child is gendered. Once outside, that same child will most likely come home to a nursery, layette, and visitors who all contribute to a specific gender identity of this tiny little person. The first thing we know (or wish to know) about a person is their gender: "the cry "It's a boy" or "It's a girl" ushers us into the world" (Bornstein, 1998). And if that one identifier is ambiguous, anxiety sets in for everyone concerned. We do not yet know how to live with ambiguity in gender.

Throughout the laborious process of culling the information and fashioning this piece, I have on occasion reflected upon my initial motivation for studying gender theory, and trans theory, specifically. I do not personally identify as a gender non-conformist, at least, not in accordance to the descriptions of trans people I have read. Perhaps in my own

mind I am playing at non-conformity, not on a daily basis, but in a constant protest of imposed norms that make me feel always outside of something "authentically feminine". I am what I am. Every person must feel that way. The transgender individual is not only trans, but is a person. Yes, we are a culmination of our varied identity categories, our multifarious experiences, but we are also something beyond the articulable. And that is what excites me so much more: that which I cannot quite figure out, of which I only have a feeling or a picture, but as of yet, no words to describe. The feeling that lured me to the study of trans is still in rough, un-translatable form. But it is centered in a belief that justice must be done for those who are punished for being themselves, or trying to live out what they feel. And I have an inkling that many more people are constrained by gender norms than they care to admit, or consider. Fluidity in gender is a beautiful concept to me.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks

Aims and Purpose

This is a project about process. It is about youth's understandings of gender

identity and their knowledge of becoming or articulating such identities. Youth encounter

heteronormative regimes within schools that inhibit their own gender self-expression and

impact how they treat each other, often with most harmful results. It came to me in a

dream to combine the notion of gender with the concept of process, or being in the midst of

something. Only now do I realize how unoriginal my dream was; I have been pre-empted

by exciting academic writing that claims gender identity is the very epitome of process

itself; it is expressed or seen through repeated acts (Butler, 1990). Simone de Beauvoir

famously established the notion of *becoming a woman;* Kate Bornstein carries this further

to note that one becomes a gender, "becoming is the vehicle for gender itself" (Bornstein,

1994). She protests the belief that gender is a static entity, one that "stays exactly the same

as the day we were born" (Bornstein, 1998, p. 1), but is rather a transmutable thing. Thus,

gender is in the doing. And as process implies always doing, never done, it must

presuppose an ability to grasp that finite, complete, and static answers are impossibilities in

the discourse of gender identity. Instead, the making of gender identity must be more

about complexities, in-between-ness, transitory and translating acts, taking on a rather

more fluid nature. These are the frameworks that inform my early thinking on this project

and have stayed with me, developing into strong reminders that this work is continually

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Chapter 1: Theoretical Frameworks

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Various feminist and queer theorists inform my thinking for this thesis and triggered the desire to investigate the real and relevant stories from youth about how they understand gender identity and engage with gender diversity. I wished to seek how youth understand, in their own terms, the politics of difference in general. Specifically, I wanted to know how youth interrogate gender norms, negotiate their understandings of gender in social situations, and to ascertain the implications of their understandings on a daily and ongoing basis. My investigation was thus qualitative and exploratory, a preliminary stage of inquiry into a field that is underrepresented. I aimed not to test theories, evaluate programs, or seek causal relationships; rather, I hoped to gather rich and varied stories from students' voices directly.

Through an examination of all my participants, I aimed to clarify what beliefs already and currently exist in schools today about gender identity and identification from the perspective of the students. I wanted to move to a better understanding of how gender-variant youth might be treated in schools and to gauge how discourses of gender fluidity play out in schools. In no way do I assert definitive authority on the subject; instead I examine the standpoint of a selected group of students in order to produce knowledge and further insight into the processes of gender identification and gender fluidity in one school community in South Western Ontario at one particular time.

In light of these concerns about the politics of gender diversity in schools, I aimed to address these questions:

In what ways do (any and all) students subscribe to rigid classifications of gender or gender rules (gender conformity)?

In what ways do (any and all) students perceive/envision and understand gender

variance/ fluidity (gender non-conformity)?

How do youth make gender variant individuals visible/ invisible?

Significance of the Research

Although initially I had hoped to extend this study into an examination of the lives

of transgender youth, self-identified gender fluid individuals, it became redirected to study

more in-depth the perspectives and understanding of youth (regardless of their

identification) on gender diversity. It is important to acknowledge current transgender

academic discourse, but the nature of the study allows me to include gender fluidity studies

as relevant also. I have investigated transgender theory only in tandem with other gender

theories because it is not the prime focus of my study; additionally, much of trans work

exists in a medical or scientific context. A plethora of studies and articles are available in

the scientific dissection of transgender as a medical condition, often pathologized to

become equated with GID (gender identity dysphoria). In the field of sociology,

transgender theory is really in its infancy. Because I aim to use transgender theory as a

framework to re-work gender, my study is useful as it extends the applicability of

transgender theory in the social sciences. Additionally, any academic sociological

perspective on transgender requires more empirical application because of a "lag between

community knowledge and practices and academic discourses" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 15).

Conceptual Frameworks

I have drawn on feminist, queer, and transgender theorists such as Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), Britzman (1995), Kumashiro (2002), Lather (2008), Anzaldúa (1999), Bornstein (1994) and Halberstam (1998) who have significantly contributed to my conceptual foundations in this thesis. Generally, they have informed my thinking about gender fluidity, gender non-conformity, gender rigidity and gender diversity. And it is through their work that I approach a new concept of gender through transgender as metaphor.

Transgender Metaphor

Although it was not possible to gain access to transgender individuals as participants for my research, I employ transgender and other gender theories as espoused by Halberstam's (1998) gender ambiguity, Ekins' and King's (1997, 2001) gender blending, and Tauchert's (2001) 'fuzzy gender' to elaborate a framework for making sense of gender ambiguity and identification which culminates in a metaphor of transgender. Not only do these theories provide ways of problematizing the binaries of gender that dominate heteronormative ideology, but they also offer a reconstruction of gender that is more inclusive of all gendered bodies. I consciously conflate transgender theory with gender ambiguity and gender fluidity theory because I see all as working to unsettle the binaries of gender and most importantly, expanding the limits of acceptable gender expression. Kate Bornstein (1998) tells us in banal terms, reminiscent of Butler's gender performativity theory (1990), that all gender is political and transmutable:

> I think we all of us *do* change our genders. All the time. Maybe it's not
> as dramatic as some tabloid headline screaming "She was a He!" But we
> do, each of us, change our genders. In response to each interaction we
> have with a new or different person, we subtly shift the *kind* of man or
> woman, boy or girl, or whatever gender we're being at the moment. (p. 8)

In this interrogation, all gendered bodies, even non-transgendered, require an acknowledgement of the construction within which they operate. Further, Bornstein dismisses the cultural assumption that transsexuality and transgender are rarities: "nearly everyone has some sort of a bone to pick with their own gender status, be it gender role, gender assignment, or gender identity" (1994, p. 118). But while making transgender more commonplace, Bornstein is not condoning an erasure of unique transgender viewpoints. Thus, I also do not mean to undermine its political strength, but I borrow trans theories to apply them to an understanding of the politics of gender expression that is committed to challenging and escaping the limits of rigid heteronormative thinking and living. Leslie Feinberg's (1998) trans liberation discourse allows me to use transgender theory in this way. As a transgender individual, Feinberg calls upon other trans and non-trans individuals to form a coalition against gender oppression:

> And if you do not identify as transgender or transsexual or intersexual,
> your life is diminished by our oppression as well. Your own choices as a
> man or a woman are sharply curtailed. Your individual journey to
> express yourself is shunted into one of two deeply carved ruts, and the
> social baggage you are handed is already packed. (p. 6)

The "two deeply carved ruts" represent the binary system of gender that Feinberg deconstructs, and thus wishes to reconstruct. Feinberg permits me, as a non-trans researcher, access into *hir* political world; I am justified in applying trans theory, and thus developing a transgender metaphor, to gender politics in a more general sense.

An explication of the transgender metaphor requires a grounding in the binary

system of gender that is harmful and problematic and which requires a ferocious

interruption and reworking. I cite theorists whose work is in line with transgendering

which help to expound on the metaphor of transgender, including theories on gender

ambiguity and gender harassment which I have organized as paired concepts embodying

transgression and consequence. In an attempt to trace the evolution of the transgender

metaphor, I have also provided some reflection on scientific studies that are based on a

reconceptualization of gender and sexuality.

Transgender Metaphor: From the Gender Binary System to Gender Fluidity

Transgendering, gender diversity or gender fluidity explode the notion of gender

binaries and acknowledge the space(s) in between. While deconstructing the binary, the

likely solution is to condone a third gender: offering a place for those who fit into neither

category or whose gender is 'unknown'; however, this in-between state automatically

positions itself between the binary, thus maintaining that system. Halberstam too argues

that "'thirdness' merely balances the binary system and, furthermore, tends to homogenize

many different gender variations under the banner of 'other'" (1998, p. 28). A more

reconceptualized gender will restructure the binary, or blend the binary positions into a

sliding scale of gender where the polarities of masculinity and femininity exist only as two

among multiple points or ways of being gendered (Tauchert, 2001). Transgendering, or

gender fluidity, allows gender to be viewed as a spectrum of blended and blurred positions

where the likelihood of being somewhat masculine and somewhat feminine in varying

intensities is as common, or more so, than one being exclusively masculine and not at all feminine, or vice versa. This is not to be confused with the term 'gender blending' (Ekins and King, 1997) which historically named transsexuals or transvestites, but it does share semantic similarities. The new concept of gender may borrow from transgender theory, but it is meant to be applied to all, not merely the gender minority. Transgender, then, stands to offer possibilities for reconceptualizing gender; thus, it becomes a metaphor for a new way of understanding gender expression.

Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory has already established the transmutability, or the temporal nature of, gender. Gender in any one individual can slide along a scale from masculinity to femininity repeatedly. One is constantly negotiating one's gender identity through daily practice and thus one could be argued to be oscillating on the gender scale to some degree. Again, I borrow the term, 'oscillating', from transgender theory also (Ekins and King, 1997) but find it useful here. Further, the binary itself is a construction that deludes people into thinking it is achievable, that anyone can truly fit. According to Halberstam, "nobody fits the definitions of male and female, the categories gain power and currency from their impossibility" (1998, p. 27). More likely, gender expression must be corrected and realigned continually just to get as close to the hegemonic polarities as possible. According to Butler, even if gender appears to be more static or stable or "congeal[ed] into the most reified forms, the 'congealing' is itself an insistent and insidious practice, sustained and regulated by social means" (1990, p. 43). Nothing is static in gender, but the repeated practice of a syndrome of markers (appearance, behaviour, etc.) must be perpetually negotiated. If gender is not static, then

neither is it innate or attached to the self in any permanent way; it is not a fortification, but a result, apparently, of action. Transgendering, because it is about the suspension of gender, that which exists beyond or in between binary constructions, illuminates the temporal performative qualities of gender. It is through the consideration of transgender that gender itself can be reformed.

It is at this point, conceptually, that the transgender metaphor emerges. It is a way of addressing gender in new, un-polarized (non-binary), open terms. It can mean a way to deconstruct and reconstruct normalized notions of gender. This is not a study of and for *only* a gendered minority; it is a study that hinges on the hope that the transgender metaphor can liberate *every* gendered person from rigid classification and surveillance mechanisms in performing gender.

Butler, Bornstein and Others on the Transgender Metaphor

"Possibility is not a luxury; it is as crucial as bread" (Butler, 2004, p.29). Judith Butler insists we think, as educators and researchers, in terms of fantasy, of possibility, of another world that embraces those who suffer in this one. Although not quite turning transgender into metaphor, she certainly sees the value of the transgender as allowing society to "question what is real, and what 'must' be" and how to deconstruct societal norms and investigate how they come to be (p. 29). The transgender person belongs to the populace of the invisible, those whose lives are excluded from the discourse as if to negate their existence. They are the "not quite lives" who suffer a violence that "leaves a mark that is no mark" (p. 25). Butler also points to the transgender as "evidence of the

breakdown of any lines of causal determinism between sexuality and gender" (p. 54). If the transgender is not a metaphor for her, at least it insists on a conceptual departure from the normative binary system of gender. For me, it can achieve much more, through a restructuring of gender. Further, Butler explains gender is not a norm, but an apparatus that seems to dictate and produce the binary of masculine/feminine as the norm (2004, p. 42). Here transgender can act as a metaphor of sorts that breaks open this binary.

Kate Bornstein, in *Gender Outlaw* (1994), claims transgender accesses a new way of conceptualizing gender by allowing space for those who live outside the binary. Transgender allows us to question what makes a man, or what makes a woman, because gender, sexuality, biology, and legal status do not cohere in heteronormative ways. Short of promoting a "world without gender, something bland and colourless", Bornstein would rather be "playing with genders...with all the shades and flavors that gender can come in" (p. 58). Bornstein's transgender theory embraces fluidity: she criticizes that androgyny, for example, because it assumes a middle space between male and female, ignores "all the beautiful shades of identity of which we are capable" (1994, p. 115). And it appears Bornstein, although not directly subscribing to a transgender metaphor, would be open to such a concept. She laments "as a [transgender] people, we're short on metaphors, any metaphors...". And thus calls for "transgendered people to look for new metaphors---new ways of communicating our lives to people who are traditionally gendered" (p. 66). Transgender as metaphor advocates the transgender ideology as applicable to all traditionally and non-traditionally gendered individuals.

Bornstein positions transgender into the middle space between the gender binaries, as Marjorie Garber (1992) positions transvestism into a "third" space, a metaphor, of sorts. For her, transvestism is invested with power "as a space of possibility structuring and confounding culture" (p. 342). Through Garber's analysis of operatic figures, the transvestite signals "that space of 'thirdness'" which, although disrupting the binaries, re-normalizes the system (p. 239). A third space implies a space between two other positions; it does not connote a fragmented spectrum that allows for multiple sites of being gendered, or gender fluidity. Halberstam (1998) argues "Garber's third space tends to stabilize the other two" (p. 26). Since the inception of this project I have had to alter my thinking and articulation of the in-between precisely because of this consequence of reaffirming the binary. Somehow even the language must be reworked; if 'in between' is problematic, then another term must be sought that adequately and accurately defines the multiple, and blended "shades and flavors" of gender Bornstein so exalts.

The work of Deborah Britzman (1995) also parallels the transgender metaphor. She contributes to the language of gender politics by using 'queer' in queer theory as a verb to emancipate all. She presents queer theory as a "way to rethink the very grounds of knowledge and pedagogy in education" (1995); the discourse of the oppressed is open to all, oppressors both individually and systemically. Primarily this offer of queer studies is necessary as a way to

> question the stability and fundamentalist grounds of categories like
> masculinity, femininity, sexuality...categories that are central to the ways
> in which education organizes knowledge of bodies and bodies of
> knowledge. (Britzman, 1995, p. 152)

And even in her acknowledgement that the term 'queer' incites social anxiety (it is "disparaging" and "not polite") and suffers the criticism that it will only cater to the minority population, 'queer' is a new verb that will attack the binary system hence 'valorizing' its meaning (p. 153).

Further, the transgender metaphor seems not far off the work of Halberstam (1998) on 'female masculinity'. Similarly, it is through this "imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (p. 1). Halberstam employs the idea of one identity, female masculinity, as a symbol or signifier to point to another way of being gendered. The lives of these gender ambiguous individuals stand to help disrupt normative gender ideology; in this way, they become the metaphor for a restructured gender discourse. And Viviane Namaste (2000), in her work about the importance of examining the everyday lives of transgender people, frames them also as a symbol for the work that will "expand gender identities, rather than reify a binary gender system" (p. 26). In both cases, in Halberstam's and Namaste's work, the logic is precisely aligned with my own understanding of the transgender metaphor. The emancipatory effects of the language of the Other are widely acknowledged in academic circles.

Gender Ambiguity and Gender Harassment

As I have already acknowledged, I am aligning gender ambiguity theory with transgender theory. Gender ambiguity can provide another way of thinking about the transgender position because both are about a space beyond the normative constraints of

gender. But the two are distinct. Kate Bornstein (1994) clarifies the distinction even

between gender ambiguity and fluidity:

> If ambiguity is a refusal to fall within a prescribed gender code, then
> fluidity is the refusal to remain one gender or another. Gender fluidity is
> the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless
> number of genders, for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender
> fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender. (p. 52)

For my purposes, my thesis is more aligned theoretically with gender fluidity, as Bornstein

describes it, but it is also informed by gender ambiguity theory.

I have already identified Halberstam's (1998) work as informing the transgender

metaphor; but as her concern is situated in gender ambiguity, more exploration into this

related concept is wanting for my project. Because masculinity itself is a construction,

separate from the biological body but related to the expression and appearance of the body,

it is a signifier that can move across the physical bodies from male to female, thus creating

the masculine female. Halberstam defines 'heroic masculinity', or dominant masculinity,

as that which is equated to maleness thus excluding all other types or variations of

masculinity from the realm of what is socially acceptable. However, her book examines

where female masculinity is exemplified and relevant, specifically, in the James Bond

films, tomboyism, and queer butch art and performance, to name a few. It is not that

female masculinity has not existed, simply that it is "prevent[ed]...from taking hold", from

interrupting the "bonds between masculinity and men" (p. 15). Halberstam argues that

despite ample examples of 'heroic' women, embodying much of the attributes belonging to

masculinity, "there is still no general acceptance or even recognition of masculine women

and boyish girls" (p. 15). Gender ambiguity is relevant to my project in that it is a form of

gender transgression, a way of being that thwarts the normalized performances of the gender binary, and it is the understanding of such disruptions I seek amongst my participants.

In a discussion of gender identity and expression, especially with the focus on gender diversity or fluidity, a necessary follow-up must concentrate on the consequences for those who perform outside the gender norm. Under the umbrella term 'harassment' these consequences can be varied and sometimes ignored by the educational system. Both Wyss (2004) and Sykes (2004) discuss the impact harassment has on the youth who identify as gender diverse or "gender-queer" and the responsibility of the educational system to recognize these occurrences and act upon them.

Filax and Shogan (2004) contribute the notion of heteronormativity and its violent and sad impact on the stories of two gender-queer Aboriginal youth from Alberta. Through a complete reliance on this socially constructed system, youth can suffer incredibly. An examination into gender ambiguity or fluidity would be incomplete without investigating the ways gender non-conformist individuals endure harassment of all sorts by a populace intent on policing and punishing their gender performance.

Heather Sykes' (2004) work contributes also to the discourse about gender violence against non-conformists and the implications for "gender equity" in schools. She already acknowledges that certain binary understandings of gender "no longer capture how many students experience their gender identities" (2004, p. 21). For her, what is "taken-for-granted" about gender identity is separate from the reality in both the classroom and in Queer and Feminist studies. She urges teachers to see the truths of gender identification,

especially amongst "gender-queer" youth, as they play out in schools. She warns this work

is imperative because gender variant youth suffer incredible "harassment in school,

unemployment, homelessness, hate violence, lack of access to health care and loss of

custody of their children" all at the hands of transphobic peers and systems" (p. 21).

Historical Context of Transgender

Transgressive gender expressions as ideology find conceptual roots in sex theory.

As a parallel concept to gender variance or gender fluidity, the Kinsey Scale (1948) charted

the gradations between 'true' heterosexuality (at level 0) to 'true' homosexuality (at level

6). According to Kinsey's own research, many more individuals fit into the categories

between 0 and 6 than merely a minority sexual population. Conventional society still

reveres the binary with regards to both sexual orientation and gender identity, and ignores

the possibility of anything more fluid. But established research has offered the alternative.

Dr. Harry Benjamin (1966) followed up from the Kinsey scale to create the Sex

Orientation Scale (S.O.S.) which is based on gender expression but is specifically geared to

plotting the gradations in identity of biological men who claim transsexualism. The

problem with this scale is its inherent pathologizing and exclusionary principles: it does

not apply the fluidity of gender expression to anyone beyond the minority population. In

addition, Benjamin's scale conflates sexuality with gender expression, which are distinct

and discrete concepts in contemporary academic literature. It is not enough to say that the

conceptual work of promoting gender diversity has been done, especially in the field of

sociology, since this work is primarily medically-based.

Transgender is a personal identity; it is also a highly political position which must be examined before its appropriation into metaphor can be fully accepted. The name of transgender emerged only in the early 1990's as a "collective category of identity which [then and now] incorporates a diverse array of male- and female-bodied gender persons" (Valentine, 2007, p. 4). But it also became "a powerful tool of activism and personal identification" (p. 4). Transgender as a name and category has worked both for the individual and the group: it created a space for people who did not have public recognition. Transgender, as it is lived, results in various self-conceptions: it can be the mid-point between male and female; it can be a space through which one wishes to pass, from one gender to another; it can also be a position of gender in its own right, not qualified by either binary gender. Overall, it acknowledges the many multiple and compounded places within the framework that opens up the possibilities of gender expression. Indeed, all gender is a fluid performance (Haynes, 2001, p. 13). In non-transgender people, gender goes "uncontested, because there is usually a cluster of dominant features that tend to one side or the other, but the normal person will not be entirely male or female" (p. 13). And so it benefits every gendered individual, all people, to re-conceptualize gender through a transgender framework.

Unknowability and the Borders of Knowing

The metaphor of the transgender also draws on the work of Kumashiro (2002), and Patti Lather (2008) in that it works for everyone, the oppressed and the oppressor. Kumashiro argues that education should be not *about* the Other, but *for* the Other/

oppressed which I extend should then be *for* the oppressors also. This project may appear to be *about* those who are othered, but it is equally *about* those who observe and contribute to this othering. As long as work (education/ research) protects the oppressed, the inclusion of the oppressor is also necessary to change hegemonic gender ideology. Kumashiro also acknowledges unknowability as a legitimate place that teachers and researchers inhabit. Lather cites Derrida in her explication of the concept of "getting lost as a way to move out of commanding, controlling, master discourses and into a knowledge that recognizes the inevitable blind spots of our knowing" (2008). She permits the confused or "partial knowledge" (Kumashiro, 2002) of the researcher because it "interrupts or derails absolute knowledge...[and] loses itself, gets off the track, in order to expose itself to chance...[and] in order to do what [Derrida] calls...knowledge from and of the Other thanks to the Other". Knowledge *for* and *of* the Other is new and thus is complex, incomplete and unstable. In this way, Lather calms the anxieties of the researcher who engages in investigative, exploratory research. The unknown and the blind spots are not to be feared but exalted because they mark the path to true change. I take great solace in Lather's and Kumashiro's politics: without the assurance that the unknown should be embraced, I would have been paralysed in my pursuit of students' perspectives simply because I must remain open-ended and unsuspecting.

Unknowability demarcates the limits of knowing; if knowledge is quantified and located, then what lies outside of it is unknowledge. Limits, or borders, are key markers in the discourse of gender fluidity or variance because the gender non-conformist is often an inhabitant of the borderlands. Britzman (1995) and Butler (1993) teach us about the

borders in gender politics which is also an extension of serving the oppressed to serve/ change the oppressor. Without knowing the end of what is acceptable, we cannot know what ideology we uphold subconsciously. Britzman cites Foucault whose "regimes of truth" (as cited in Britzman, 1995, p. 156) "regulate...the thinkable, the recognizable, the limits, and the transgressions discursively codified through legal, medical, and educational structures" (p. 156). But it is through examining these limits we learn what is "the dismissed, the unworthy, the irrelevant" (p. 156) and thus can learn what is within the limits. By shining the proverbial light on "what students and teachers cannot bear to know" (p. 157) academics and activists can begin the work that will reconstruct norms. After collecting my data, I grappled with the apparent blandness of the responses. At first thought, before I engaged further with the data, I regretted not finding vibrant or spectacular stories from vibrant, spectacular subjects. I think I was afraid without a sensationally marked Other among my participants, I would have nothing to analyse. Indeed, it is now I see the real work can ensue from my data that resembles the everyday; it is in that blandness, or banal nature that I can unearth the very norms that Britzman argues "produces itself as an unmarked sameness and as synonymous with the everyday" (p. 159) and I will find it by reflecting on what the participants othered or called unacceptable gender expression.

Butler (1993) looks also to that which is excluded (the Other: the feminine, the transgender) to uncover the borders of normative identity: "every oppositional discourse will produce its outside" (p. 52). But what Butler contributes is that the outside is precisely where our focus should be in order to understand how such borders are manufactured. One

chapter is entitled, "Bodies that Matter", which puns on matter: bodies are *of* matter, that

is, of materialistic substance; but, they also matter, as in they are of consequence or

importance (p. 32). It is those bodies which traditionally do not matter which can

illuminate our strict gender regimes and help us disassemble their borders. The lives of

gender variant individuals may prove applicable to any gendered individual. And the way

the participants examine those lives of the other is relevant to how they conduct their own.

Butler's heterosexual matrix (1990) incorporates this tie between the outside and

inside as necessary parts and almost codependent entities: that which is outside is

"nevertheless [a construction] fully 'inside', not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete

cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible" (p. 98). To imagine

anything as rejected or outside the norms, is to have it belong to the whole construction of

the normative identity; if it were truly outside, it could not even be acknowledged. The

maintenance of the outside also presupposes a very strict policing of the borders between it

and the inside or the acceptable.

The production of the heterosexual matrix also speaks to Butler's performative

theory of gender: gender is not innate, but a result of social fictions that create the illusion

of an internal gender which is supported and regulated by societal constructions (1990).

Further, heterosexuality is deemed the original, or natural sexual orientation, thus

preserving the taboo against homosexuality and creating a "compulsory heterosexuality".

Adrienne Rich (1980) challenges this notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" which

pathologizes the lesbian experience, positioning it on a range "from deviant to abhorrent,

or simply rendered invisible" (p. 632). Thus, social constructions create interior and

exterior identities, and inclusive and exclusive practices. The matrix is about power, that which decides what is to be subverted, accepted, and punished. Butler argues the reproductive domain normalizes heterosexuality, conflated with binary notions of gender identity, which then creates "a fiction of heterosexual coherence" (1990, p. 173). The repeated performance of gender through "acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body...[never revealing] the organizing principle of identity as a cause" (p. 173). The very innate nature of binary gender and heterosexual dominance are social fictions that hide the mechanisms that create them.

Further, Butler's discourse on embodiment intersects with the limits of knowing. Butler (2004) articulates the symbiosis of the body with an act of critical awareness: as the body is a process, so too is the evolution of rethinking gender norms a process, one that "exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone" (p. 29). Imagining a place beyond our societal limits is imperative to end the violence and torture to which the rejected, those who live outside of our gender norms, are subjected. For here the real work begins. It is at the limits, Butler explains, where "the reproducibility of the conditions is not secure, [and is] the site where conditions are contingent, transformable" (p. 27). Researchers and educators must get at those limits, pad along the proverbial wall until the structure begins to crumble, and then continue through the instability to arrive at something as yet undiscovered. To effect change, or achieve "transformation", one must "disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality" (p. 27).

The major contributor to the concept of the limits or 'border' is Gloria Anzaldúa in her reflection and examination of her own 'borderlands' as the *mestiza*, a woman of mixed ancestry, and the lesbian which gives her an identity of hybridity. The new "consciousness of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 1999, p.99) embraces the cross-pollination of identities, the "juncture of cultures" (Preface to the First Edition, 1999). Anzaldúa writes of the struggle of negotiating norms and the limits of those norms but calls then for a "tolerance for ambiguity" (p. 101). She tells the story of "a *muchacha....una de las otras,* 'of the Others'" who was a woman for half the year and a man for the other half. But instead of denigrating this individual, Anzaldúa insists there "is a magic aspect in abnormality and so-called deformity" because the

> half and halfs are not suffering from a confusion of sexual identity, or
> even from a confusion of gender. What we are suffering from is an
> absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other.
> (p. 41)

Anzaldúa is the embodiment herself of the half and half; identifying as a queer person, she claims both male and female in one body. She is an inhabitant of the Borderlands of both culture and gender. And the discourse of the borderlands continues beyond Anzaldúa's work: C. Alejandra Elenes (2003) describes the "discourse of the Borderlands speaks a language of fluidity...[and] is the discourse of people who live between different worlds" (p. 191). And Bornstein (1994) claims the borderlands discourse for her deconstruction of normative gender regimes: "in living along the borders of the gender frontier, I've come to see the gender system created by this culture as a particularly malevolent and divisive construct" (p. 12). The Borderlands is a metaphor for those who

live beyond heteronormative categories and stands as a model for the transgender

metaphor.

Visuality, Visibility and Invisibility

As much as this project addresses gender variance, alludes to the notion of process,

it is also a project about the visual. My background as a Visual Arts teacher influences my

preference for studying the visual. For many it is the first mode of connection with the

world, before sound or touch, we see; as an aside, visual literacy is a necessary skill for

responsible, engaged students which is the basis of Visual Art curriculum. I was wont to

include a consideration of the visual for these reasons initially. Further, I discovered

certain theorists (Harraway, Tauchert) contribute to a discourse on visuality and the visible

in gender politics. Because the body of the gender variant individual is so highly visible, it

is essential to investigate how that individual is visualized, made visible, and likely made

invisible simultaneously. I did not seek to know about how the participants identified

personally; therefore, most if not all of their stories are about seeing peers, locating their

knowledge in visual identifiers or symbols of gender. Sometimes their knowledge about

the gender diverse appears to be incomplete probably due to the invisibility not only of

these individuals but of their problems or presence in the greater educational landscape

(see Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001).

Visual Models of Transgender

Because the visual is inevitable in a discussion on the gendered body, two theories (Ekins and King; Tauchert) create models that help envision a new way of conceptualizing gender identity. In a less formal way, Kate Bornstein (1994) offers her visual model of gender in opposition to the binary system that conventionally sees a line flanked by two polar entities: "it would be interesting to twirl that line in space, and then spin it through several more dimensions. In this way, many more possibilities of gender identity may be explored" (p. 116).

Based on their extensive individual and collective research of the personal narrative, Ekins and King offer four modes of "transgendering" (2001, p. 125): migrating, oscillating, negating, and transcending. To add to the complexity, their data helped them develop sub-processes that occur during transgendering: erasing, substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining (p. 126). Each sub-process intersects with various modes in various permutations. What their research indicates, at the least, is how complex and yet how comprehensible transgendering stories can be. They are neither reducing transgender to a monolith, nor are they letting the stories become so tangled and complicated that they become nonsensical. They have a firm but gentle hold on the concept of transgendering.

The fourth mode of transgendering, 'transcending', contributes more to the discourse of gender as a whole because it implies a movement into a "third space" (Ekins and King, 2001, p. 125) which makes "questionable our 'commonsense' assumptions about what it means to be a man or a woman" (p. 137). Although Halberstam (1998) may take issue with the third space's unwitting re-establishment of the binary gender system, for

Ekins and King this concept is transgressive. Transcending stories are about the participant, rather than the authority; difference, rather than truth; and deconstruction, rather than the "categorically clear" (p. 137). In this way, the stories of gender variant youth are highly important to the discourse of gender fluidity.

As a complete rejection of the binary system of gender, Tauchert presents a unique conceptual model. Fuzzy Gender and the Radical Center borrows from fuzzy logic in mathematics (Tauchert, 2001, p. 183). Tauchert explains 'fuzzy gender' using Day/Night which, according to Cixous, are "necessary 'opposites' in the sense that they cannot be simultaneously present" (p. 184). Inventively, Tauchert corrects Cixous. Day and Night *can* exist simultaneously: "there are moments in the Day/Night when it *is* both Day and Night at the same time", specifically in the Dawn and Dusk (p. 184). The visual model is not a line flanked by polar opposites but a circle that incorporates the continuum of difference. Of course this formula is then transposed to gender whereby transgender is part of the whole picture of gender and lies alongside maleness and femaleness in equal importance.

Tauchert argues the sustainability of the binary concept relies upon the need for boundaries. People police the boundaries between gender identities, between what is acceptable and what is not, because it is the only way for "the categories to remain differentiated at all" (Tauchert, 2001, p. 184). Tauchert proposes a "radical center" (p. 186) that embraces ambiguity, the previously "excluded middle" (p. 187). The gender variant individual fits right in to this newly articulated space. But also the understandings of gender amongst a more general population of youth (as in not specifically identified as

gender-fluid) can find a place in the in between space, or at least, can remain ambiguous. Tauchert's new gender concept literally draws the picture that allows room for other-than binary perspectives.

Visibility and Invisibility

In daily living, the gender fluid individual is seen or witnessed not for anything but their gender expression and its obvious discordance with the normative gender regime. For this reason, the gender variant individual is more visible and thus can become the archetype of the icon for transgender politics. Societally an outsider, and metaphorically an icon, the gender variant person is both rejected and revered, but also made visible and invisible simultaneously.

Visibility, visuality and invisibility are intertwined concepts in gender variance politics. Harraway's (1988) work connects visuality with knowing quite elegantly in the concept of "embodied objectivity" (1988, p. 284) which frames all knowledge as socially constructed. Objectivity is oppressive and connotes the "conquering gaze from nowhere... [which] mythically inscribes all the marked bodies" (p. 283). Patricia Hayes, in her essay on photography, describes the complex relationship between seeing and being seen. Specifically, she distinguishes between the terms 'visibility' and 'visuality'. To make visible, to uncover from the security of anonymity, is often a political act. Hayes cautions us that "the positivist mandate to 'make visible' as a panacea for all gender ills" is inadequate because it ignores the "question of power" (Hayes, 2006, p. 3). She replaces visibility with visuality as "the central focus...because it questions *how things are made*

visible" (p. 3). Esther Newton researches the culture of drag queens and finds that "gender

is highly regulated even within the world of female impersonators" (Namaste, 2000, p. 25).

She has found that if the transgender person is 'made visible' through drag, performing a

transcendental gender, it is empowering only while that person stays on the stage: "The

drag queen in the gay world is meant to be on stage or 'walking' the streets. Don't get off

the stage, baby!" (DeVille, 1990, as cited in Namaste, 2000, p. 10- 11). After the show,

even within that same establishment amongst the drinks and music and varied trans-

identity spectators, that person's cache has strangely disappeared: "drag queens can move

freely within gay male settings as long as they abide by the implicit rules of such

circulation" (DeVille, 1990, as cited in Namaste, 2000, p. 11). Their transgender identity

(manifested in this case as 'transy drag' or the wearing of women's clothes) is now only a

costume; they are "reduced to entertainment... whose only purpose is to titillate the gay

male viewer" (p. 11) and are "viewed with disdain" (Newton, as cited in Namaste, 2000, p.

25).

How and when the transgender identity becomes authentic outside of the literal

performance is important to question. Without relevance in the everyday, the transgender

visibility is more harmful than not. It is re-inscribing the image of the freak onto the body

of the person. What Hayes might argue is that the transgender person needs not to be made

visible, but to enter into the discourse of 'visuality' whereby these concerns of authenticity

and humanity would be valid: "Asking *how* things are made visible (or not) shifts

'gender' as an unmediated category of historical analysis to gender as a vehicle of specific

representations" (Hayes, 2006, p. 4). Although Hayes examines gender through visual

texts, both historical and contemporary, her caution is useful to sociology also.

It follows then a complex paradox: the transgender is so very visible and yet

extremely invisible simultaneously. If turned into a spectacle in an accepted forum as the

drag show, only a particular part of transgender is exposed: literally, the body that is

transgressive, but not the affected person beneath. Rather a form of tokenism, the 'transy

drag queen' re-inscribes the harmful stereotypes onto the transgender body.

Namaste blames queer theorists and researchers for their constant disregard for the

real lives of transgender people. Critics and theorists ignore the real violence and

"implications of an enforced sex/gender system for the people who have defied it, who live

outside it, or who have been killed because of it" (2000, p. 9). It is the tendency of

sociological research to objectify transsexual and transgendered people and Namaste takes

great issue with the "touristic view of the lives of poor, urban TS/TG prostitutes", for

example (Pettiway as cited in Namaste, 2000, p. 29) or the moralizing applied to their way

of life. These individuals are made invisible by society at large also. These "unseen

genders", those "that are not visible in terms of acceptable cultural constructs", convince

society that all is well (Haynes, 2001, p. 17). Further, they are excluded from even the

sexual minority population, namely the gay and lesbian communities to which transgender

is conveniently, but inadequately, attached in political causes or research circles (Namaste,

2000, p. 12). Interestingly, Namaste cites this exclusion as part of the operation of lesbian

and gay identities who "position others as 'anomalies' in order to portray themselves as

'natural'" (p. 12). Transgender invisibility may also be self-elected "given the lack of

safety in the social environment" (Burdge, 2007, p. 244). What needs to be made visible is the clear danger and oppression transgender people suffer. Namaste points to the need for further research on the everyday lives of transgender people, rather than more of the medicalizing focus that is rampant. Although my study is not about the lives of transgender people, I aim to look at how gender non-conformist youth are treated and viewed in their everyday school lives. The ultimate justification for this research is as Namaste insists, without sensitive consideration and progressive work, gender non-conformist individuals will continue to suffer violence and trauma at the hands of a hateful and intolerant gender regime.

Embodiment

Butler (2004) contributes to my understanding about gender as an embodied experience. For her, bodies are social, seeing each other, working in each other's space; and because the body is about physicality, "mortality, vulnerability, agency" the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and to violence" (p. 21). We cannot help but belong to a politically charged body of bodies, one that dictates regulations, norms, and consequences. Further, a *gendered* body is so, really, only for another *gendered* body, in that we are "always, to a certain extent, becoming gendered *for others*" (p. 25); gender without others is irrelevant. The space between bodies is porous, a boundary not quite impenetrable because we interact and overlap as social beings do. Indeed, "as bodies, we are always for something more than, and other than ourselves" (p. 25).

Jay Prosser (1998) examines the relationship between the body and language in his essay "A Skin of One's Own" which begins with a description of the performance art of Orlan whose own plastic surgeries transformed her into a composite of classic beauties from the art world. In this work, Prosser asks how changing the body's surface affects the self. Through citing Didier Anzieu's concept of the 'skin ego', the body is more than mere costume or discrete surface. It is "quite crucially making us who we are" and because it is the border between the inside and outside of the body, it is the "key interface between self and other" (p. 65). As a Freudian psychoanalyst, Anzieu differs from Butler on the debate of the purpose of the body: for Butler, the body is a "projected image"; for Anzieu, the body is not a site for which the self can project its desires, but the creator of those desires that are also played out on its surface. The body is intertwined with the self while retaining its physicality: "the skin ego returns the ego to its bodily origins in Freud" (p. 65). Further, Prosser likens his thesis to Anzieu's reversal of Lacan's idea that "the unconscious is structured like a language" to become "the unconscious is the body" (p. 66). Sondergaard seems to agree that the body is integral to the creation of self: asking, "how is the body spoken into existence?" (2002, p. 189), Sondergaard states the name (the signifier) is not independent or distinct from the body (the signified), but that they create each other. Thus, the body is signifier as well as signified, in the discourse of language. The body's significance in the formation of identity is justification for asking students not only about their understandings of gender and gender expression, but also reason to trust their visual perceptions of the body's surface as a legitimate source for their understanding.

What we see on the surface of the body is not mere happenstance, but a result of the making of self.

If it is legitimate to study the surface of the body, it follows then that how youth choose to stylize the body is more tied to the formation of identity than a superficial following of trends. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2001) use the term 'fashioning self' which is key to my discussion of youth citing fashion or bodily stylizations as examples of gender expression. Each fashion genre has political implications in the society of youth. But Halberstam (1998) disagrees. After her critique of the James Bond character, she cites fashion that promises to create a rebel out of the wearer. A brand of clothing called Bad Boy "reveals how quickly transgression adds up to nothing more than consumerism in the sphere of the white male" (1998, p. 4). It is necessary to examine this relationship now among the body, the self/identity, and the adornment of the body through clothing and other stylizations in youth and then how that relationship intersects with consumerism and/ or political statements.

Regulation of Gender

The limits of knowing, as Butler described, could be rephrased as the limits of the norms. How gender is normalized, what is normal within gender expression and what is outside of normal, is monitored through strict regulatory practices. Youth understand the limits they impose upon one another better than anyone. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli investigate gender regulation through these "normalizing practice[s]" (2001) that are manifested in the form of self-regulation and involve the impact of "society and

media" (Heather Smith, p. 94) on the expression of gender. They detail the intricacies and complexities of how gender norms are maintained and the consequences upheld for transgressing them.

Halberstam (1998) also contributes a great deal to the discussion of the regulation of gender norms in her story of the "bathroom problem" (p. 21). The problem is that gender ambiguous individuals do not feel welcome or safe in public bathrooms that are divided into "either/or bathrooms, either women or men" (p. 15). She recounts a time when she entered the women's public washroom in Chicago's O'Hare airport only to be confronted by security guards who were called by someone who mistook her gender. Poetically, she reads the airport space as a place "where people are literally moving through space and time" (p. 20), accentuates the policing of gender because nothing else is permanent or stable. It is in this public space where gender is regulated and gender ambiguity tested that the signifying capacity of the body becomes a site for establishing a very real hegemonic masculine/feminine binary in practice. For Halberstam, the "bathroom problem is much more than a glitch in the machinery of gender segregation and is better described in terms of the violent enforcement of our current gender system" (p. 25). My participants engaged at length in their own bathroom discussion, both in the focus group and the individual interviews, divulging the problems and pitfalls they had witnessed.

Because gender is understood or conceptualized as a regulatory practice that is governed by specific norms, or at least, it operates as such in dominant discourse, Butler (2004) discusses norms and normalization as part of the regulation of such hegemonic

gender order: "norms ...when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce" (p. 41). That which is invisible is probably a norm because it is normalized, made neutral and thus so banal it is not worth noticing or seeing.

Gender and Intersections with Sex, Sexuality and Race

It seems inevitable that through exploration of gender diversity, issues of sexuality will enter the discussion. When a participant talks about sexuality instead of gender, it happens perhaps not because the terms are slippery and easily confused, using Paechter's argument (2006), but because according to Youdell (2005), sexuality and gender, along with sex, are intertwined and impossible to extricate from each other. Mine is supposed to be a study about gender; however, it is false to think of gender in isolation. When speaking about youth identities, the conscious stylizing of the body is key to the formation of identity and refers to gender and sexuality equally (p. 249). And just as gender is socially constructed (Butler, 1990), sexuality is too (p. 249) so it makes sense that it would be part of the discourse of identity-making.

It might be helpful to draw on Paechter's (2001) poststructuralist work that defines the terms in question. She outlines sex, gender assignment, gender identity, and gender role. The first is standard: "*sex* refers to matters of biology" (p. 47); a person's sex is determined by their anatomical and genetic makeup at birth. The second term is a marker of subtlety and often elides into other concepts: "*gender assignment* ..is based on perceived physical characteristics" especially at birth (p. 47). Only in cases where the

perception renders confusion (i.e. of ambiguous sexual organs) will the gender assignment also be ambiguous. To this thinking, *sex* is most often as possible supposed to be aligned with *gender assignment,* but where mistakes are made, this equation is broken. Third, "*gender identity* refers to a person's own feelings about their gender" (p. 47). One's gender identity does not have to align with sex, gender assignment, or any other markers of gender; it is in the jurisdiction of the individual's own self-identification. Finally, Paechter defines *gender role* as "a set of behavioural prescriptions or proscriptions for individuals who have a particular assigned gender" (p. 47). She notes these roles vary according to culture, and are thus societal constructions, constituting, for example, hegemonic masculinity and femininity. A study on gender fluidity will take notice of the conflation of all of these terms, in gender essentialism, and also deconstruct the way the hegemonic gender concepts are normalized.

A topic hotly debated in contemporary feminist and queer theory, Butler (2004) examines the relationship between sex/sexuality and gender. At first she aligns them because they equally expose the body to the societal sphere, making the body public because it is visible in the public sphere. But she also insists they are distinct concepts, albeit often conflated. In her definition of gender as a mode of constructing meaning, she acknowledges that society often reduces gender to a norm that conflates it with "masculine/feminine, man/woman, male/female, thus perform[ing] the very naturalization that the notion of gender is meant to forestall" (p. 43). In this way, gender should not be reducible to sex because both are easily polarized, naturalizing the hegemonic genders. Luce Irigaray (1985) denotes sex as not a social or biological category, but "a linguistic

one that exists, as it were, on the divide between the social and the biological" (p. 43). So again, sex and gender are distinct concepts, as gender is most certainly a social category.

As for sexuality and gender, in Butler's words, they are "separate but overlapping concerns within contemporary queer theory" (2004, p. 54). Although they are tied, they cannot be conflated because they cannot be assumed to operate in tandem with each other. For instance, one's sexuality does not and should not presuppose one's gender and vice versa: as in, "to engage in a given sexual practice, anal sex...does not presuppose that one is a given gender" (p. 54). Unfortunately, given the current gender regimes in place, gender is believed to be dependent on sexuality. Further, one's gender should not be assumed to fall within a heterosexual hegemony, especially since queer sexualities alter the insistence on a binary gender because "gender itself is internally unstable" (p. 54).

The relationship between gender and sex becomes more involved in Butler's (2004) chapter, *Doing Justice to Someone*. The case of Brenda/David is about a person born a boy, who suffered a botched surgery and was socialized by Dr. John Money's Gender Identity Institute into a girl, who later reclaimed a male status as an adolescent. Butler attributes Money's philosophy as borrowing from the second wave feminist movement in the 1970's where if gender became divorced from biological sex, it could offer great liberties to women. However, this ideology does great harm to transexual cases because the medical community, with Money at the forefront, insisted that gender could be altered through social nurturing exclusively. Brenda/David is evidence of the inadequacies of this theory in practice. Butler describes the academic reaction to the Money case as a renewal of the idea that biology is the basis for gender. This "essential gender core" unequivocally

ties gender to anatomy, to sex. But this leaves no room for the transgender who lives

outside of or *beside* oneself, beside one's anatomy (Butler, 2004, chapter 1). According to

Butler, "gender is a different sort of identity, and its relation to anatomy is complex" (p.

63). She wishes to look at the case as thwarting both competing philosophies: "there may

be another way of reading this story, one that neither confirms nor denies the theory of

social construction, one that neither confirms nor denies gender essentialism" (p. 67).

Butler suspends the question "whether gender or sex is fixed or free" (1990, p. 13);

additionally she posits,

> ...if the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a
> fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems
> that genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the
> truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity. (p. 174)

Butler decides the social construction of gender renders its coherence to the

heteronormalized body as natural but is in fact an illusion, a fiction supported by

regulatory practices. Through her analysis of drag, the "unified picture of 'woman'" is

interrupted to reveal a "falsely naturalized...unity through the regulatory fiction of

heterosexual coherence" (p. 175). Drag makes visible the constructed nature of gender.

Gender and sex are separated but also inextricably linked; indeed, Butler asserts the

"illusion of an interior and organizing gender core,...[is] maintained for the purposes of the

regulation of sexuality" (p. 173). Gender is only conflated with sex when it supports the

fiction of heteronormativity.

Although I did not intend a study about race, it seems also impossible to ignore the

implications of race, ethnicity, and culture on the formation of gender understandings. It is

thus pertinent to access Athena Wang's (2000) study about Asian and white boys because

she is able to discuss the impact Asian culture has on specific masculinities and how this

knowledge differs from that of and about white boys'. I cite her precisely because three of

my participants are Asian, two of which are male. In fear that the dominant masculinity of

white males will become the default framework when I understand my participants'

responses, Halberstam warns to pay attention to that "degree of indifference to the

whiteness of the male and the masculinity of the white male" (1998, p. 3). Just as Butler

(1993, 2004) looks to the limits for understanding a concept, for Halberstam, masculinity is

only recognizable , or "becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white

male middle-class body" (p. 2).

Feminist Interpretative Frameworks for Making Sense of Gender-Identity Formation

Sondergaard's (2002) feminist analytic approach has also informed my conceptual

understanding of gender identity formation as an ongoing process involving negotiation.

She acknowledges that gender is a social construction rather than any sort of authoritative

truth or natural effect of one's biological sex (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 188) which informs

my approach to engaging my participants in this research. I pose certain questions to my

participants, not to convert them to my political stance vis-à-vis gender variance, but to

create a discursive and interpretive space for encouraging them to examine the very

structures they assume to be inherent or even banal and thus invisible. I embrace a

feminist perspective as I am reading their stories in "terms of [their] location within a

historical moment marked by a particular gender, race, or class ideology"(Denzin and

Lincoln, 2005, p.7). In this way, I am not generalizing, but seeking rich, descriptive detail that I acknowledge is situated in a precise subjective context.

The identity of individuals is a constantly negotiated process; it meanders and reconfigures its details in response to external societal stimuli and to internal personal instincts. Post-structuralism states categories of identity exist only in the artifice of language which is in a state of "constant movement" of meaning where "there is always more" (Derrida, 1976 and 1972 as cited in Sondergaard, 2002, p. 188) and thus acknowledges the validity of multiple meanings.

It is important to note I am not trying to harness some sort of official word on the topic of gender fluidity from the responses I gathered from my participants. My aim is to foreground constructed and situated knowledge derived from the participants' own understandings and in their own terms, albeit a mere moment even in their own 'meandering and reconfiguring' lives. What I gathered this year could and probably would even change amongst the same participants next year. As gender is a constantly negotiated process of becoming, so too is their understanding and articulation of it as an ongoing phenomenon.

Throughout my analysis, I must pay attention to the language, specifically, the terminology the participants used and I echoed or vice versa. At times I fear I was not aware of the confusion between masculinity and male or femininity and feminism, for example. But Paechter teaches us that the very "'obviousness' of a particular term or its use in a specific context" prevents us from "perceiv[ing] the problems it brings in its wake" (2006, p. 254). The normative language allows us to "slide constantly between

uses and understandings of words" (p. 254) but not without effect: most importantly it impinges on the clarity of intended meaning and confuses the recipient's understanding. The ambiguity in terms can mean that the researcher and the participant are actually speaking about different concepts entirely. However, Paechter also claims poststructuralism allows for the shifting in meaning in the transmission from "the originator of the statement...[and]...the understandings of those who read/hear and interpret it" because "meaning is constructed" (2001, p. 42). It is impossible for the transmission to be pure; interpretation will always impede the communication process and they will always be part of a power relationship. As a researcher, I must be aware of my position as powerful and although I may be trying to empower the participants, I must also be sensitive as to how I exert my own authority unwittingly.

Terminology

My terminology borrows from many academic leaders in the discourse and I favor no one over another. I use the terms rather interchangeably, without meaning to confuse, rather because I do not see a clear distinction amongst them; for me, they simply signify the 'other', or the transgressive gender. In general, the term 'genderqueer' (Wyss, 2004, p. 714) might describe anyone who problematizes heteronormative gender regimes. More specifically then, 'gender non-conforming', or 'gender non-conformist', are better descriptors of this transgressive actor that Wyss sees as "emcompassing all transpeople, genderqueers" etc. (p. 714). A 'sexual minority' is only confusing and conflates sexuality and sex with the discrete category of gender, thus I refrain from using this category

although I encountered it as a descriptor of the transgender in a political context. Other

terms like 'gender diverse', 'gender variant' and 'gender fluid' and Butler's (2004)

'otherwise gendered' are appropriate and relatively unproblematic. Bornstein (1994)

distinguishes between gender fluidity and gender ambiguity, as I have already discussed

(ambiguous is about occupying the space beyond normative gender; fluid is about the

constant movement negotiating that space, the constant playing with and changing gender),

but I use those also interchangeably at times. One term I have not used is

'transgenderist' (Namaste, 2000) which is a "community term denoting kinship among

those with gender-variant identities" (p. 26). Wyss acknowledged her participants'

identification as trans or genderqueer because she notes the empowerment involved with

self-naming. Because I was not accessing any genderqueer participants (at least

knowingly), I could not ask about self-naming. Therefore, for this study it is irrelevant to

consider the integrity of the term except according to my own comfort.

Thesis Overview

I have organized the thesis over six chapters. Chapter one establishes the research

questions and then explores the conceptual frameworks that have influenced and formed

my thinking from my inception into gender studies. Although I could not present a finite

list of all who contribute to the discourse, I hope to have highlighted the major ideas in a

cohesive manner. Additionally, I use Chapter one to define the significance of the

research; also, I have incorporated a short consideration of gender theory terminology.

Chapter two contains a literature review of relevant and related research studies in the

field. Through this survey I have attempted to ground my own project within a context.

Chapter three examines my methodological approaches while providing justification for

them. It also includes participant profiles, describes my participant selection method, data

collection, data analysis modes, and considers the limitations of the study. Chapter four

and chapter five contain the actual data analysis. I have divided the analysis into two

chapters for the ease of reading; chapter four explores the concepts of gender conformity

and non-conformity as it relates to the participants' knowledge and understanding about

gender variance. This then leads into an extensive inquiry, in the second part of the

chapter, about the embodiment of gender through sartorial descriptions and transgressions,

as well as an interpretation of the drawings of gender the participants produced. Chapter

five continues with an examination of participants' voices and narratives as they relate to

gender regulation in various forms, including girls' and boys' transgressions, a

concentration on tomboyism, and a focus on the bathroom as a site that complicates the

lives of gender variant people. Further, I investigate a compliance and rejection of

regulation that addresses the way the participants react to harmful practices they witness.

Finally, Chapter six concludes the thesis, summarizing the body of the paper, re-establishes

the significance of the research, and offers implications for future study on gender fluidity.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced the topic of gender fluidity and outlined my aims

and purpose from the outset. My research questions examine gender fluidity and gender

rigidity, asking to what extent youth subscribe to either, and pursues an interrogation of the

visual ways gender performance is implicated in gender conforming and non-conforming individuals. At this point I postulate the significance of the research project for the field of education. I have also outlined the various theorists who have informed my understanding of gender variance. Engagement with various feminist, queer, and transgender theorists derives from a long process of mental marination initiated early on in my graduate career. Ultimately, I believe the seeds to these ideas were planted even years before I officially enrolled. Here I have also included an unravelling of the transgender metaphor, a concept whose justification I culled from Butler (1990), Britzman (1995), Bornstein (1994) and Halberstam (1998) primarily. Overall, this chapter outlines my engagement with theory and in this sense has enabled me to map out a conceptual framework and to apply analytic categories that inform my approach to investigating the phenomenon of gender fluidity and gender variance in the lives of adolescent youth in one school in South Western Ontario.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I provide a review of the relevant literature in the field and in doing

so indicate what my contribution is to producing knowledge about gender variance and

gender expression in adolescent students' lives at school. I report on important studies that

have addressed issues related to gender fluidity and genderqueer youth in schools. Specific

research documenting the violence imposed upon genderqueer youth are included to

convey a picture of the intolerance deriving from the imposition of a regulatory system for

enforcing rigid gender norms. Such studies, which examine the impact and effects of

heterosexism and homophobic practices in schools, are therefore highlighted. The

significance of quantitative studies that have attempted to measure levels of harassment

inflicted on the gender diverse population is also included. The worth of such studies is

embedded in its ability to confirm, in strict scientific terms, that these harmful practices are

pervasive, but have their limits providing insights into the complexities of how gender

expression is negotiated in the lives of youth in schools. In this sense, the value of

qualitative studies is foregrounded in their capacity to access thick description and to yield

more in-depth analysis about the process of negotiating gender expression as it relates

specifically to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) youth. Finally, I

consider one study on Visibility Management (2008) that dovetails with my intentions to

examine how students make sense of the visual cues of gender.

Sex, Sexuality and Gender

In reviewing significant research in the field, it became immediately apparent that

the conflation of sex, sexuality and gender is quite widespread, despite Youdell's (2005)

insistence about the need to acknowledge the complex intertwining of identity components.

The problem is also one of exclusion of transgender subjects who merely become

incorporated into the LGB category in a tokenistic way, with their particular needs and

specific issues being associated with or linked to other sexuality minority youth.   Such

research results in an erasure of the transgendered and gender variant subject and calls for

research that focuses on the specific and unique characteristics and needs of this targeted

population. Transgendered and gender variant subjects should not be covered with the

same blanket as their other non-heteronormative cohorts. Ma'ayan (2003) notes her own

frustration with the problem of sex and gender conflation in her article about masculine

female subjects. Her participants admitted difficulty in finding others like them but found

support in the more widely available gay and lesbian youth groups in schools (p. 126); but

the result is that these youth, as masculine females, are "lump[ed]...into the 'lesbian'

category even if their difference is regarding gender expression rather than sexual

orientation" (p. 126). It is not an academic laziness that results in the conflation here, but a

concern that is more practical: in order for these youth to have any sort of community and

avoid total isolation, some would rather belong somewhere, even if it is less than a perfect

alignment.

Several studies I reviewed appeared to be concerned with transgender issues; meanwhile they ignored the unique position of gender fluidity in favour of a focus on sexuality. One Masters Thesis in Education looked at preservice teachers' perceptions of GLBT youth and resulted in erroneous definitions. The author, Dowling, added the category of transgender in her abstract along with gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals (2005). However, she did not actually have access to or collect data from any transgender individuals. She also aimed to discuss sexual orientation, not gender identity. Moreover, there was also a tendency for Dowling to conflate the concepts in her initial questionnaire which listed 'transgender' as an option under 'sexual orientation' whereas for the category of 'sex', 'female' or 'male' were the only options listed. It is frustrating when transgender gets lumped together with other sexually marginalized people. Whereas one's sexual orientation—who one loves, or to whom one is attracted—is a mere *part* of identity, transgender is identity, period. Transgender means who one is, not to whom one is attracted. Gender is not sexuality. But politically, these distinctions get muddled. Scientifically, they should not.

A related study committed the same falsehood. It too tacked transgender onto the LGB population to study perceived social support in the high school environment (Mufioz-Plaza, Crouse Quinn, & Rounds, 2002). I concede that for political purposes it is necessary to group all sexual minorities into one. However, this study did not provide any data on transgender or gender variant individuals explicitly. Thus, little empirical research exists on gender variant youth.

A promising study about LGBT youth in Ireland (Reygan, 2009) proved disappointing in the same respects: the erroneous conflation of sex and gender. Save one sole participant who identified as transgender, the remaining 25 were either lesbian, gay, or bisexual. For a study that claimed to discuss the experiences of LGBT youth in schools, which in itself is a rather large task, it failed to acknowledge the distinction between the sexual identities and gender identities in their sample. All discussion surrounded the homophobia LGB students suffered. After survey questionnaires and brief interviews were conducted, the researcher revisited two homosexual participants for further one-on-one interviews of half an hour each asking questions under the following topics: political, socio-cultural, economic, and affective (p. 83). Indeed, much of the discussion attributed the strong Catholic values inherent in the Irish school system as a major factor in the homophobic problem. And although the suggestions for improving the school situation for LGB students are common amongst the current available literature (i.e. providing education to peers and educators about LGBT related issues, tolerance or awareness campaigns), they do not address the needs of gender non-conforming individuals.

Sexuality, gender, sex are inextricably tied, creating a complex web of interrelationships and probably best not discussed as isolated concepts; but they are also distinct concepts that cannot be interchangeable. An argument for avoiding a total teasing apart of the concepts, sex, sexuality and gender, considers the violence being done to marginalized youth whose oppressors ignore everything but their non-normalized appearance. Violence is not blind, but it is ignorant: the perpetrator does not care why or how someone identifies only that they look a certain way that is not acceptable, a way that

violates gender rules. Whether the target self-identifies as gender fluid, transgender, non-

heterosexual, or none of the above, is irrelevant to how they appear as 'other' to the

harasser. The transgressions of sex, sexuality and gender seem to be punished in the same

way.

Gender Queer Youth and Violence

A study on gender fluidity necessitates an examination into research about the

consequences of its transgressions. Shannon Wyss's study (2004), taken from a greater

qualitative study exploring 24 genderqueer youth, focuses on seven teens' experience with

school-based violence who went to school across the USA (p. 713). She examines the

harassment and violence inflicted upon "genderqueer youth who refuse to conform to the

gender pressures" (2004, p. 715) in high school. She cites high school as the place where

identity formation is at a peak: it is a "period of life when many teens become increasingly

aware of the differences between them" (2004, p. 709), especially if they identify with

"'alternative' sexual and gender categories" (p. 709). Wyss' term, 'genderqueer',

encompasses those youth who 'do gender' in a non-heteronormative way, who possess

"'alternative' gender identities" (p. 710), or "who visualizes hirself as neither man nor

woman or neither masculine nor feminine...or as having a gender that is unidentifiable in

US culture" (p. 714); she focuses on how these youth must negotiate the "stringent gender

rules" teens enforce amongst each other (p. 710). Both the work of Kessler and McKenna

(1978, as cited in Wyss, 2004, p. 712) and West and Zimmerman (1987 as cited in Wyss,

2004, p. 712) mark interactions among teens as the locus for gender identity formation; through relationships, within a society, gender is created and confirmed.

Wyss' (2004) discourse surrounds the body simply because that is the site upon which the suffering occurs. She describes both physical and sexual violence upon genderqueer youth and then examines their long-lasting effects in the form of post-trauma coping mechanisms (p. 722). Her participants recall experiences as victims of physical violence which occurred in what one youth calls 'full-contact hallways': here they were punched, smacked, kicked, beat up (p. 717). One incident involved the physical attack with a leather belt on one genderqueer youth's buttocks and genital area, precisely the parts of the body that are normatively tied to gender and where the attackers must have wrought punishment on their non-conforming victim (p. 717). Later, this youth named his experience as sexual violence. Other youth described abuses that resulted in serious life-threatening injuries and stories of ongoing verbal and written threats. But in several cases, the youth could not assume they were targeted due to their genderqueer status, but more likely as "a result of just being different" (Kyle, p. 717).

Despite these horror stories, genderqueer youth keep their victimization silent, often believing they deserve it (Mallon, 1999b, as cited in Wyss, 2004, p. 718, and Alluvion in Wyss, 2004, p. 719) and thus making schools appear relatively safe places to other youth who are not part of the violence as either attacker or attacked. Even the victims of these constant attacks assume the violence is harmless, probably because it becomes so constant and normalized in their lives (p. 719).

Whether they fully recognized the abuse they endured, instinct and history taught Wyss' participants to react in several ways. Youth practised avoidance, rallying the support of like-minded peers, pretense and retaliation. Locating and securing safe spaces in schools meant being surrounded by "people at school whom they considered either trustworthy or, at a minimum, not especially dangerous" (2004, p. 720) or leaving the school building altogether as soon as the school schedule would allow. One female youth performed a specific gendered image of toughness, "butchness" or looking like one always ready to fight, to thwart attacks she might otherwise attract (p. 720). Other youth responded to violent attacks with profanity, threats at public humiliation and actual physical self-defense (p. 722). But a common aftermath of any reaction to the violence seemed to be silence (p. 722). Silence only perpetuates the cycle of violence because it prevents anyone in a position of power to interrupt the abuse and deteriorates the self-esteem of the victims, allowing for constant self-abuse to continue. In answer to this need to help the genderqueer youth in their daily sufferings at school, Wyss calls "for a radical revisioning of gender, including the eradication of the binary sex/gender system, a move away from the assumption that there are only two genders...and the elimination of all gender hierarchies and other forms of injustice" (Devor, 1997; Wilchins, 2002; Califia, 1997, as cited in Wyss, 2004, p. 724).

Wyss' justification for pursuing this work is precisely because "there is almost no non-psychiatric, academic writing that focuses exclusively on trans youth" (2004, p. 711). Additionally, Wyss' work "breaks new ground, uncovering the conditions under which these young people endure high school" (2004, p. 712). Although my project does not ask

specifically for the stories of genderqueer youth, it is asking about how these students are received, treated, even noticed by a more general population, not necessarily excluding the voices of genderqueer subjects.

Without falling victim to my own criticisms, I intend not to use a study about sexuality to stand in for gender issues, but I must underline the connections, while admitting the distinction. A study from the United Kingdom about harassment of sexual minority youth, *Invisible Difference in Space: The Role of Different Spaces in Homophobic Bullying in Schools* (Roberts, 2008), is relevant in its description of 'verbal spaces' as sites of intended harm. Most bullying happens beyond the watchful eye of regular authority figures in schools, but is also often pervasive and prolific. More importantly, this study is applicable to all students, not merely the sexual minorities because homophobic slurs are directed to anyone "deemed unmasculine, non-normative, or 'uncool'" (Thurlow, 2001 as cited in Roberts, 2008, p. 13) and regardless of the target's actual identity. Thus, Roberts leaves an opening for his study to be applied to gender non-conformists as well. However, the methodology of this study was based in standpoint epistemology where the researcher, identified as a gay male, mirrored the sexuality of most of his respondents (seven out of ten men identified as gay), so it is also tailored to a specific population. And standpoint epistemology provided Roberts justification for his unique ability to "know these people intimately, to see the world through their eyes" (Goodley, 1996, as cited in Roberts, 2008, p. 14).

Homophobic bullying is distinct from general bullying in that it involves the invisibility of the target (because, as Roberts claims, sexual orientation is not visible,

although managed through visible cues) and unless it is enacted verbally (which is its most common form, according to Roberts) is very difficult to recognize, thus eluding teachers and administrative personnel in schools (2008, p. 12). From the stories collected, Roberts concludes that bullying must also be contextual and dependent upon the social status of the instigator and the target: "one man's bullying may be another man's pecking order" (p. 17). In essence, it is near impossible to define homophobic bullying or to locate it in a static form; it "suffers from multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations of social interactions and accounts" (p. 17). I extend this explication of the complexities of homophobic bullying to gender harassment in that it too is difficult to recognize and isolate from other forms of bullying or social interaction.

Sexual and gender non-normative individuals suffer equal abuse in school locker rooms, an unfortunate part of the required physical education classes. As Roberts (2008) highlights, the physical space of the "changing room" or the locker room is a common site of bullying that centres on bodily difference and opens up a "verbal space" of harm. According to one participant in Roberts' study, Fred, changing rooms are traumatic for "anybody with any sort of unorthodox body appearance or not fitting the mold of how a child should appear, it's a very hostile, unforgiving environment" (p. 29). Not only do targeted youth endure taunting, mockery, bullying, harassment more readily when their body is so exposed in this space, but all the more also because it is most often unsupervised by teachers and left to the regulation of peers. Youth can self-govern to cruel ends; those who do not fit or conform physically will suffer in these verbal and insidious spaces.

Distinct from my qualitative work, one quantitative study is worthy of consideration in light of its topic. In order to test discrimination and harassment of gender-queer individuals, Hill and Willoughby (2005) created and validated a scale to measure degrees of 'genderism' and transphobia. Their background study found that "cross-dressers, transgenderists, and transsexuals" (p. 531) "or those who transgress gender norms" (p. 532), are at high risk for such verbal, physical and employment discrimination and abuse. They also uncovered assumptions that trans people are more accepted by normative standards than homosexuals: as in, homosexuals suffer greater harassment. However, through examination of experimental research studies, they conclude "reactions to gender non-conformity are not all that positive" (p. 533) and the trans people who "may 'fit in' to prevailing social norms by passing as ordinary men and women" (p. 533) create the smokescreen that gender queer is a more benign identity than homosexuality.

Genderism, transphobia and gender-bashing are the specific forms of abuse or harassment against gender queer people that Hill and Willoughby cite. In their words, "genderism is the broad negative cultural ideology, transphobia is the emotional disgust and fear, and gender-bashing is the fear manifest in acts of violence" (Hill, 2002, as cited in Hill and Willoughby, 2005, p. 534). In all, they conducted three studies to quantify these types of abuse, to draw up a scale entitled, the Genderism and Transphobia Scale (GTS), and then to certify the scale's reliability and validity. The first study plots reactions of undergraduate students from Concordia University in Montreal to multiple provocative statements about gender-queer individuals in a questionnaire delivered and executed in their Psychology class. Due to this focus, their findings merely gloss over the actual

discriminatory remarks in favour of establishing a mathematical device. Their work is a

tool that can have applicability to qualitative research on gender queer because they claim

it can "detect gender differences in attitudes toward gender non-conformity" (p. 535). But

there is the fear that this kind of quantitative analysis is a normalizing practice, simplifying

the complexity involved in diversity dynamics. Contrary to the purpose of the GTS, other

qualitative studies in the field provide in-depth descriptions about how students understand

and produce their own knowledge about gender queer-ness.

Qualitative Studies on the Experiences of Queer Youth

A significant study (Grossman, et al, 2009) dovetails with the intentions of mine in

that it asked about the perceptions, experiences and knowledge of LGBT students and

sexual/gender violence to be expressed in the participants' own terms; mine asks about the

perceptions, experiences and knowledge of gender fluidity or gender diversity of non-

identified LGBT students in their own words. Grossman's study is based on the direct

experiences of the LGBT group; mine is *on* gender fluidity as it is understood in the group

of not necessarily self-identified LGBT youth. The study hinged on a strong history of

quantitative research examining the visibility of LGBT youth and "their actual or perceived

sexual orientation or gender identity by peers" (p. 25); perception in this case is as valid as

reality because it is the resulting treatment of these individuals that is the focus. But this

study contributes uniquely to the discourse of "sexual orientation victimization (SOV)" (p.

26) because it provides the personal views and stories of the targeted youth, and, unlike

quantitative work that uses researchers' words, summarizing findings according to how the

researcher worded the initial questions, it focused on themes "supported by the youths'

words and their interactions among themselves" (p. 28).

In this rather vast study (Grossman, et al, 2009), the principal investigator oversaw

the work of five assistant researchers conducting focus groups of LGBT youth, each

assigned to a certain group according to their own identity, (e.g. female facilitator to female

group). Looking for themes that emerged from the data, the researchers used a method in

"grounded theory" called "constant comparison" (p. 28) useful probably because it offered

a potential for consistency amongst the multiple examiners. Additionally, the researchers

employed the "ecological model" as a framework to investigate the complex relationship

between individuals and their environment, acknowledging "the contributions of

individual, social, and cultural domains, as well as the interactions among

them" (Grossman, et al, 2009, p. 27). Beyond looking for stories of violence against

LGBT youth, the study sought out recommendations from the youth about how school

environments could improve to limit or erase the violence. And the researchers cited the

Amherst H. Wilder Foundation for their working definition of violence: this included,

"words and actions that hurt people; ...[the use of] pain, fear, or hurt;..words to scare, bully,

embarrass...; hurting a person's body..." (p. 27).

Refreshingly, the study actually included transgender participants (i.e. 16% of the

whole sample) among the other LGB youth. The paramount themes that emerged--lack of

community, and lack of empowerment--were in some form echoed by my participants as

essential components of the gender diversity problems played out in schools. Sadly, the

LGBT youth in this study used their own experiences of helplessness and continual

suffering to conclude "that not much could be done to remedy the situation" (Grossman, et al, 2009, p. 31). They felt powerless, unable to "envision any catalysts for change...unable to act without assistance" (p. 31). Often, these youth admitted they were alone as victims, abandoned too by the school system, its representatives, the teachers and support staff. According to one participant, Timmy,

> Some teachers may be helpful, but some teachers may not because they don't care. They just don't care. They like, if they see somebody making fun of you they don't care. (p. 33)

Further, these youth expressed moments of said representatives not only ignoring their need for help, but contributing to their miserable days in school; one incident of a security guard misreading/mistreating a participant is key:

> There are metal detectors, and they have a female and a male line. I look like a boy, but I was standing on the female line. You know, we get checked. A security guard said, 'Excuse me; this is the girls' line. You're on the wrong line.' I explained to her that I'm a female, and she was like, 'Well, I don't check dykes.' (p. 35)

It was the first day of this student's career at a new school, a school she never attended because of this shocking, not to mention unprofessional, treatment.

Other LGBT students who suffered discrimination for their gender and sexuality non-conformity either also left school altogether or remained in fear, "avoid[ing] places in the school building in which they would be most vulnerable, such as in the bathrooms" (Grossman, et al, 2009, p. 35). Similarly, another place of extreme difficulty within the schools for LGBT students is the locker-room and the gymnasium itself. One participant described how, despite being under a supposed watchful eye of the physical education teacher, students played a perverted version of the dodge ball game: "faggot

dodge. The object of the game was for all gay people to dodge the ball coming from thirty

other people....Now, I just don't go to gym class" (p. 36). Non-LGBT students may not

have suffered such bullying or harassment, especially due to their gender expression or

heterosexual orientation, but they are a part of the problem either by ignoring or denying

its existence or actively participating in it. Thus, they too should be part of the work to end

such systemic hate.

In addition to presenting stories of suffering, the study included "recommendations

for prevention" whereby each of the focus groups proposed a mode of action to remedy the

school situation for LGBT youth. Two groups believed the onus for change fell upon the

individual, not the school system (Grossman, et al, 2009, p. 37). The researchers cited

Holmes and Cahill (2005) as proponents of peer education, or "student-initiated events" (p.

37) that can empower LGBT students by allowing them to effect positive change on their

environment. Here, the researchers disagreed with their participants by adding that school

policy really must follow such "grass-root activism" (Mayberry, 2006, as cited in

Grossman, et al, 2009, p. 38), policy put into practice by "administrators,...educators, and

community" (p. 38). Further debate around recommendations bounced between the value

of integrating LGBT issues into curriculum and organized school life at large, versus the

fear that LGBT students would only endure more isolation as a result (p. 38). In multiple

ways these suggestions mirror those of my participants, albeit not as representatives of the

LGBT community, but as students invested in the maintenance of a positive school culture.

Also in line with my project's intentions, to gauge the current climate of gender

diversity amongst youth, Kristopher Wells (2008) writes about a study for Youthography in

which he participated in 2004 "to explore the opinions and experiences of youth in relation to sexual minority issues in Canada" (2007/8, p. 20). However, his participants were LGBTQ identified and mine did not reveal how they identified. He claims at the time of publication of his paper, "Generation Queer: Sexual Minority Youth and Canadian Schools", that this large-scale survey remains "the only national quantitative baseline data on the experiences of LGBTQ youth in Canada" (p. 20) and that it shows a definite shift in the thinking of youth that embraces a fluidity of gender and sexualities, quite distinct from their parents and teachers. Youth are identifying, according to this study, as questioning or queer, designations beyond the LGBT scope and labels that are more "fluid, situational, and relational" (p. 20). They are the members of "Generation Queer", youth who, as the Latin *torquere* suggests, "twist or traverse...traditional understandings of sexuality and gender" (p. 20).

The survey's findings in Wells' (2008) study align with the conclusions from Grossman's (2009) focus groups: LGBTQ youth feel isolated, unsupported and alienated by their peers and school system. They are misunderstood or unrepresented largely because they are invisible in their schools. And those few outlets of support that do exist in schools, outreach programs or peer-groups, require these youth to come out to access them which puts them at greater visibility for being victimized. As my participants admitted, non-LGBTQ youth are similarly unwilling to help in school-based pro-queer activities because they cannot figure out how to remain immune from becoming targets themselves for bullying or harassment. But certain students, despite their obstacles do succeed in schools due to a "resilient mindset" (Goldstein and Brooks, as cited in Wells, 2008, p. 20).

Wells suggests ways schools and families can help hone this resiliency in all troubled

sexual minority students: positive representations or models available; family acceptance

and understanding; school and peer support; school-based policy in place; support

networks (p. 21); but he also warns one "should be mindful 'that resilience is not absolute.

Virtually every youth has a breaking point'" (Gabarino, J. 2005, as cited in Wells, 2008, p.

22). These LGBTQ youth cannot be their own advocates, fight for acceptance and

negotiate their own daily disturbances indefinitely. It is time for schools to recognize their

strife and step in.

A rather hopeful article, *Risky, Generous, Gender Work*, comments on the work of a

LGBTQ youth group, The Attic Speakers' Bureau, with whom the author, Mollie

Blackburn (2006), worked to alleviate the suffering of gender nonconforming youth in

schools. The Speakers' Bureau consisted of youth "who were hired and trained to conduct

outreaches to youth and youth-service providers, including teachers, to educate them about

the experiences of LGBTQ youth" (p. 264) and their work provides the material for this

article. Here she focuses on the work that specifically English teachers can do to help

make school safer places for students who engage in "gender trouble" (Butler, 1990/1991

as cited in Blackburn, 2006, p. 263).

Uplifting in their optimism that gender trouble will happen and will be successful,

the Bureau's work is also very tangible and applicable. They propose a five-point plan to

help a teacher negotiate when an LGBTQ student discloses his/her identity which includes

listening to the student, telling the student they are not alone, referring the student to a

trained professional counsellor, addressing harassers and following up with the student

(Blackburn, 2006, p. 265). Further, they suggest teachers take up leadership in the

community and the school for LGBTQ programs (p. 267); and they also underline the

importance for teachers to know and enact the policy in their schools that protect the rights

of LGBTQ students (p. 267). Blackburn herself indicates the need for English teachers to

encourage LGBTQ students to read and write about LGBTQ subject matter as ways of not

only avoiding their silencing, but nurturing their own identity development (p. 266). The

kind of work teachers seem to need to do is on an ongoing basis through one-on-one

encounters sometimes, or whole-class addresses; but often most of the victimizing occurs

in the hallways, beyond the gaze of the authority (p. 267). In this case, the Bureau really

depends on the good and consistent work of teachers, hoping this stream will pervade all

corners of school life. But also most importantly, the Bureau, through Blackburn, declares

that in this good work, despite all that is required of teachers, it is irrelevant what personal

beliefs the teacher holds. Converting the teacher to LGBTQ acceptance is actually not part

of the project at all because

> ...teachers were not responsible for valuing the same things as their students or
> asking that students' values align with their own, but it was their responsibility
> to prohibit hate-based values so that diverse and even conflicting values could
> flourish in classrooms and schools. (p. 267)

Teachers, in essence, have already signed up to protect the rights of ALL of their students

simply by becoming teachers. And through that organic, self-initiated and daily

interrupting of heteronormative practices, teachers can do 'gender trouble' successfully and

support their students who want and need to do it too. This method of troubling gender is

akin to the suggestions of my participants who discovered the value of the organic process

of change too.

A growing trend in gender studies is a new focus on the differently gendered female youth. Ma'ayan's study on Masculine Females (2003) builds on the work of Judith Halberstam (1998) with what she calls 'Female Masculinity'. The language in the gender discourse is becoming clearer: male/boy or female/girl are nouns that describe the biological sex of the individual whereas masculinity or femininity are the adjectives that describe the *gender* of that body, a gender that is separate from or independent from the sexed body (Butler, 1990). The adjective is the floating signifier that can belong to any body. And with such an adjective, further detail can quantify the degree of femininity or masculinity that body performs: "in reality,... girls present gender in many ways, including being ultra-feminine, androgynous, masculine, or somewhere in between" (Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 126). The same movement in gender is available to boys. It follows then that a multitude of combinations should exist; but Ma'ayan laments that existing literature seems to ignore the female that is masculine-gendered in favour of the feminine males (Bass & Kaufman, 1996; Chase, 1998; Harris, 1997; Ryan & Futterman, 1998 as cited in Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 126). Females or "girls are seen as a monolithic group" (p. 126) and those girls who do not fit, or who belong to the 'borderlands' of gender (p. 132) are sometimes wrongly called 'tomboys' or 'lesbians' because "we do not have a common name for these students" (p. 125). And although the diversity of girls is acknowledged in some academic literature, it is more about their race and class and not at all about their gender (p. 125).

Ma'ayan's study accessed thirteen self-selected participants aged 18-54 because the gatekeepers to youth of this population are strict: "it seemed that asking young people about gender was seen by some as too risky" (2003, p. 125). Thus these participants were

talking about their memories of school, rather than their lived reality now, but Ma'ayn sees

the value of this exploratory research far outweighing this limitation (p. 125-126). The

qualitative study involved individual open-ended interviews, each for one hour, followed

by written surveys about demographic and other questions, leading to follow-up

clarification interviews and then purposeful sampling of four participants involved in a

focus group interview. Data collection paralleled the research: as one stage of the research

was complete, Ma'ayan discovered themes that guided the next stage of the research (p.

127). The themes comprised the following headings that organized the remainder of the

paper: gendered bodies; gendered curriculum; gendered spaces; intersections of gender

oppression and homophobia; gender risk and resiliency.

Ma'ayan articulated the assumption in educators that gender is tied to the body,

versus the 'floating signifier' Butler's performativity theory teaches. Such belief leads to

the ways that society (or in this case, the school) tries to control the body (Feinberg, 1998,

as cited in Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 128). Participants remembered the oppressiveness of school

uniforms that distinguished between girl and boy in their styling: the girl uniform

consisted of a skirt and blouse which made some masculine females highly uncomfortable

(p. 128). Other dress requirements in school such as "graduation wear, school pictures,

formal events and dances" (p. 128) are based in the binary gender ideology. This rigidity

in gender expectations follows into the curriculum where certain subjects, such as physical

education, operate on the belief that there are separate issues for boys and girls and that

those issues are *the same* for all boys or all girls (p. 130). The uniform in the physical

education class for girls also demonstrates the belief that girls should look like girls even

when they are involved in sports. Shorter shorts, tighter shirts for girls contrast with the baggier shorts and shirts for boys that were restricted to youth not who identify as masculine, but who are sexed as boy (p. 130). Some participants recalled great tension in the locker rooms and washrooms in schools because they did not feel they belonged anywhere. They did not practice the normative feminine body performance to fit into the girls' space nor were they biologically acceptable to enter the boys' (p. 130). My participants lingered on the conundrum of these public spaces that regulate and insist on a binarism in gender. They were challenged on how to accept gender fluidity in a school that was structured to ignore it.

Even outside the formal system, gendered expectations perpetuate amongst peers through the act of shaming or othering. Kumashiro (2000, as cited in Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 128) writes of "peer pressure, or...shaming, manipulation, or coercion" as ways youth regulate gender expression beyond the gaze of any authority figure belonging to the official school system. This is the practice of 'othering' which "privileg[es] the normative and marginaliz[es] the divergent" (Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 129). Those females who perform gender in masculine ways are viewed as immature because the school is responsible for nurturing female students on their path to mature and, supposedly, rightful feminine status (p. 129). Any gender-deviant behaviour, such as the performance of the tomboy, is acceptable in normative ideology as long as the behaviour is moderate and the individual is young; beyond adolescence, this tomboyism must be outgrown or else be punished (Halberstam, 1998).

Ma'ayan cited gender queer theory as seminal and ground-breaking (Butler, 1990;

Jagose, 1996; Sedgwick, 1990 as cited in Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 126) but lacking in its

practical application to schools or real life. Thus, Ma'ayan concludes with

recommendations for educators that, if somewhat incomplete, are good starting points and

easily translatable to a real classroom context. Ma'ayan calls for the educator to question

his/her own assumptions inherent in daily practice: the use of language that assumes the

gender of a person; the segregation of students according to gender; and other stereotyping

of gender. Additionally, the school culture and the institution itself are called to change:

harassment must be interrupted every time it is witnessed; open discussion about diversity

issues must occur frequently and on an ongoing basis; queer support groups must be

allowed to flourish in schools; and teacher hiring should encourage diversity (p. 134).

Although my participants focused on their own student level of operation in the schools,

their willingness to contribute to a diversified culture in the school mirrors Ma'ayan's

wishes.

Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2001) provide insight into the body presentation of

one gender fluid youth in their chapter entitled, "Gender Performativity and Normalizing

Practices". After a brief discussion on Gender Identity Disphoria (GID) which explains

how gender diversity is pathologized, they examine the story of Stephen, aged 13, self-

identified as a 'tomgirl' (p. 96). Stephen, despite her/his biology and name, relates to none

of the available language for gender and creates another category that fits. But her/his

behaviour is in line with what s/he has witnessed, just not what is normatively male: her/

his "walk and other bodily styles that were components of being a 'tomgirl' ... were based

on the observation and imitation of girls at school and women in society, and on men s/he

had seen in magazines and on television performing femininity as 'drag queens'" (p. 96).

Stephen performed two types of walks for the researchers, showcasing his/her preferred

walk while "wearing girls' clothes" (p. 96) which involves strutting, butt wiggling and hip-

swaying, versus the "normal" walk of a boy which is more rigid, straighter, with larger

steps (p. 96). Although each is an observation from society or an attempt at imitation, each

is also an interpretation, or a "parody" and thus a transgression of all normalized gender

behaviour (Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p. 97).

Fashion is also an opportunity for Stephen to express a desired gender, although s/

he explains it as following a whim or forming an identity beyond gender. From wearing

"punk" clothes with "army pants, the jacket, the boots, the spiky hair" to wanting to be a

"dance party guy" with the "dance pants and the shirts ...[that have] the little lights" to a

new interest in wanting to be a "surfer", Stephen also admits s/he "could change next week

or something" (Stephen as cited in Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2001, p. 97). Stephen's

styles change according to some internal desire that must be intricately tied to gender

identity, but might also blur with a more general shaping of identity. S/he claims not

merely to look like the style figures cited above (i.e. "punk", "dance party guy", "surfer")

but to "want to be" (p. 97) that particular figure, as if identity is itself only a costume that

can be donned and discarded easily. My participants also located gender in the stylization

of the body through fashion choices and behaviour or movement. Specifically, they could

recognize a non-conforming gender individual through their clothing choices and bodily

presentation. And like Stephen, they also could not distinguish between attributes that were derived from gender identity or a more general sense of identity.

<div align="center">*Visibility and the Body*</div>

Of some significance is the study, Visibility Management and the Body (Lasser and Wicker, 2008), about the experiences of LGB high school students in Texas, simply because of the concept, visibility management (VM), which is applicable to an understanding of how other gender non-conforming youth present and self-regulate. VM involves the "decisions made regarding the disclosure of invisible traits" (Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 103). According to the authors, although all teenagers invest in a developmental process of "personal and emotional changes that include an individual's establishment of self, a value system, and establishing a place in society" that "search for sexual identity" for heterosexuals is much less complex than that for LGB youth (p. 107). This "exploratory, qualitative study" (p. 105) investigates how lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth actively manage what they reveal to others about their sexual identity, which one could extend to transgender and genderqueer youth. The twenty participants (self-identified LGB and 18 or younger) recruited from a non-profit agency that caters to the LGB youth population in central Texas, underwent individual, in-depth interviews.

Theoretically, VM is based in the literature on self-presentation (see Goffman, 1959) and impression management (see Schlenker, 2002) but refers specifically to the way an individual presents an invisible trait (see Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 109). The concept VM is also predicated on the discourse of gender or sexuality as social constructions versus

innate or naturalized phenomena in that much of what one reveals results in others'

perceptions and ultimately produces an understanding of that individual's gender or

sexuality: perception can be a reality, at least for the moment. Coupled with Butler's

embodied and performed gender (1990), self-regulation is an ongoing, necessarily

unending practice because gender is produced in action, in performance and will change as

the performance itself changes. VM relates to the idea of 'passing', performing the desired

gender (or sexuality) to such a successful degree, the performativity of that gender (or

sexuality) is itself hidden, the mask, invisible.

Other strategies of VM include "selective verbal disclosure" whereby individuals

may decide to tell certain people about their identity, "and solicitation of social

information" whereby individuals may try to determine the receptiveness of such

disclosure to certain people (Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 109). Further, VM strategies also

include how the individual uses the body: the authors call this section of discussion, *the*

body as a message board, (p. 110). Participants told stories about dressing or fashioning

their bodies in "gender-typical apparel" (p. 110) to avoid attention or to attempt to 'pass' as

heterosexual; others claim they did the opposite, announcing their sexual identity through

the choice of stylizing, obviously "violating gender norms on the body" (p. 110). Some

gay boys had been targeted and, according to one participant, judged harshly by

homophobic students because of the way they dressed: "They started wearing make-up

and stuff like that" (April in Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 110). VM even regulated body

language, another nonverbal strategy. One lesbian participant claimed she averted eye

contact when passing by other girls in the hallway because she was "not sure of how she

would react or what people would say, and how it would make you feel if she did catch you [looking at her]" (Susan in Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 111). Fear even controlled with whom LGB youth associated: "everyone assumes that if you're friends with somebody that's gay then you have to be gay too" (David in Lasser and Wicker, 2008, p. 111). The pressure these youth admit to on a daily basis controlled every minute action; for LGB youth, nothing is automatic or allowed to be left unregulated. If they slip and somehow let their sexual identity show it would result in too costly a social backlash. Educators must be aware of "the ways in which students actively regulate the degree to which others are aware of their sexual identity" (p. 114) because it occupies a great part of their energy and attention in a school day that is supposed to be devoted to curricular concerns.

This discussion on VM is relevant to my study because I investigated the perceptions of youth on gender diversity which could be influenced also by these practices of self-expression. My participants could only discuss what they observed. This study of VM offers insight into how gender non-conforming youth may manage their behaviour and body, that which is directly observed and perhaps generally misunderstood. Additionally, Lasser and Wicker note the impact a social context has on the developmental process of youth: those individuals who identify as other than the "embellished and exaggerated" forms of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' will find it difficult not only to fit in, but to escape harassment from this peer group (2008, p. 107). They cite hegemonic masculinity as the force that defines these peer groups and claim that any male adolescent appearing feminine or female adolescent appearing masculine (i.e. as in any gender non-conforming youth) are rejected or dismissed with the automatic labelling of 'gay' or 'lesbian'. They conclude this

practice to mean that "being gay is negative" (2008, p. 107). But one could extend it to mean that being non-normative is also negative. Here too, gender non-conformity is conflated with sexual minority status. The perpetrator of the harassment is unaware and unwilling to be aware of the accuracy of his/her insults. As Roberts (2008) notes in his study on homophobic bullying, "Whether the homophobic epithet or physical assault was directed at the person's assumed or presumed sexual identity was less a factor than its use in exercising power over another" (p. 31). It is enough for the oppressor to know that the targeted youth does not do gender or sexuality in the normative and accepted way.

Conclusion

The studies reviewed in this chapter provide important insights into gender fluidity, identity management, homophobic or gender harassment, and visibility as they relate to and influence my own work. Such research in the field highlights and supports the need for further research into the policing and regulatory effects of gender regimes in the lives of gender variant, gender queer and transgendered youth in schools.

New research is particularly needed given that little work on the perceptions of gender fluid youth currently exists. In fact, I have attempted to show in this literature review that available studies have tended to examine the direct experiences of gender fluid youth or rather have simply included them as another minority group that can be added to the LGBQ list, without really focussing on their specific and particular needs or characteristics. In addition, current research has tended not to produce data about how students in general observe, perceive and/or understand explicitly questions related to

gender fluid expression. My study makes a particular contribution in this capacity in its

focus on how youth begin to make sense of gender expression.

I have also provided a review of certain studies that have tended to conflate sex,

sexuality and gender that were neglectful of the intricate web binding these categories as

Youdell (2005) argues. I have also included some discussion of research undertaken by

Ma'ayan (2008) who offered a useful analysis of gender ambiguity and gender regulation

in the lives of youth in school. Some of the genderqueer youth studies contained an

activist component: either the researcher was reviewing a student outreach program, or the

research data itself was the result of front-line activism. Indeed each of the studies I

positioned against my own work. Even the quantitative study is valuable because it

focuses on the degree of violence gender fluid youth endure. Most distinctive is the paper

on Visibility Management because it provides a language for how youth negotiate their

own gender presentations and how others perceive them. A review of all of these studies,

in their variety and breadth, have enabled me to situate my own study into the significance

and effects of the regulatory norms governing gender expression in the lives of a specific

group of students attending one particular school in South Western Ontario.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines my methodology and provides justification for my choices.

First, I have attempted to explain how qualitative inquiry is the only suitable method, given

the purpose and aims of my research which centre on the desire to produce a deeper

knowledge about gender expression and gender fluidity in secondary school students' lives.

The narrative or personal story initially attracted me, but without access to the immediate

population of gender fluid individuals, I had to rely on the stories of youth *about* gender

fluidity, their understandings, their degree of subscription to the norms, the way they

witness transgressions. By providing a detailed justification for my overall methodological

approach in this chapter, I draw attention to how the goal underlining my research as an

exploratory study is closely aligned with a call in the field for more detailed knowledge

about the political significance of gender expression in the lives of youth in schools.

In this chapter I am able to tell my own story about the participants and the school

which they attended and at which I have worked. For each, I devised a pseudonym to

protect their identity. I am careful to note the complications embedded in teacher-student

relationships, and have addressed how I tried to lessen them. The position of the social

sciences researcher as subjective and ultimately human is most interesting to negotiate;

Lather (1991, 2008) contributes most amply to the subject, alongside the work of others,

namely, Kumashiro (2002), Cook-Sather (2007) and Youdell (2005) whose "Same/Other"

dichotomy is most intriguing. Ultimately, subjectivity belongs to a survey of limitations,

which I find all too easy to embellish. My own subjectivity reveals a self-criticality that in excess is unbecoming in a researcher. In this respect, I have to temper my examination of the inherent limitations and focus on how I have settled them.

Of course, I use this chapter also to describe at length my process, from one stage of the focus group, complete with an outline of the questions, an analysis of the social dynamics at play, through to the second stage of individual interviews. I also incorporate a drawing task into the process which yielded crucial insights into the students' own understandings about gender identity. This task was undertaken during the focus group interview as a means by which to facilitate further discussion about gender expression and was also used as an additional data source for me to analyze as a former Visual Arts teacher. I used a reading and writing activity to generate another data source for my study and this derives from my experience as an English teacher. For each phase of the project, or each method, I cite Patton (2002), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), and Lather (1991; 2008) to provide justification for the sort of methodological decisions I made in the execution of this study.

Relationship to Established Traditions of Inquiry

Qualitative research is a legitimate field of inquiry. Specifically, this study is idiographic which favours the story of the individual rather than proposing absolute truths and discovers the personal experience and perspective as valid data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Qualitative also means the research will focus on "processes and meanings that are not measured...in terms of quantity" and are about the social construction

of reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). Through the concept of voluntarism, I acknowledge that participants are producers of their own environment and thus validate their voices over that of the system. Because I have sought the personal knowledge of participants, the study is anti-positivistic in nature. And through focus group inquiry and analysis, I have followed an established structure (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p. 9).

Qualitative inquiry is perfectly suited to the study of the marginalized because it is rooted in that tradition and its approaches embrace the multiplicity of meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). Although Denzin and Lincoln chart the "painful history" (2005, p. 2) of qualitative research that has "serve[d] as a metaphor for colonial knowledge, for power, and for truth" (p. 1), they also cite that it was born with the best of intentions, "to understand the 'other'" (p. 2) and that currently there is evidence that it is being deployed as a political practice that is identifiable as "a multicultural, gendered process" (p. 2). They cite poststructuralism as contributing to the concept that research is filtered through multiple lenses of identity of the subject and the researcher: "Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity". All observations are "socially situated in the worlds of---and between---the observer and the observed" (p. 2). My research study is about the processes that exclude the other; it is not about reinforcing those processes or even maintaining the position of the other. Rather, it exalts the other as a metaphor to help liberate those who prescribe to and feel harnessed by heteronormativity.

Because "the province of qualitative [inquiry]... is the world of lived experience" (p. 8) it fits that I am focusing on the stories and perceptions of youth. Qualitative research is about the "socially constructed nature of reality...[asking] *how* social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 10) which is what I have investigated: how youth construct their understandings around gender identity. Van Manen et al (2007) name 'experience' as a resurrected notion in contemporary inquiry (p. 94). The lived experience is the only true access to understanding the everyday; if I am to understand how youth build knowledge of gender fluidity, I must seek their descriptions of real-life experiences of what they have witnessed or observed directly. Only through these rich, first-person accounts can I achieve valuable data.

Overall Approach

Originally, I had aimed to study two small sample groups: the gender variant and other (may include non-gender variant and gender variant, if the case may be). But due to access problems of the first group of marginalized youth, which seems a common obstacle for other researchers conducting similar studies (e.g. Ma'ayan, 2003, p. 125), I opted for a more in-depth and enriched investigation of the perceptions, observations, and knowledge arising from students who did not necessarily identify as transgender or gender queer (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Because this selected group of students is small and not an attempt to represent a cross-section of youth, I am not generalizing my findings so that they may be superimposed onto any other population. Patton (2002) notes the benefits of particularizing the details of a case:

> To generalize is to be an idiot. To particularize is the lone distinction of merit. General knowledges are those that idiots possess. (p. 582)

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) agree with this focus on particularization. They cite Flick (2002) as distinguishing qualitative research from quantitative in that the former accounts for "rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds" by offering "*local* knowledge and practice" (p. 2). Even still, my *local* knowledge is small, specific, and non-representational. Patton justifies that small sample groups are better situated to "permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon *in depth*" (2000, p. 46).

Further, social context is crucial, as well as an understanding of how other identity categories (sex, race, class, etc.) intersect with identities of gender. The complexity of difference remains somehow beyond academic grasp, according to Eve Sedgewick (1990) in *Epistemology of the Closet*: "it is astonishing how few respectable conceptual tools we have for dealing with [the] self-evident fact... [that] people are different from each other" (p. 22). But Kumashiro answers that paradox by relying on the personal narrative as veritable material (Filax, 2003, p. 139). It is through the stories of and about the sexually marginalized that one can appease the problem of accessing some sort of truths without generalizing or making sweeping claims. Thus, in no way am I proposing a homogeneity of perspectives even within my sample; these youth are individualized amongst themselves. Also, I acknowledge that even within this group of students, what these youth know at this time and place is part of their ongoing development of knowledge. This is a study situated in social complexity and transition.

I am studying perceptions and knowledge of a concept (gender variance). Qualitative research situates the observer in the world consisting of a "set of interpretive,

material practices that make the world visible" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). This study is about what actually exists in the realm of gender variant perceptions and experiences. It is not about why these perceptions exist.

Additionally, this is a highly exploratory study and sits at the beginning of what is a growing trend in educational research. More knowledge about how marginalized youth live and are perceived is necessary to the improvement of schools because of the impact schools have on the developmental process of youth identity. According to Grossman et al (2009), because "schooling is one of the cultural institutions designed to socialize youth to 'fit' into the community...many school personnel become gatekeepers of the status quo, which includes fostering heterosexual and gender 'appropriate' expression" (p. 43). When the school system ignores gender diversity, it perpetuates that ideology in its students. Qualitative research is essential for a changing world because traditional modes of inquiry that favour scientific truth and logical, deductive reasoning "are failing" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 11). Research that accepts gender variance as a part of the whole spectrum of gender, as opposed to relegating it to the margins as it always has been, is a practice that needs qualitative methods.

The School

The school where I worked as a teacher, we will call Richview Collegiate Secondary School, has a history of academic prowess known to the community. Because I was new to the city, and then only worked in the school for three years, I was generally unaffected by its reputation and thus less attached also to the maintenance of elitism to

which some of its core staff seemed to subscribe. From what I witnessed, the school population, at just under one thousand students, was not homogeneous: I taught students of varying degrees of academic ability, and although a greater proportion of students' families were of upper and middle social classes probably due to the higher priced real estate in the catchment area, other students attended from out-of-area neighborhoods which meant they were from lower and working class families. Originally, these students were accepted because of their high academic performance in intermediate school. During my time, the recruitment process changed to a lottery system: once the neighborhood students' places were secured, the available places would be filled by a random selection method. Thus, no longer could the school boast of housing only the wealthy and intellectually elite. However, much criticism from the teaching and counselling staff centered around the school's inability to accommodate its new recruits. Some students left the school midway through their career to attend the other downtown school for various reasons. In fact, it was a goal in the last administrator's portfolio to figure out how to retain those students who fled. Many staff believed there simply was not the space for them, either academically or socially. The students who remained, but did not conform to the typical 'Richview kid', became absorbed into one of the few non-conforming groups within the school or stayed completely isolated. Even racially, the population is somewhat homogenized. From my informal estimate, Caucasian tops the list, followed by Asian, and then much fewer East Asian, and only a handful of others, African-Canadian, First Nations.

The Recruitment Process

I recruited participants both through purposive sampling (Stake, 2000, p. 451) and 'snowballing'. I selected the participants I had known, and then relied on their own referrals and that of a colleague to secure the others. The few students I had recruited I had worked with in an extra-curricular capacity as Yearbook supervisor. These students were devoted to the monumental task of completing the high school publication; their self-directed efforts and general camaraderie with each other and me were factors that helped me identify them. Originally I had hoped to avoid working with my past students because I did not want that type of formal relationship of evaluations and lessons to precede the research. I preferred to work with students who I thought might be receptive to such a project not because of how they identified or even because of their identity politics. I did not know this information of any of them because I did not have the opportunity to figure it out. I only thought some of them would like to work at a discussion about a sociological and relevant issue. And to be quite transparent, I had identified one student who expressed overt gender transgressions and short of recruiting him, I wanted to ask his friends to join because of their relationship to gender diversity through their associations with him. Overall, I had a small core group of interested and motivated students. Qualitative inquiry allows for smaller samples to achieve "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

I started the recruitment process in the spring and then conducted the research in the autumn. During the late spring and summer months I was able to solidify the participant list and gain proper ethical approval and informed consent. Only one participant was 18 and could give her own informed consent, the others required parental

or guardian consent. In total I had nine participants who agreed to work with me but ended

up working with only eight individuals, seven of whom were able to meet for the initial

focus group interview. The eighth member was only able to participate in the second

round of interviews that I conducted individually face-to-face with each of the participants.

Of the eight, four I had selected from the extra-curricular experience, two were recruited

by my teacher colleague, and two were recruited by one of the participants. Two of the

four I had recruited had graduated from the school to attend post-secondary school by the

time we began the research. The other six were still attending the school. According to

Stake, the ones "most accessible or the one[s] we can spend the most time with" (2000, p.

451) offer the best route to learning. Because I had worked in the school and was familiar

to the administration, I thought I would have easier access to the participants. However, by

the time the interviewing began, the administration had changed and I had moved from the

city and began maternity leave. Thus, I encountered problems with accessing and

scheduling the students anyway. In another sense, because I did not have regular contact

with any of the participants outside the research project, the relationships were simplified.

If they had interacted with me in the halls or in the school cafeteria during the weekdays

before and after the interviewing, it might have impacted the nature of their responses.

The Participants

I did not actively seek gender non-conforming participants; the way these youth

identified was irrelevant to my recruitment process because I was asking about their

knowledge and understandings of gender fluidity, not of how they personally identified.

Ethically, it was essential that I insist I would not pursue questioning of their private

identities. Had I done so, the risk of harm would be far greater and would have put ethical

approval on hold. This caution alerts one to the difficulty of pursuing a study that does ask

about how youth identify. As Ma'ayan (2003) laments in her study,

> ...asking young people about gender was seen by some as too risky.
> Difficulties gaining access to marginalized youth participants compound the
> already existing silence in educational research regarding their experience. (p.
> 125)

Despite avoiding access problems, I did not recruit gender non-conforming youth in a

study about gender diversity for another reason: by casting the net wider, beyond the

gender minority (but not excluding it), my hope was to look at what gender diversity

means in context and to deconstruct systemic heterosexism.

Of the eight students, three are female, and five, male. I did not ask about sexual

orientation or gender identity, so I can only report on how they choose to express their

gender, or how they identify publicly, whether this aligns with their biological sex or not.

Six of the students were in their senior years of secondary school (Grade 11 and 12) and

two were in their first year of university. I had wanted to speak with senior students

because of an assumed level of maturity that may have been missing in the junior grades.

Most of these students were very busy in an extra-curricular sense so it was difficult to pin

down a common meeting time. From part-time employment, to membership on

committees and teams within the school, volunteering in the community and various

hobbies, these students' lives were rich and full. One could say these were the 'eager kids',

the only type who would volunteer their little free time and receive no tangible

compensation. In that sense, the group is rather homogeneous: but again, these students

are not supposed to represent any other population; in fact, it would be unfair to say they can even represent their own school. They are a few interested and engaged individuals with whom I wanted to work.

The Demographics

The focus group interview began with a collection of brief demographic information about each participant. Primarily, I wanted to know the nature of the student participants' time commitments so that I could tailor the study to suit their schedules. Additionally, I asked about their languages spoken at home and their years spent in a Canadian school not to attempt to show a representational sample but simply to have a more accurate description of this particular group of students. Of the eight, three spoke Mandarin or Cantonese; two, English; one, Hindi; one, Ukrainian; one, German. Only three did not begin their schooling in Canada but arrived some time in elementary school. I am not drawing any causal relationship between these categories of identity and their responses as I am trying to avoid generalization.

The Participant Profiles

The student profiles will include the same information in an attempt to provide an equal picture for each participant. For example, for each participant profile I include the following: their pseudonym; their age and grade; their language(s) spoken at home; their extra-curricular involvement; how they came to be a part of the project (which is based on my recollections); how or if I knew of them, and in what capacity, prior to the project; what

I perceived of their attitude in joining the project and their reported motivation in agreeing

to participate; my perception of their general behaviour and/or contribution to the project

in the interviews. In addition, I include any extra observations or knowledge I have about

the participants that is relevant. I collected much of this information in the first interview

in September which means that what they indicated about their time spent outside of

school is only applicable to that time period; I did not collect updated information at the

second interview in February, nor did I ask about what they anticipated for themselves for

the remainder of the year.

Ralph S., age 17, Grade 12

Ralph reported speaking Mandarin at home and was very busy with his part-time

job, one university course in addition to his full slate of courses at the secondary school,

and his dedication to cross-country running, and a student leadership team. I taught Ralph

in Grade 9 Visual Art and from there recruited him for the Yearbook Committee, which he

came to chair in his second year. I sought out Ralph for this project because I knew he was

an extremely hard worker, dedicated to every task, be it school or extra-curricular. His

schedule was most difficult to accommodate but I arranged the focus group to fall on a

weekend just so he could attend. I also knew, from a previous mini-interview I had

conducted with him for a term paper, that he had an ability to articulate his ideas about

gender and that he thought about certain topics in more depth than what he let on in casual

interactions with peers. What he claimed about that first research encounter became his

motivation to work with this project: "I was kind of a little jerk...kind of fun to jerk people

around...during yearbook...you asked these questions...OK, good time for me to explain my views...to clear my positions and whatnot, and that kind of led on to this...to know who I am in the process". Only once he began talking in the focus group did I learn how traditionalist his ideas were. With confidence and criticality he asserted his voice amongst and in direct contrast to the more liberal discourse surrounding him. A stoicism presided over his features even more so in the individual interview. It almost seemed to alter his face beyond recognition: it had been some months since I had seen him, and some three years since I had worked with him, but the hard edges and planes of his face seemed the result of time or conviction or both. Ralph S. was actively cultivating a sense of humanitarianism, but certainly through a capitalist lens: everything is about money to him, what he will make and how his money will and does affect his relationships with others. He intimated he was paying the bills in his household; he spoke of the strong influence of his mother whose conservatism fell to him. He also mentioned his communist Chinese background as a child which he also attributes to his traditionalism.

Leo J., age 16, Grade 11

Leo J. reported speaking a mix of Cantonese, Mandarin, and English at home. He also reported a vast involvement in extra-curricular activities at the school: student parliament, Music Council, four bands, football, environment club, swim team, track team, and a student leadership committee. Outside of school, Leo J. worked as a lifeguard and took piano lessons. It was unclear if he was involved in all of these activities

simultaneously or if these were his commitments for the academic year. Nonetheless, he was a very busy individual.

I also taught Leo J. in Grade 9 Visual Art, albeit a different year from Ralph S. I recruited him myself because I thought he was a responsible student, would actually attend the required meetings and might be interested in the project. He also worked on the Yearbook team, which I probably asked him to join because of the similar qualities that made him suitable for this project. In his own words, he agreed to participate because "you [I, the researcher] approached me [Leo J.]...cause we had that personal connection...a lot of people I knew...that's what made me feel comfortable...you made it sound like something you really needed help with...the topic of gender diversity, also thought I could learn more about it". Leo J. follows Ralph S. in my mind because he was younger, also Asian, a hard worker, but the complete antithesis to Ralph S.'s self-assured stance: Leo J. was thoughtful, but most good-natured in his articulation about the topic. His was the tempering voice in the focus group, always questioning, or reaffirming the group's consensus on a certain issue. Like a well-trained good student, Leo J. wanted to read the questions in the focus group, not just hear them as everyone else wanted, to prepare himself. I also noticed Leo J.'s maturation since I had taught him; his athletic build and amiable personality would make him a popular student, coupled with his sensitivity and thoughtfulness. Based on his written response, he did not seem short on friends: "in my small little social group, everyone is really close to each other...the people in my social group are people that are close to me and people I see everyday".

Nigel C., age 16, Grade 11

Nigel C. reported speaking English at home and being involved in choir, senior and jazz band at school as extra-curricular activities. He also reported spending time providing graphic design services for charities and teaching trumpet lessons.

I taught Nigel C. in Grade 9 Visual Art two years ago and my contact with him in the past academic year found him continuing to be a mature, sensitive, and curious student. I knew him to stand out for these qualities and so I recruited him for the project. But he also seemed to be migrating towards a more transgressive position. During my few encounters with him for this project, I noticed a more feminized stylization to his person; he even spoke about the conscious decision to wear a neck scarf over his sweater implying it as some sort of a concession to his true desires, albeit one lone symbol. In his quiet demeanor, this act was equally quiet, but bold. With tight curls, dark eyes, and soft brown skin, Nigel C. might have wanted to blend in, but also felt safety amongst his social group of like-minded individuals.

I was most encouraged by Nigel C.'s early interest in the project; he was the one asking me when things were to start and if he could write more in his response than just answering the questions from the novel. For me he was most promising: an untapped resource of gender fluid ideas, I thought. But the interviews failed to fulfill these expectations. Even the final individual interview left me confused and unsatisfied precisely because I think he was confused and uncomfortable. He even admitted his discomfort in the focus group interview but conceded "it was good to hear what other people were thinking" all the same.

Raj, age 16, Grade 11

Raj reported speaking Hindi at home; his extra-curricular commitments included running for the track team, competing in Math contests, and acting on the Multicultural committee. He also claimed drawing, writing, and Kumon Math as his hobbies. When I thought of Leo J. as a potential participant for the project, I recalled Nigel C. and Raj, who were all in my Grade 9 Visual Art class. All three were friends and alike in their active interest in learning. I had one significant encounter with Raj and Nigel C. in the year immediately prior to beginning this project where they exhibited this inquisitiveness I found so compelling and unusual. Coupled with his dedication to school, I deemed Raj an asset to the project.

His initial motivation might have been because he "just thought it'd be interesting" but the focus group discussion proved to propel his own evolution: "I never thought about gender diversity like that...I never thought it was that complex, I just thought male/ female...". I learned through the research process that Raj's care with his drawings also applied to his thoughtful answers. His proved to be a distinct and useful contribution. Raj was the quiet activist: he researched the topic of gender fluidity, so inspired was he after the focus group. And he told a story of how he changed his thinking about homosexuality after a gay friend's disclosure taught him to be more just. Mostly a very quiet, poised, thoughtful boy, Raj was also maturing before my eyes growing more angles in his face, and becoming more lanky in his slight build.

Bert T., age 16, Grade 11

Bert T., who reported speaking English at home, was also very busy with music and other commitments outside of school and in the community. He sang in the school choir, played in the senior band, jazz band, and the school stage show; he also worked as a babysitter, dog-sitter, competed in a recreational bowling league, and acted, or used to act, as an LGBT peer-mentor online. Despite this technological access, he was the most difficult to contact via email, often requiring multiple messages and weeks to pass before I received any response.

I had no previous knowledge of Bert T. He was actually recruited by his friend, Nigel C., who thought he could contribute to the topic with some background knowledge. Immediately upon meeting him, I knew Bert T. was familiar with the language of gender politics. And his loquaciousness, amicable personality, and assertiveness quickly positioned him as a leader in the focus group discussion. His motivation for agreeing to participate centered on his verbal talents: "well, I love voicing my opinion...but something like this...I thought it was perfect, I like to discuss this...and see how it's changed my opinion...". Bert T. offered the most vivid narratives in his responses, often implicating himself in the scenarios, even though I had advised I was seeking stories of others. A bigger boy, in stature and personality, Bert T. dressed in non-descript clothing, sported t-shirt and baggy jeans, longish locks, piercing eyes and exuded an air of self-importance combined with vulnerability.

Gray, age 16, Grade 11

Gray reported speaking German at home and although an engaged student, relatively she was less involved in extra-curricular activities than some of the other participants. After her membership on the volleyball team and the school newspaper, she admitted most of her unstructured time she spent drawing.

Gray was also not known to me prior to the first interview; my colleague recruited her as a favor to me. Thus, I could only assume she was mature, responsible, the likely qualities a teacher would deem appropriate for working with another teacher. The little contact I had with her for this project proved this interpretation of her character. I could also add she seemed versed in the topic of gender fluidity, if not in her explicit background knowledge, at least in her sensitivity to the issues on a daily basis. Similar to Bert T., she too provided illustrious responses, full of detail and narrative structure. More talkative than others, it occurred to me this may have been a strategy to deal with tension or discomfort. But, Gray also possessed a self-confidence especially in describing her personal style as boyish.

Lynn T., age 17/18, first year university

Lynn T. reported speaking Mandarin at home and described as many extra-curricular commitments as might belong on a curriculum vitae. Her campus activities included being captain of her soccer team, sitting on an academic committee, working with Health & Wellness, and acting on the executive panel of a Dharfur awareness group. She also described volunteering on another committee in the community whose details were

unclear. She reported her age as 17 in September but then was able to sign her own

consent form for the second interview which is why I cite her as also 18.

I worked with Lynn T. on the yearbook committee at the school where she attended

and I taught. However, I did not teach her in any capacity; I recall recruiting her for this

project because of her vigor, nearly intoxicating enthusiasm, and leadership skills. She had

also proven in the past she could voice her opinion with little hesitation. Fashioned in

sporty clothing, no makeup, and simple ponytails, Lynn T. admitted only slight insecurity

in these choices. Extremely talkative and yet somewhat inarticulate, she also admitted

difficulty communicating both verbally and in written work; thus, her words were the most

challenging to transcribe, full of the stops and starts and breaks of conversation as well as

the complication of jumping from one idea before the last one was fully defined. Despite

these difficulties, Lynn T. seemed appreciated and pleased to contribute to the project: "it's

kind of rare that someone will listen to you and your opinion".

Oleana, age 18, first year university

Unable to attend the first interview, Oleana was still a part of the participant list

because she had secured her position in the first round and then did attend the individual

interview. Thus, I did not collect any demographic information from her. I can only report

she spoke English and Ukrainian at home and was enrolled in a nursing program.

She came to the project because she also belonged to the Yearbook committee in

her last two years of secondary school; her invaluable contribution to the yearbook coupled

with my knowledge of her as a hard-working student in my Grade 11 English class, made

me seek her as a participant. And it was unfortunate that the others could not benefit from her articulate responses in the focus group. Admittedly conservative, she spoke at length about the topic, proving great forethought and sensitivity as well as an incredible amount of self-awareness. Also donning an unembellished style, her unmade-up face and simple, straight hair were the same as always, if not revealing a more stressed demeanor befitting a first-year university student in September.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

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Stages and Timeline

I designed a multi-stage project that occurred over several months. Initially, I did not intend the timeline to be as lengthy, but other personal circumstances (i.e. my maternity leave) necessitated a pause between data collection stages. The first stage was the meeting of seven secondary school student participants in a focus group interview in September. During this two and half hour interview, questions and answers were conducted verbally, except for one question that required a drawing response from the participants. I recorded the entire interview on a digital recording device which I saved to my computer and transcribed in full before the second set of interviews. Patton (2002) advises that interviews must be transcribed *verbatim* in all their awkward glory: in natural conversations "sentences hang incomplete, interrupted by new thoughts before the first sentence was completed" (p. 441). I offered the students the opportunity to review the transcript but received no specific feedback. After the interview concluded, participants

left with a reading and writing assignment which they would return to me via email in the next two months. In February, I conducted individual interviews with each of the seven participants plus one who was unable to attend the first meeting at the last minute. This participant was part of the initial recruiting process and so I considered her a part of the participant list. These interviews lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and a half, all of which I recorded again on the digital recording device and transcribed in part in the weeks following. Each of the interviews, the focus group and individual, I conducted in a room in the Faculty of Education building during the weekend hours. I had secured this site due to its public nature and relative privacy it afforded.

The First Stage: Focus Group

I structured the study in stages for the purpose of developing a direction; because it is exploratory, I needed some groundwork established first to gauge the general understandings of gender amongst my participants. Because researchers cannot know "how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world" (Patton, 2002, p. 341) interviewing is necessary. It is an efficient tool to gather stories and attempt to "enter into another person's perspective" (p. 341). This initial meeting was in the form of a focus group. After this first interview, I could use the data obtained to generate further questions for detail and seek a more enriched quality to the responses.

As each participant arrived, the group gathered informally before we began the official interview. They sat down around a rectangular table according to their own choice;

I took my place at the head of the table. After I welcomed the group, I stated the ground rules to the focus group discussion: each member must be respectful of every other member; each member must allow others to speak without interrupting or shouting over; no names of individuals not present should be mentioned. Because I wanted everyone to feel safe and unthreatened, I encouraged the students to opt out of any question they did not want to answer and refrain from pressuring each other to answer unwillingly. Stake (2005) reminds us of the contract that exists between researcher and participant: "a disclosing and protective covenant" (Stake, 2005, p. 459) which is only somewhat compromised by the group. Each participant had to arrive at their own level of comfort to disclose information and opinions in the semi-public arena of the focus group. I provided a brief overview of the number of questions and allotted time and then articulated the tone was to be informal and conversational: they were allowed to speak with their own chosen form of expression; this was not the classroom, I reminded them. If they required more 'street-talk' to be authentic, I would welcome it, again, as long as they refrained from verbally harming others present or not. Finally, I thanked the participants for their interest and expressed my hope that in the end, they enjoy themselves. Then we started with question number one.

On the Focus Group Style

The focus group interview was semi-structured using the "general interview guide" approach (Patton, 2002, p.342) which Patton claims is "essential for focus group interviews" (p. 343). The guiding questions provided a framework of key issues (p. 343)

and also kept me, as interviewer, on topic, as well as allowing room for a conversational

flow to the discussion. But this style also necessitates a competent interviewer, one who is

flexible, yet controlled, and can negotiate the many different voices. The nature of a focus

group is one that embraces the group dynamic because according to Patton, "decisions are

made in a social context, often growing out of discussions with other people" (p. 385). I

had anticipated the students influencing each other, including helping and hindering

individual responses. The advantage of the focus group to the participants is that they can

"consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (p. 386); the advantage to

the researcher is that data collection is more efficient, with multiple responses at one

sitting, and the interaction actually enhances the data quality, again according to Patton (p.

386). However, Patton also warns that participants who know each other will ensure the

"dynamics are quite different and complex" (p. 387). These students do not exist in a

vacuum and because they all attend or have attended the same school in the past year, they

have a shared history and shared understandings of their own school environment that

supersede my knowledge. Additionally, the subtle and distinct social interrelations, where

and how they interact with each other outside the interview space, impact how they might

respond. As much as accessing these students who know each other and with whom I am

previously familiar is a benefit to the practical concerns of recruiting participants, it is also

a limitation in the study. Further, the students interacting in a group setting could actually

be a drawback for those individuals who feel insecure about expressing their thoughts to a

selection of their peers; the degree of disclosure might be higher in a one-on-one interview.

The second stage of interviews I designed to balance out the potential negative effects of this focus group style of interviewing.

The Questions in the Focus Group

I tailored the focus group interview following several of Patton's (2002) recommendations on sequencing. One is that the participants should be eased into the interview with questions that require description about their present because what they observe requires the least cognitive efforts and can help put the participant at ease (p.352). From here, the questions moved to opinions because it is in this order, that "rich, detailed and concrete" description lays the foundation for interpretation (p. 438). Patton also suggests asking participants first about their present, then about their past, and finally conjecturing about their future (p. 353). Again, the reasoning is to help ease the participants into a less threatening encounter, then once they are relaxed and comfortable with the moderator/researcher, the intellectual demands can increase.

Because I was unaware of how they understood gender, I had to begin with basics and with their own definitions. Language is a set of accepted codes used by a collective and although in constant flux, it can simultaneously remain rigid and unforgiving. Identity politics has its own grammar. Sondergaard provides the examples of 'machogirl' and 'homme fatal' as codes "not part of the available frames of interpretation" (2002, p. 190). Thus, my research must first determine the particular language of categories youth use (the *description*) and then pose scenarios that might challenge these boundaries (the *interpretation*). Patton indicates it is not necessary that focus group members come to a

consensus (p. 385); this was also not my intention. I sought multiple understandings throughout the project. And to maintain as much balance and personal distance as possible, I was careful about not injecting my own opinions into their conversation. I had to withdraw from the teacher role and proceed with caution as researcher.

As the interview progressed, I was able to investigate the boundaries of their concept of gender. Butler tells us the boundaries of a category can lead us to understand the very construction of such a category (1993). Here I wanted to figure out how they allowed transgressions in gender, how much they can allow the "rupture" of codes (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 199) or simply how they regulate and police certain gender expressions. After they had presented various understandings of gender expectations, I wanted to know about the consequences for not conforming to gender rules. Indeed, I asked about what they had witnessed, not exactly how they contributed to what they saw. Again, for the sake of protecting their privacy, I needed to be conscious of not associating anything they divulged with their own behaviour unless they stated it as such explicitly.

The interview continued with what they understood was the source of their gender knowledge. We discussed how parents, teachers, and other figures of authority influenced and contrasted with their own concepts of gender. In this section of questioning, I had to be careful not to ask too much about their own personal identification because that was *verboten* territory, ethically speaking. They needed to feel free to express what they wanted to express on their own accord without feeling compelled to do so.

Optimistically, we concluded the interview with talk around how to improve the lived experiences of gender non-conformists at school. I could not have rushed into this

territory because I needed to explore what they understood about gender expression within the context of their current school climate. In short, had they not been willing to identify harassment at all, or were not able to notice anything problematic with gender expectations and expressions, I would have to rephrase this final line of questioning (see Appendix B for detailed examples of questions used).

The Drawings

After significant discussion on how they understood the term gender, how they observed gender and gender nonconformity, I integrated a drawing response. Inspired by Tauchert's (2001) visual model of fuzzy gender (see Chapter 1), I wanted to 'see' how these students really conceptualized gender and gender diversity in the form of their own visual model. Making meaning through image making is the central concept discussed in Julia Marshall's (2007) paper, "Image as Insight: Visual Images in Practice-Based Research". She explains that when "ideas, concepts, or information is transformed into visual images" (p. 23), clarity and meaning result. The image, diagram, or visual map, can offer a new way for the viewer to see the concept "in a fresh, more meaningful, personal, and experiential way" (p. 23). This clarity probably extends to the maker as well. Through image making, the creator can attain better self-knowledge. Marshall does acknowledge theorists and art educators alike may use image making as a research tool (p. 24).

Without presenting any preamble or background on visual models, I invited the students to depict their concept of gender on the paper with the markers and pens I provided. With my past experience as a visual art teacher, I had to remember these were

not art students and that maintaining their comfort level was paramount to the project.

After setting the ground rules that no one need be an artist, or that these drawings were not

expected to be anything other than a quick, unpolished representation of their ideas, I

allowed time for the drawing to develop. The participants expressed only mild hesitation

to attempt to articulate in visual form and Bert T. established his own rule: "I say we make

a consensus, nobody laughs at each other's artwork" (age 16), to which I concurred. This

activity was not meant to be intimidating which is why I allowed other means of

expression alongside the visual (i.e. the participants could use text, to embellish the

diagram and also had the option to explain their drawings).

As I have described in analysis, the drawings share many common elements. The

first instinct is to explain that they must all be referencing a common visual language.

Specifically, the gendered symbols denoting the public bathroom acted as a subtext to the

entire activity. The triangular skirted female figure and the male stick figure, sometimes

accompanied with their labels, 'men' and 'women', permeated the drawings. But

secondly, the similarity amongst all of the drawings was in some part due to the

intermingling of ideas; these artist-participants were presented with the same task at the

same time and worked at the same table. As a teacher, I am aware that eyes will wander.

This was not a test either, so I did not forbid talking during the drawing; for the most part, I

did not have to ask them to be quiet because they were concentrating, but they were not

silent either. How much of their drawings represent their own exclusive ideas I could not

determine. But this intermingling of ideas is a property of the focus group style which is

also an asset which I have already explained in an earlier section. It is a way of building a

dialogic space and establishing a group dynamic which also has the potential to constrain individuals in terms of expressing what they really think and feel about a particular topic.

A similar activity that looks at gender expectations through drawing is recommended by the Center for LGBT Outreach Services at Ithaca College (Maurer, 2005). The article merely outlines the procedure without providing context, justification, or the results of empirical studies that used this method. It is written as an informal lesson plan for teachers, without specifying the grade, subject, or curriculum expectations. But it is relevant in that it suggests drawing as a means to generate discussion or verbal response from participants. This particular activity asked about personal gender performance versus perceived societal gender expectations; due to its invasive and personal nature, the author suggests delicacy while asking the participants to share their drawings. First they were to pair up and ask each other about the drawings and then, according to their comfort level, share what they wished with the group. Of course I asked permission for my participants to share their drawings with the group, but we avoided the first stage of pair sharing due to time constraints and the less invasive nature of the topic.

The Reading and Writing

After the formal questions of the focus group interview came to a close, I issued a reading response assignment to the participants to be completed before the second set of interviews. The novel excerpt--in the interests of their time, a short passage equalling four pages from the text--was from *Luna* (Peters, 2004), a story about a transgender adolescent struggling to transition from male to female, told through the voice of his/her sister. The

specific excerpt focused on the sister's observations of the children she babysat; here, she reflects on the source and conditioning of gender. She filters her perception through what she has witnessed of her own brother's nightly transformations from Liam to Luna. The significance of the excerpt for my research lay in the observations of someone else's nonconformity to gender, which is precisely what I was trying to access from my participants. Secondly, I wanted to locate something familiar and universally applicable: the gender-ing of children is more likely an understandable phenomenon in my participants' lives, either through recalling their own experiences or witnessing that of their siblings or other relatives.

Qualitative research describes storytelling as a form of collected data; I chose to collect stories but also to use stories or narratives to promote narrative responses. Storytelling then is the data *and* the method of inquiry used to collect that data. Distinct from the generalized narrative approach that also "[honour] people's stories as data", (Patton, 2002, p. 478) storylines chart the "sequence of actions that, just as with categories, creates identities through inclusive and exclusive discursive movements" (2002, p. 191). The storyline is not to focus on detail or to get caught up in the fantasy of the narrative, but to notice the codes and cultural conventions embedded in the story that are generally accepted as normal. Through the youth's examination of the storyline in Luna, they are permitted to locate themselves either somewhere within or outside its reality. Once they might place themselves in relation to the story's reality, they can reflect on their own reactions to its issues. Patton (2002) cites Stephen Denning's (2001) concept of storytelling as a qualitative research method. These stories Denning calls "springboard"

because they "communicate new or envisioned strategies, structures, identities, goals and values...[and that] storytelling has the power to transform individuals" (p. 195). The story Luna is a tool for articulating their subject positions providing a platform, or "springboard" for reflection; it is not meant to force a truth upon them. In other words, I have not used this story to 'convert' them to embracing gender nonconformity. The transformation as Denning calls it, is not to become something they are not; instead I hoped to encourage a transformation into an awareness of self-knowledge, to promote a clarity about how they really think. I would think this story is far enough outside their own reality that they would have felt safe in their response to it. It is a story about fictional characters, not about someone they know and thus they may have felt more detached, objective, and thus liberated to express an honest response.

Sondergaard's (2002) storylines approach is pertinent here. She cites heteronormative romantic storylines, for example, that underline the behaviour and interactions certain youth use to navigate their relationships with peers. The conventional fairytale can be subverted to disrupt these invisible mechanisms of normalization through a retelling, or an alternative "storyline-rupturing fairytale" (p. 193). In one way, the story of Luna acts to disrupts codes of normalization by describing the life of a gender non-conforming youth in the role of protagonist. But the challenge exists in discovering the storylines embedded within the participants' own perspectives and then through interview questioning, allowing the researcher and participant to root out such assumptions.

Along with the excerpt, I attached response questions that cited what I underlined as probing lines from the story. The story served as a basis for these questions. I was not

interested in a comprehension of the text; this was not a literary response assignment. Instead, I used the text as a point of departure, the 'springboard', as previously mentioned, that led to questions not necessarily dependent upon the text. The participants were to take the work home with them, complete the reading and writing in their own time and submit the work to me via email, a mode of communication we had already established prior to the first interview. Again, to increase their comfort level, I did not outline expectations of word count, formatting and organization, or diction. The participants were free to express their responses as they saw fit as long as they were written, in English, and converted to a digital file able to be submitted online. I received all of the assigned writing, some ahead of time, and some at their individual interviews which they delivered in person.

One article directed to language teachers for professional development supports the use of journal writing to "capture students' changing perceptions" (Dunlop, 2006, p. 20). Unlike my study, Dunlop describes journaling for longitudinal usage (i.e. over several months) rather than my one-time written response. But similarly to my project, she recommends "guided journal questions"(p. 21) and also supports the use of email as a valid mode of communication between student and teacher (p. 25). Of course the major distinction between Dunlop's use of journaling and mine is the specific purpose: hers is curricular, mine, not. But, both do share a promotion of student engagement: "journaling is 'a method of promoting exploration and facilitating reflection on learning and new experiences'" (Gillis, 2001, p. 49, as cited in Dunlop, 2006, p. 25).

The Second Stage: Individual Interviews

After a cursory analysis of the data from the focus group interview, I identified a

shortage of the narrative quality I was so determined to study. Patton (2002) cites Richard

Mitchell (1979) as observing that "our knowledge is made up of the stories we can tell,

stories that must be told in the language we know... Where we can tell no story, we have no

knowledge" (p. 196). The next set of interviews needed to focus on attaining rich

descriptions of experiences about gender expression and nonconformity from the

participants. Like the focus group, these also were semi-structured to achieve the

flexibility of exploration that only this style can accommodate. As Roberts (2008) explains

for his own research, I did not want "to limit the direction in which participants took the

interview, but... focus on certain issues and probe and clarify comments made" (p. 14). I

began each interview articulating the intent to hear their stories, a time when something

happened, a particular incident or scenario which answered the question, providing me

with as much descriptive detail as they could recall save actual names of individuals

involved. The interview then continued in a conversational nature; not all of my questions

were prepared because I had to respond to what the participants articulated at the time.

And, depending on the participant, I may have changed the order of questions; however, I

did ensure that the same questions were posed to each participant to allow for some room

for comparison.

Data Analysis

The data sits there, 'sprawling, diffuse, undefined, and diverse'
(Lofland, quoted in Van Maanen, 1988:24), seemingly stable, waiting for me to figure out
how to use it, which means figuring out what my purposes in all of this are. (Lather, 1991,
p. 83)

Lather seems to speak my mind: the mountain of data will not escape me and I

have feared this moment, attempting to find my way into and through it all. But it is not

something already done, just waiting for me to translate it. Lather encourages me to know

that through unearthing it all, while understanding it, I am indeed creating it.

Patton provides an approach to understanding the process of analyzing qualitative

data. First, one must take inventory of all material to "get a sense of the whole" (2002, p.

440). He explains transcribing is a "transition between data collection and analysis" (p.

441). Following his advice, I transcribed my own interviews "to get immersed in the

data...[and generate] emergent insights" (p. 441). Only through this tedious process was I

able to become familiar with my data and notice certain themes, or repeated motifs. Jones

(2002) describes the true task of data analysis: the work is neither about a reorganizing of

text, nor is it "simply pulling out a few themes and ideas" (Jones, 2002, p. 468). An

attempt to glean real meaning and significance from

> pages and pages of transcribed interviews....requires the researcher to
> engage in an inductive analytic process while staying close enough to the
> data to create an in-depth understanding of the exact words and
> behaviours of the participants in the study. (p. 468)

The real onus on the researcher, on me, was to make meaning where none currently exists,

all the while remaining authentic to the subject (p. 471).

Patton (2002) also offers several options for organizing the data. I used the analytic

framework of processes because I have investigated "socialization processes" (p. 439).

Using all of the data amongst all of the interviews and the journal writing, I employed a

cross-case analysis (p.440) because I combined several cases or individuals' perspectives

into a thematic presentation. I have neither distinguished amongst the specific stages of

data collection nor have I reported in a chronological order. I am looking at the whole and

gleaning from that. However, the themes I have devised are so highly interconnected it is a

challenge to separate them at all. For example, how the participants define gender leads

directly to how they see gender expressed which is most often illustrated in terms of

clothing choices. Transgressions in clothing can lead to a discussion about tomboyism

which is often interpreted as a transgression of normative gender expression and then

ultimately ties to the debate about the conflation of sex, sexuality and gender. I have

organized all the data into themes, even if it seems artificial occasionally, only to create a

semblance of order for the reader. As long as that reader acknowledges all themes are

linked in multiple ways, the data analysis can retain some authenticity.

Perhaps a better overall organizing point is my focus on narrative. Accessing

someone's unique story, believing in the value of that story to be translated to others, is

central to my motivation. The need to tell a story, coupled with my own anxieties/

awareness of the self interrupting the research (that of the participants and the researcher)

makes me a "gendered, narrative *bricoleur*" and an "interpretive *bricoleur*" (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2005, p. 6), one who builds "a set of fluid, interconnected images and

representations" (p. 6). The story is allowable as data in its own right, without a need to

cross-reference it for validity (Patton, 2002, p. 478). Thus, I have focused on rich descriptions that reveal the participants' unique and personal perspective, told in their own terms.

My analysis evolved in tandem with some of the data collection: as I was developing the second interview questions, I was understanding what was significant amongst the data of the first interview. As the first interview informed the next, it outlined what was lacking. I learned I needed to pursue further detail and storied descriptions in the second interview. The data naturally could be arranged into areas of content in several ways. Most simply, I could have decided to report in the same chronology I collected the data: following the same questions, and distinguishing from the first to the written responses to the second interview responses; but in this way much would become redundant. I suppose another option was to tell a story from the perspective of each or several of the participants (see Sondergaard, 2002). This too might be repetitive, but also overwhelming for the scope of this project. Another option was to organize and analyse thematically. I settled on separating the data analysis into four thematic sections: each an analysis culminating from all of the data collection stages (the focus group interview, the writing, and the second interviews with individuals).

To create some coherence between the theoretical discussion and the analysis of my project, I consciously borrowed terminology and applied theory from Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) and Halberstam (1998), primarily, to generate thematic categories. The participants did not use the term embodiment, but their talk of the body, of corporal stylings, was a nice fit with Butler's and Prosser's (1998) work on embodied gender and gender performativity.

Neither did the participants speak of regulation, but gender discourse, also primarily

through Butler (1990) who describes the regulatory practices that maintain the illusion of

natural or innate gender; these practices police the behaviours that are excluded from the

normative regimes of gender, as do they punish also. Of course, the initial category

entitled gender conformity and non-conformity derived from gender discourse also rather

than from the participants' language. It was meant to locate the participants'

understandings in an introductory way, to assess their general engagement with terms such

as gender, sex, sexuality, gender expression, and social consequences. Halberstam and

Rasmussen (2009) provided invaluable analysis of the public bathroom that intersected

with the students' concern of this social structure/construction impacting gender

transgressors' lives. Halberstam also proved to be a useful resource once the issue of

tomboyism became apparent amongst the data. Finally, Wyss' (2004) work on

genderqueer violence articulated the various reactions to harassment including compliance,

rejection, resilience and silence. Her findings incorporated this wide range because she

researched genderqueer youth specifically; my data fit better into the first two categories of

compliance and rejection. The position of resiliency would speak more to the experiences

of a person targeted for their gender transgressions and my participants did not identify in

this way, thus they could not assume a form of resiliency. I had to tailor the categories of

analysis to reference the conceptual frameworks I initially accessed; rather, the theory

informed my thinking about gender variance throughout the project design, but during

analysis I had to be conscious of their exact intersection and articulate it adequately.

Sondergaard (2002) offers another analytic approach in the form of storylines to study "the construction of discursive categories, mainly the categories centered around sex/ gender constructions and their in- and exclusive effects in relation to identity projects" (p. 187). This ideology references the work of Butler (1990), explicating the very constructedness of gender as well as examining how regulatory practices maintain the illusion of natural and appropriate gender expression through demarcating a limit of acceptable behaviour. Sondergaard points to the likely modes of accessing these discursive practices as including interviewing and diaries, for example, but prefers the "material of a kind that is saturated with descriptions of how life is lived...[specifically] sequences of actions,...reflections and interpretations" (p. 191). I have sought the sort of rich personal data Sondergaard identifies through the methods of interviewing and journal writing, but it is the approach of storylines that frames the analysis of such data. This tool differs from the common narrative tool because it is "more focused on process than plot... [which] as a concept is a bit more static than the concept of storyline" (p. 192). The acknowledgment of process aligns with my project that investigates the ways students form and engage with discursive practices of gender expression because theirs is an evolving understanding, not a static body of knowledge that remains intact and impenetrable.

Limitations

Activism as a Potential Limitation

The novel excerpt was chosen to present an alternative lifestyle or gender expression from the heteronormative image. Admittedly, it was a peripheral thought that a story about a transgender teen would be ripe opportunity to educate these participants about a subject with which they would more likely be unfamiliar. But in the interests of maintaining the integrity of this research study, as discoverer, I had to unearth what these youth really believed, not attempt to teach them what I think they should believe. The researcher turned activist is a tempting role to fill. Richardson (2008) concedes his desire to do the same; while showing a film to his South African preservice teachers about queer youth, he "had the choice of using the film to transmit 'knowledge'" about LGB youth or allowing the students to "identify issues the film raised for them" (p. 65). He dismissed the former because of its inevitability to reduce the issues to mere facts, or stats, which is useless in the call for "action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 1995, p. 17, as cited in Richardson, 2008, p. 66). I would fear the same superficial knowledge could be the only result if we relied on one small novel excerpt to teach about the lives of transgender youth.

Although it was not my intention to model activism, if any results indirectly, I would be pleased because it means the work is accelerated from mere information-finding to effecting change. Lather (1991) notes "a growing concern of critical social science discourse is how to generate knowledge in ways that turn critical thought into

emancipatory action" (Comstock, 1982; Dubiel, 1985; Lather, 1986a; as cited in Lather, 1991, p. 12). My project design might have an influence on the ability to inspire change. Spanning in stages over several months, the participants had time to interact with each other in their own school environment, talk with others, and reflect on the issues raised. And because I was asking about the same topic in each interview session, albeit probing for different results, I could chart the progression of each participant's ideas. I concluded each interview (focus group and individual) with the question of how to improve the school lives of gender non-conformists. In this way, I had hoped to mould "transformative intellectuals" (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985 as cited in Lather, 1991, p. 12) "who will serve as catalysts for the necessary empowering dialogue" (Lather, 1991, p. 12). Because the final interview occurred in February, the students had plenty of time in the school year remaining to generate action inspired by the project. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the study to investigate this possibility.

At the least, I might inspire a quieter change that occurs in the individual, a type of small self-revelation. Because of the nature of the questions, I am probing for a certain intellectual activity beyond simple description. I was asking for a metacognition, a way to have the student participants articulate their understanding of how they understand or come to know about gender expression and gender fluidity. In this way, the work might incite further self-reflection which, if not activism in the purest sense, may serve to create the potential for change through engaging students critically with discourses about normative gender expression in their everyday lives in schools.

Validity

Any research that works with human subjects is bound to be fraught with ethical concern for their appropriate treatment. Practical implications create inevitable limitations to the study. Yet, the work is still worth pursuing, despite all the pitfalls and stumbling blocks.

Because the research focuses on narrative, the personal story, I have bypassed triangulation, in the strictest sense. However, to account for validity questions, I have asked the same type of questions multiple times of multiple participants, which "adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Flick, 2002, p. 227 as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 5). I looked at a whole group discussion, individual written pieces, and individual verbal interviews. Stake (2000) agrees with this method of research: "multiple perceptions... clarify meaning ... verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (p. 454). Further, triangulation itself is limiting because it only presents three sides; Laurel Richardson (in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) favours the "crystallization process" where multiple views of the same issue are pursued. And in true poststructuralist form, this method is not about accessing "the one 'correct' telling of [the topic]. Each telling, like light hitting a crystal, reflects a different perspective on this incident" (p. 6). Poststructuralism denies the existence of "arriving at a 'truth'" (Sondergaard, 2002, p. 188). This type of inquiry can access how discursive practices of gender expression arise and in what conditions but Sondergaard reminds us that "such conditions cannot be studied unmediated...[or] investigated as 'pure' phenomena" (p. 189). Rather, they must always be situated in a cultural and local context.

Technology

Another concern of reliability is the pervasive use of technology for communication in research. I used email to keep in contact with my participants on a regular basis throughout the project, to send out and receive informed consent letters, to schedule the interviews, to issue the transcript from the focus group for their review. Despite the apparent ease of this mode, I ultimately encountered problems with timing, delays in responses, lack of communication altogether depending on how often the participants collected their email or if they changed their email address. Additionally, I could never be sure how my tone was received, or what tone they intended. With written correspondence, it is a challenge to include all of the information and achieve the proper tone of business formality with familiarity. For instance, I wrote a terse and somewhat frantic email to one participant because his signed consent letter was late and I thought it the best way to incite action. When he responded in an equally terse and cold tone that he had sent it to me weeks ago, I immediately returned with a profuse apology to which he replied, 'don't worry about it; stress gets the best of us'. Instead of a simple correspondence that achieved a task, I fell into an exaggerated expression I interpreted as necessary. Now, I still do not know if he thinks I was having a breakdown, or if he was as cavalier as I thought I was.

Yet, the method of traditional postal mail proved to be a challenge for the participants. Letters of consent had to be returned to me through the postal service because they were signed copies. Of course, the participants could have scanned their signed letters and submitted them to me as digital files, but I tried to make it easier for them by providing a self-addressed stamped envelope with their information letter. Still, some said they had

never before delivered a letter in the mailbox. Thus, I received letters late, sometimes

hand-delivered at the interview itself (I had garnered informal permission on email that

they attend in the first place) and one or two I had to hound relentlessly to receive them at

all. It might have been an additional challenge to the participants that I required two

separate consent letters as I had altered the project midway to include the second set of

interviews. Had I organized it from the beginning, they would have had to contend with

the postal service only once. Only months into the project did it occur to me use the

telephone to expedite communication.

Time

Coupled with the delivery system problem, I allowed too much time to pass

between interviews and before I expected the written responses submitted. The first

interview occurred at the beginning of the school year, in September, and the second set

occurred at the beginning of a new term, in February. The result was that the participants

lost some recall ability of their responses from the first interview in the second and thus

could not easily followup or build on ideas from the one to the other. The other result was

that the deadline for submitting the writing passed for many of them. In some cases, I

received these also in the second interview, delivered in person. The delay here affected

how I wrote the questions for the second interview. Initially, I had wanted to analyse the

data simultaneously with forming the research questions because of the exploratory nature

of the project. Instead, I had to rely on only a few of the written responses that participants

had submitted on time. I think what also happened is that the participants who submitted

the writing very close to the second interview meeting time or had delivered them in

person at this second interview, mirrored their written ideas in their verbal responses more

so than the others whose responses varied more from their writing.

Social Dynamics

Another limitation is embedded in the nature of the focus group style. While

considered a benefit, social interaction and group self-governance may also amount to a

drawback. Some of the participants would inevitably feel intimidated to speak in a group

setting, and thus not assert their voices in the midst of the more vocal participants. Even

though they volunteered for the project, perhaps they were unaware of the interview set-up.

I had allowed participants to speak or to answer as they saw fit; I did not insist on an order

of responses. My task was to facilitate discussion according to their willingness. I tried to

limit my control of the discussion. Talburt (2008) writes of her concern that too many

queer activists impose their own adult concerns onto the lives of unsuspecting children.

Short of mediating to this degree, the most I intervened was to organize who would speak

when, if many volunteered to respond simultaneously; sometimes I might ask to hear from

someone whose voice was quieted or neglected in the big group dynamic. Of course, I

always allowed the participant to decline to respond, depending on their comfort level.

Another interpersonal concern is my prior relationship with these students. These

participants had background knowledge of me as a teacher either in their own classroom,

or at least in their school. This familiarity coloured the relationship between participant

and researcher. To begin, they addressed me formally, the way they would have a teacher,

using my surname and a proper title. How one is named or addressed is a telltale sign of the nature of the relationship; for instance, "teachers also know that naming is a crucial aspect of the relation they maintain with students" (Van Manen, McClelland, Plihal, 2007, p. 85). I did not correct the participants but I signed my email correspondences with my initial and surname without the title; this did not change how they referred to me. As I reflect on their comfort level in the focus group I have to include myself as a factor. Not only the knowledge of me as a teacher, but as someone, even researcher, in a position of authority, no matter how familiar or informal I insisted the tone of the discussion be, would impact the nature of their responses. Paechter (2006) writes at length about the power relationships embedded between researcher and participant. How the student participants respond to such questions about gender in the company of their friends or peers may differ vastly compared to what I witnessed; but, my presence may not have been all problematic. Without some strong voice to facilitate their discussion, they may not have kept on task or been as democratically sensitized as they were.

The Subjective Position of the Researcher

Because qualitative research is about the personal, it is inherently complex, especially if it follows a postmodern paradigm. Lather (1991) charts postmodernism as post-humanist, engaging in "pluralistic structures of authority", "anti-hierarchical", and embracing "multiple sites from which the world is spoken" (p. 33). My work is in its infancy and I can only hope at postmodern tendencies, specifically, the erasure of the researcher as authoritarian. But through this acknowledgement of subjectivity, the

researcher's position is also fraught with complexity. Lather reminds qualitative

researchers of critical inquiry that research designs must "allow us as researchers to reflect

on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work" (p. 23).

Further, she asks of "teachers with liberatory intentions": "How can we position ourselves

as less masters of truth and justice and more as creators of a space where those directly

involved can act and speak on their own behalf?" (p. 95). She sees the researcher/teacher

who wants to invoke change as a facilitator who must be conscious of "the politics of

creating meaning" (p. 23) and understand how the self interrupts and influences the work.

The researcher exists not in a vacuum and "it *does* matter who does research" (p. 25): "the

people who identify and define scientific problems leave their social fingerprints on the

problems and their favored solutions to them (Harding, 1987, p. 184). Here Lather

describes *feminist empiricism* which as a theory is about being in transition, and is "full of

tension between and within" (p. 25). Lather is interested in investigating the ways "prior

concepts shape the data [she] gather[s] and the ways in which those data are

interpreted" (p. 24). Who I am, outside of the research, impacts the making of the

research.

Who I am to become is a direct result of enduring the research process. Alison

Cook-Sather extends Lather's argument that a researcher impacts the nature of the data to

add that they "not only translate what they gather but are also translated by it" (2007, p.

829). Cook-Sather eloquently investigates the process of translating both in the work and

self of the researcher: "as we translate, we are translated" (p. 829). I respond to this

concept because translation implies process, the enduring and the changing *through* the

work and because of the work. The prefix, *trans* has obvious import in a study about gender fluidity. My topic of gender diversity, or more widely, *trans*gender, is about moving through and across social understandings of gender. The researcher must be moving through and across the language and data from and about gender fluid individuals, all the while understanding the implication of the self in the process of making sense of it.

In Chapter One, I examined Lather's (2008) and Kumashiro's (2002) contributions to my understanding of exploratory research and the concept of unknowability. Although both may have calmed my anxieties about traversing the unknown and actually assured me the work could be of more value simply because I was "getting lost" (Lather, 2008) during this study, I must now take into account how I find my way, what markers I recognize as significant, and even what I am wont to dismiss. My background is key to understanding these decisions I make subconsciously. Youdell (2005) remarks on being the problematic Same, as opposed to the Other, while investigating the Other. She questions, as I do, the ability of a privileged white, middle-class researcher to access and understand the stories of and about the Other. Further, Heyes (2003, p. 1093) asks, "where is the author?" in the case of a non-trans woman writing about trans issues. I would have to question the position and validity of the author/researcher as a non-queer/gender conforming person writing about gender queer/*non*-conforming people. Patton (2002) acknowledges the anxieties of the researcher engaging in qualitative studies: "you realize that completely value-free inquiry is impossible, but you worry about how your values and preconceptions may affect what you see, hear, and record in the field" (p. 93). In response, he offers several ways to counteract such fears, including the emphasis on reporting the empirical

findings over one's own personal perspective. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) also admit that "there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual" (p. 21). They cite poststructuralism and postmodernism as creating this idea that "any gaze [specifically, mine, as researcher] is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity" (p. 21). The knowledge one creates is situated somewhere between the "observer and the observed" (p. 21). Despite the pitfalls inherent in qualitative research, responsible reflection is expected and manageable; otherwise, the work will be compromised by excessive navel-gazing.

Lather (1991) notes the impact of the individual on the work: meaning-making through methodology is a political process, "inescapably tied to issues of power and legitimacy" (p. 12). Jones (2002) also writes about the impact of the researcher on the research: "researchers both write 'the word' and are written by the life stories and experiences that the research is designed to document and understand" (p. 472). It is through writing that the self of the researcher is better understood, but it is also the researcher's responsibility (and this is what distinguishes a researcher writer from any other kind of writer) to be aware of how that self interrupts the text (p. 471).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reported on my methodological approach to collecting and analyzing data which evolved through many snares and stumbles. Given the aims and focus of my research project, which centred around producing more detailed knowledge about secondary school students' understanding of the limits and possibilities of gender

expression, I embrace a qualitative research methodology for its potential to provide me

with a means for accessing the meaning-making practices of youth in one particular school

in South Western Ontario. In this sense, it was the particularizing aspect of such

naturalistic inquiry, with its potential for producing thick description, that appealed to me.

In this chapter I also provide some reflection of my own subjectivity as a researcher in

terms of its capacity to influence the research process and the analysis of data. Overall, I

must admit that I enjoyed the complicated path of navigating my way through the

methodological process through which the research materialized. While it often felt as if I

were walking blindly, unsure of where I was heading at times--to use Lather's analogy--I

ultimately came to understand my engagement with the research process as getting lost so

as to find my way. This chapter needs to be understood as my attempt to unravel this

productive experience.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis Part I.

Introduction

In this and the following chapter I provide analysis of significant themes that

emerged from the data. To separate the themes into distinct categories seemed false and

constricting at times because so much of the data is interrelated. The theme subheadings I

employ are primarily for the purposes of organization and making the data analysis more

coherent for the reader. I do not presume that these distinct categories are thus in actuality.

I find support in Wyss' (2004) reasoning to categorize her own data on violence against

trans youth due to "conceptual purposes" which becomes "a useful organizational and

analytic tool" (p. 716). The categories are derived from the theoretical frameworks I

outlined in Chapter One. Butler (1990; 1993; 2004) and Halberstam (1998), primarily,

among others, contribute key understandings about gender regimes and gender

normalization and thus helped develop how I organize my findings into thematic categories

of gender conformity and nonconformity, embodiment, and gender regulation.

I began the focus group by asking about how the participants defined gender, in

order to gauge a starting point, or a way into their understanding; thus the first theme

explores the sense-making practices of youth as they relate to gender conformity and non-

conformity. The questioning pointed to discussions of how one determines one's gender,

and what is noticeably outside the realm of acceptable gender expressions; thus, the second

key theme is about embodiment of gender, or gender and the body. The individual

interviews as well as the writing contributed to this theme and to the following theme on

embodiment because I was investigating topics in more depth at these stages. Within this category, I examine issues of visuality also because of their inextricable connection to embodiment. In the focus group, the participants identified situations of harassment of the persons who operated on the edge of dominant gender norms; thus, I divide these themes into two, how gender is regulated and the consequences for disobeying the regulations; and, harassment of the gender non-conformists. Once we had established or exhausted the topic of problematic gender expression, students imagined ways of addressing how to interrupt the cycle of harassment experienced by gender non-conformists which I felt were best understood in terms of the analytic-thematic categories of compliance and rejection.

Part I. Gender Conformity and Nonconformity: the Meaning of Gender

To what extent did students subscribe to gender rigidity and variation/fluidity? In what ways were they able to talk about and embrace gender diversity? How did they witness gender diversity in their own school environment? The participants' responses to these questions varied.

When I asked the participants about their understanding of the term gender, I was only mildly aware of the type of metacognition I was encouraging. What my participants felt about others' expression of gender and what they claim to be their own personal interpretation of such expressions need to be understood as governed by specific norms and access to particular discourses that cannot be separated from the broader social and cultural context in which they find themselves immersed. Judith Butler (2004) aptly names the unnameable; she calls attention to the illusion of normalcy that is itself a fiction, its

constructedness invisible. Specifically, she points to the norms embedded in language of

the self. In her case analysis of Brenda/David, she wonders how David's self-talk is

already imbued with the norms of society that told him he was inadequate as a girl, that

called him a freak (p. 69). Butler claims that "one speaks a language that is already

speaking" (p. 69), a language that is probably not distinct from what one feels internally.

In fact, one participant, Leo J. in my study, distinguished between the self and society, as if

one was not informed by the other. For him, there are social categories that exist for

adolescents defined by "'lines' [that] are simply borders, which people use to categorize

everyone around them" (Leo J., age 16). But, even if the crossing of these lines means one

"may fall into a pre-determined category...they are really just being themselves" (Leo J.,

age 16). There is a link here to Butler's description of David who sees that there is a

separation between "what he [or anyone] feels" and the norm which is "other, elsewhere,

not part of who he is, who he has become, what he feels" (Butler, 2004, p. 69).

In essence, by asking these few individuals about how they understand gender, I

might be accessing a part of the greater contemporary discourse at work because what they

know about themselves and how they understand others is inherently a part of societal

norms at work. However, I still have to admit that my analysis would be merely a transient

and temporary glimpse into youth understandings because they would not necessarily be

reproduced in a continuous or consistent line.

Gender Fluidity, Gender Scales

The participants' responses of course varied and the level exceeded my expectations. What I expected to receive was some identification of boy/girl, perhaps masculine/feminine, and definitely male/female in binary terms of understanding, not because I was presupposing the sort of ideology to which these particular students subscribed, but because this was the dominant ideology available to them. What I in actuality identified was a discourse about gender fluidity and multiple points of being. One participant, Bert T., even used the word 'fluid' before I had ever uttered it. He pointed to one's own personal meaning, one's "inner gender" as working in tandem with one's physical make-up to produce gender, "it's just the way you feel about yourself" (Bert T., age 17). For him, gender is defined not by others, but by the very personal, private, and distinct interpretation of the individual. He even included the option of 'neither' for the individual who can find no truth in identifying as either male or female. As the first response for my research, and especially since prior to the interviews this individual was unknown to me, I was aghast at his ease with grasping more recent theories of gender. After quiet questioning from his contemporaries, wondering how these so-called 'neither'-gendered individuals "tag on the box" of identification forms, he retorted, "that's just social norms gone wrong right there" that nothing except the binaries of male/ female are available. Bert T. immediately recognized the inadequacies of a society that does not leave room for the differently gendered.

Ever the optimist, another participant, Leo J., suggested a "growing population of a third category" would be reason to allow for another box to be put beside the male/ female

options on legal forms. Whether this was his true answer is unclear since he did not answer my question, but decided to respond to the comments of the first participant. I will not assume, based on his other responses, that this participant was as versed in the politics of difference as Bert T. or was he as accepting of gender fluidity as he appears to be here; I would rather venture that Leo J., albeit liberally minded, was more apt to appease, mediate and encourage than he was to pose a challenge.

A counter argument to the notion of gender fluidity continued with one participant who responded in equal force as the first participant, Bert T. Ralph S. found it problematic that common forms of gender would be abandoned in favour of an individual self-naming their own specific type of gender. He prescribes to hegemonic masculinity where males should be able to "'grow a pair' or you know, 'wear balls'" and "men tend to be yeah physically strong, emotionally strong--don't show your emotions, like that" (Ralph S., age 17). Clearly, Ralph S. relies on established notions of the gender binary: "what about legally? I mean legally, there's no 'neither'; it's male or female...there is no 'neither'" (Ralph S., age 17). He could not imagine room beyond what was legally sanctioned. His argument progressed: "on a legal basis, I mean if you say, 'OK, you can be neither gender', I mean, can I be categorized as God, would that be a new gender?" (Ralph S., age 17). For him, the idea of a gender system that allowed for personal interpretation is simply ridiculous. It was not that he just was not able to summon the imagination to conceive of something beyond what already legally exists, but that he chose not to: "I'm fairly traditional in my values and morals...everyone else is kind of in

the middle" (Ralph S., age 17). Further, he separates himself from his immediate society here in Canada, perhaps identifying more with his Chinese roots:

> People seem to like liberal views a little bit better...it makes everyone a little bit happier...especially Canada is sort of a liberal country..everyone goes out for gay rights, ...and environmentalism...people don't see the aspect of ok what if we did legalize gay marriage...you don't see the consequences...I see myself as a devil's advocate... (Ralph S., age 17)

Ralph S. sees gender fluidity posing real problems for society where he is the one outside, gifted with foresight and owning a responsibility to educate these unthinking masses.   He fears societal structures would collapse with free interpretation of gender: the Olympics, for one, would not be able to continue as they are with only two categories of athletes, male and female and for "bathrooms, what are you going to do create male/female/other kind of thing?" (Ralph S., age 17). And somehow, gender diversity could lead to utter chaos, according to Ralph S. He cited the insanity plea that excuses criminal action and then equated it to "legaliz[ing] the middle genders" as providing a sort of excuse, "what are you going to say, 'I'm mostly female'? Is that going to be the safety net for criminals to go on?" (Ralph S., age 17). Butler (2004) would take great issue with Ralph S.'s views on many points, but especially his defaulting to a legal argument for denying other-gendered individuals: "perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about" (p. 20). She concedes that the "language might well establish our legitimacy within a legal framework" the problem is that "it fails to do justice to passion and grief and rage", or really, to convey what is human about us (p. 20).

Meanwhile, despite the ferocity of Ralph S.'s statements, Bert T. does not cower; he was able to maintain his position that gender is formed through personal interpretation which can allow for limitless configurations. Just as becoming homosexual is "up for debate" so too is the process of becoming gendered, for Bert T.; "it's more of a personal issue" (Bert T., age 16). He recounted a story about a debate he and a friend engaged in one Saturday morning at bowling on the definition of masculinity:

> There's me and this other male friend of mine and ah, just out of nowhere...we were actually discussing and somehow it came on to what we both mutually called a 'masculine-off' and we literally sat there and we tried to discuss which one was to be more manly because I'm not gonna lie, I can be pretty feminine at times, and what is feminine really? But um, I do do a lot things, I'm big in the fashion world, I love fashion, I love shopping, ah, you can show me somebody's hair and I can tell you why I love it, why I don't and I'm classified as 'feminine' socially, sometimes. But ah he's pretty feminine too, if you got to know him, and ah, we actually sat there and discussed which one of us could be more masculine. When he stopped and thought, well, how does one score a competition like this? And ah, we really, we found no way to score which one of us could be more masculine than each other and it really got us into a pretty extensive question about what is male, what is female and we both came to the conclusion that masculinity and femininity...that neither of them can exist because there's no physical or abstract way to grasp either of them. (T. age 16)

For Bert T, the understanding of masculinity or femininity is so complex it exceeds articulation; it belongs to the world of the abstract. In this way, he reminds me of Butler (2004) who acknowledges some part of gender, that which exceeds language, and thus understanding, in the case of Brenda/David. She concludes we will not be able to understand the intricacies of David's thinking because we do not know him beyond the text that has been written about him and because he "emerges at the limits of intelligibility" where his 'I' is "still positioned somewhere between the norm and its failure" (p. 74).

Perhaps Bert T. is also trying to access this space of unintelligibility: he rejects the binary

gender system, almost identifying in a total reversal of the norms (i.e. calling himself more

feminine because he does feminine things, versus redefining masculine). Within a safe

space of like-minded friends, he ignores, for now, the pressures of a compulsory

heterosexual binary gender regime, and embraces a line of questioning that dissolves into

nothing. He can barely make sense of his own beliefs, let alone those that create the

current rigid societal gender norm.

A quieter objector, Nigel C. agrees with Bert T. in his embrace of gender fluidity.

For him the binary system of gender is

> ...just something that our culture has just like kinda thrown at us, like you have
> to be one or the other and like, it's, I don't know, you shouldn't be labelled
> either way, you are who you are and it doesn't really matter. Like a man
> doesn't have to be masculine and a woman doesn't have to be feminine. (Nigel
> C., age 16)

He rejects compulsory gender binaries but is also a realist, he can identify how the world is

really working:

> I agree with the fact that I think you should define how, like your gender kind
> of thing, whatever you think is how it should be. But I don't think people are
> really working like that right now. (Nigel C., age 16)

He continues to explain how people make meaning: what people see in a person is how

they decide to understand that person's gender, "we see 'gender' in the way that it is

presented to us" (Nigel C., age 16), without granting allowances for other interpretations.

Nigel C. asserts that there exists a very clear "separation" between the proper way to be a

boy or a girl with only some space for movement within each category.   But, almost

antithetically, he also believes gender is not inherently natural but self-defined: "being a

certain gender isn't 'hardwired'"; then he adds, it is the person's responsibility if not to conform entirely to a binary system of gender, then to "decide 'where we fit in'", be it a non-conforming group or not. Society offers limited space for people; it is the person's role to find an identity that is already available. In this way, Nigel C. is the mediating voice between the more rigid views of Ralph S. and the liberalism of Bert T. where Ralph S. rationalizes "if someone feels like he/she is that of the opposite sex, there could be a hormonal imbalance of some sort" (age 17) and where Bert T. thinks "it's all on an individual basis" (age 16).

Others share Nigel C.'s position of a mediated definition of gender, somewhere between the norm and the complete dismissal of the norm. Raj (age 16) begins to align his beliefs with the binary but then acknowledges an interest in its disruption: "masculinity's like you have to be strong, you have to be able to do labour and stuff but with changing times, like everything changes and evolves so shouldn't definitions as well?" Gray also understands gender as suspended between society and the individual. She extends Nigel C.'s sophisticated explanation of how gender functions:

> Having a gender 'hardwired' into a person is true--but not the way you may think. It's hardwired due to a few factors like home life, school life, friends, and self-esteem. If someone wasn't to 'fit' into society's expectations of gender, it isn't necessarily anyone's fault...Society has molded people into thinking there are only two genders, male and female. This way, through the media and peer pressure and such, most people have been forced into one of the two categories. If someone was to be different, it would be their choice, but society's fault for making it difficult for them to be who they want to be. (Gray, age 16)

She and Nigel C. acknowledge the dominating power of societal norms on the formation of a person's private gender identity. Again, it is as Butler (2004) asks in the case of Brenda/

David, where is the person and where is the norm? When a certain quality (i.e. a person's expressed gender) is the "something [that] exceeds the norm" (p. 72) that cannot be "the core of person" (p. 73) because that would simply be referencing yet another discourse, that of humanism, so it must be something that exceeds the limits of intelligibility, goes "beyond what is sayable" (p. 73). The self and the society in which that self operates (and which acts upon the self) are entities inextricably linked because they inform each other on a continuous basis or create each other.

Conflation of Sex, Sexuality and Gender

But as the debate on definitions of gender evolves, the conflation of sex, sexuality and gender is obvious and seemingly inevitable. Lynn T. even stopped the focus group discussion to ask for clarification of the terms:

> Is there like a difference between the words? Is gender like social and like say sex is biological? (Lynn T., age 17/18)

But as I answered tentatively (attempting to avoid researcher interruption in the participants' talk) that the two are different concepts, she feared, like Ralph S., that fluid definitions of gender would be problematic to society: "I can see so many things like messed up" (Lynn T., age 17/18). These comments highlight the structural and systemic issues tied to gender expression and identification--gender binaries are deeply embedded in institutional structures that it becomes unimaginable to conceive of an identification or expression of gender beyond the limits of such dualistic categorization of identity.

From here, the participants cited the pregnant man, Thomas Beattie, an icon of pop culture embodying gender transgression, whose story also fuses sexual and gender

identities. Thomas was born a woman, lived as a woman, fell in love with a woman and was then ostensibly a lesbian. Only after realizing his true gender identity did he undergo partial transformative surgery (leaving his internal reproductive organs and genitalia unaltered surgically) and then changed his legal identity to a male. Because he remained in the same relationship with the same woman, the question of how his sexuality changed arises. Transitioning secondarily from a homosexual woman to a heterosexual man who retained his female body parts, his identity is complex. The participants grappled with these facts and their implications. Their discussion served as a platform upon which they could articulate their emerging understandings of transgender issues. Ralph S. lingered on the legal distinction of male and female: "from a legal aspect should you theoretically check if a baby has a working uterus or a working penis?" (age 17). Leo J. wondered whether a legal gender could or should prohibit an individual's biological function: "do you think it was a fault on his part like if he wanted to be genuinely male he couldn't have a baby, right?" (age 16). And Gray understood the pregnant man as a symbol of the gender fluid individual, one who would eventually move from one end of the scale to the other and not remain in perpetual transition. But then she also empathized with his plight: "so now it's not even that you're gay or straight now it's that you are a guy but you're having a baby, so that could be way worse" (Gray, age 16). Leo J. lamented that this societal intolerance of gender fluidity simply goes "back to nailing him to what he is physically" which is a regression "when we thought we were making progress" (age 16). Whether Leo J. meant society at large or this small focus group as the "we" who was "making progress" (that is, moving beyond the gender binary) is ambiguous. Either could indicate

his desire to belong to a community that is willing to embrace different definitions of gender.

The conflation is most obvious when the participants begin to describe gender non-conformity, as opposed to the standards of hegemonic gender. Bert T. answers that students who do not conform to acceptable gender are "assumed to be faggots" (age 16). Lynn T. also references a muddling of sexuality and gender nonconformity when she answers a targeted student might hear "stuff like, 'oh, she's pretty much a boy' or [the harasser might be] referring to their sexual preference"; but for her, this is benign: "it's kind of like they're not serious" (age 17/18). Supposedly Lynn T. means the sexual preference would be named as non-conformist, or homosexual, if the gender was targeted as non-conforming. But she does not see this as a problem for herself, for the gender fluid individual or for any actual homosexual individuals whose identity is then also insulted in this one attack. Ralph S. identifies sexuality as the reason for someone enacting a fluid gender performance: "if he dresses, if he puts on a flowery dress, I would say, 'he is probably gay'" (age 17). At another time, he blames society for this conflation and seems to remove himself from the problem: "Can you have a feminist man? You can, I guess. Society will perceive you as gay...there are those that are married and dress like women" (age 17). Not only is he acknowledging the conflation of gender transgression with sexuality, but his other terms collide: feminism replaces femininity; whether this is a confusion or an intention, we read it as a man not who exemplifies femininity but one who is equity-seeking amongst the sexes. Ralph S. may believe he is conceding here, loosening his conservativist belt, but he changes the language so much that he actually changes the

meaning. And herein lies the inherent debate: a conflation of sexuality and gender either means the two concepts are interconnected or that the speaker is confused.

Bert T. offers what he thinks is a common occurrence of the conflation between sexuality and gender:

> If you see a woman who goes around, hangs out with a lot of men, is playing football every night, doesn't get her hair done, doesn't do her nails every night, you think, one of the first words that comes to your mind is 'dyke' and depending on how close-minded you are, leads to 'faggot'. Whereas too if you see a guy going around, 'I'm going to get my nails done every night', 'I'm going to get my hair fixed', 'I'm going to go to the spa with my girlfriends': faggot. (age 16)

He illustrates this thinking in such way that I wonder how often he has witnessed these intolerances and at what range, as in, to what degree he or a close friend has been the target. But his understanding does not stop there: when called to examine the relationship between gender and sexuality, Bert T. can also provide an alternative scenario that thwarts the tendency to align non-conformist sexuality with non-conformist gender:

> I know a lot of incredibly masculine friends who are talking to me, like really if you wanted to be stereotypical and you wanted to guess their sexuality, never in your right mind would you say 'gay'. Yet, they can be. I have met some of the most masculine gay people in the world. I've also met some of the most effeminate gay people in the world, too. (age 16)

Bert T. claims more often than not, homosexual men will act in an effeminate way because that is "the way society has moulded them" but it is possible for them to act against this stereotype. He can understand that sexuality and gender are related concepts, certainly that they overlap, but also seems to acknowledge where they are separate. Youdell (2005) notes that "sex-gender-sexuality...are not causally related" (p. 256) as my participants are implying but ours is a culture "in which gender is arbitrarily tied to sex" (Filax & Shogan,

2004, p. 81). When one's gender is outside the norms then these youth blame and name the sexuality as non-normative also: "the identity 'fag' silently constitutes hetero-masculinity" (Youdell, 2004, p. 481). But for Youdell these conflated concepts "exist in abiding constellations in which to name one category of the constellation is to silently infer further categories", specifically illustrating that the female body "is already feminized, the feminine is already heterosexual, the hetero-feminine is already female" (2005, p. 256). The thinking could of course be extended to the male body, which is masculinized, whose masculinity is heterosexual, and is thus deemed hetero-masculine.

In a qualitative study on heterosexism, teacher-researcher Karen Cathers "makes the connection between sexism and homophobia: "I really see the way we pigeon-hole people and how putting them in gender roles connects to homophobia" (Schniedewind and Cathers, 2003, p. 186). Her study focused on the relationships of fourth-grade students, but the tendency to conflate sexuality and gender is similar to that which my participants cited. For her students, "'gay' always comes up" as a way students hurt each other, whether the targeted individual is non-heterosexual or not (p. 186). Heterosexism attacks any non-conforming identity, be it gender expression or sexuality. Youdell (2005) argues that this "linear relationship between sex, gender and (hetero-)sexuality" (p. 253) occurs at school which is a "key site for the proliferation, modification and incessant inscription" of such discourses. These youth (my participants and those in Cathers' study) are relying on the norm of "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich, 1980) whereby "heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed" (p. 653) and thus deemed the default identity and standard against which all other forms must be measured and judged. Martino and Palotta-

Chiarolli (2003) assert homophobia "is about regimes of heterosexuality" (p. 75) which act to normalize heterosexuality and pathologize homosexuality. My participants are enacting a homophobic ideology, or at least they are observing one at work, one that is intricately tied to understandings of gender.

Part II. Visuality and Embodiment

To address the concept of visuality that underlines much of my thinking about gender, I now turn to examining how the participants understood the embodiment of gender, that is, the role of the body as a signifier of gender, as well as how they treated the bodies of their peers as a surface for inscribing or potentially enacting their gender. The hope was that these everyday experiences would be transformed through engaging in analysis and reflection on issues pertaining to the expression of gender variance. Salamon (2006) writes of the fine balance between the everyday and academic discourse:

> How we embody gender is how we theorize gender, and to suggest otherwise is to misunderstand both theorization and embodiment ... It is undeniable that queering gender is not only theoretical work. But it is also surely the case that those everyday instances of embodying transgressive gender that might at first seem far removed from academic discourse are performed with a complexity and a self-awareness that are rendered invisible if we understand them as simply opposed to a theorizing that is unnecessarily complicated and complicating ... (Salamon 2006)

The connection between gender theory and embodiment is complex whereby both are independent entities that will inform each other. Indeed, more work must be done to understand the relevance of "everyday instances of embodying transgressive gender". To study gender then is to study embodiment, which is to acknowledge corporality as it is perceived during its expression. Thus, a study on everyday gender is inevitably linked to

the concept of visuality, the visual or a discourse on making expression of/through the body visible. The body is not "a passive surface being acted upon, [but inseparable from] discourses of gender and sexuality" (Hauge, 2009, p. 294). Foucault (1986) also notes the body as "the site upon which discourses are enacted and contested and hence,...interpreted through the discourses that surround them" (as cited in Hauge 2009, p. 294).

The participants offered their own definitions of gender as it appears to them, focusing specifically on body stylizations including clothing, makeup, and hair, and ways of moving the body including walk, posture, and gesture. They recognize the body as the primary place of gender and invest the visible with meaning. Their observations are valid because what they see begins to compose their knowledge and understanding of gender as it operates within their peer groups. The relationship between knowledge and observation is unique in identity politics. Although any gendered individual is entitled to ownership of the body, it is not a complete and uninterrupted ownership. I am not condoning that others, simply because they can see the gendered body, are permitted to react unfettered for their own selfish purposes (as in, a gender non-conformist who is visible on the street should not have to endure harassment). But others do have access to that body which is beyond what the owner can possess. What the gendered body knows of itself is not necessarily the same knowledge others have about that same body. Further, some of the knowledge of others about that gendered body may belong to the observer exclusively and remain inaccessible to the owner of the body. But knowledge is also partial (Kumashiro, 2002); just as the moon's surface is never entirely visible, so too can complete knowledge of the body never belong to any one individual, even the owner's.

Visual Gender: the Drawings

I set up the table for the focus group interview laying blank pieces of white paper with several markers in the middle; to the participants these were as enticing as candy. Long before we approached the portion of the interview where these tools were necessary, the participants doodled and played at will during the verbal question and answer period. It came to me when I was setting the specific questions for the interview to ask for a visual interpretation of their understandings of gender. Tauchert's (2001) Fuzzy Gender model and Ekins' and King's (2001) model of the multiple stages of transgendering instilled the idea that gender could be conceptualized adequately in visual form, especially if I were searching for alternative or transgressive concepts. The drawings they produced are what I reproduce here; these were not the culmination of their doodlings. In hindsight I wonder how interesting those first, unstructured, unguided marks might have been to collect; further, I wonder if they were illustrating their thoughts or using the blank paper to inspire or trigger their responses. Alas, I collected only the drawings I had originally planned on collecting.

Their diagrams ranged from Ralph S.'s liberal depiction of gender stereotypes through to Bert T.'s gender bending figures, albeit still in binary form, and then various middle ground interpretations. It looks like Ralph S. started with the stick person and then filled out the body: the female character developed curves and the iconic triangular skirt, as well as two curved lines for a longish hairstyle; but this he felt was not enough to convey his idea of femininity. Beneath the female, Ralph S. drew a flower to which he underscored with a label, 'flower'. He explained, through laughter, the woman has an

"hourglass figure" whose flower represents "delicate, good-smelling, I don't know".

Conversely, on the right hand side of the page, Ralph S. drew his male figure, again with

the skeleton of a stick person, bulked up with biceps, overgrown forearms and a definite

six-pack on his abdomen. While the female has no facial features, this male character

sports bucked teeth, facial hair, and squinty eyes. He also has an arrow protruding from his

head (like the male symbol of circle with an arrow) and carries a big black gun-like shape.

Beneath this most masculine of figures, just to complete the idea, is a horse labelled 'wild

stallion'.   He explains the "muscular gentleman who looks like he's on steroids" is indeed

a stereotype of "little boys having gun fights and stuff"; the horse "symbolizes wild

stallion, majestic, strong".   As if Ralph S.'s traditionalist views were not yet certain, these

drawings confirm his belief in the dominant gender binary in that he visually subscribes to

a quintessential representation of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). Because he

leaves no room for an alternative concept of gender, or for any departure from the

expression of feminine or masculine, I, as a female researcher, felt very vulnerable and

indirectly insulted. I wondered how I was to fit into his scheme. Certainly I would have to

be pitted on the left-side (the gauche side) as female, but in no way was this appropriate for

me or any of the females at the table, this curvaceous, flowery, delicate model. Granted,

neither depiction acknowledged intellectual properties, but I could not ignore how he

framed the female to be an object to be experienced (a static flower who looks and smells

good) versus the male framed as an actor of his own volition (holding a gun, and

represented by a dynamic wild stallion) with extreme violent tendencies. Further, the

sexualized connotations are also extreme and stereotypical: the woman as flower, to be

deflowered, by the stallion, whose rippling muscles will dominate and overpower. Ralph S. only laughed once while explicating his drawings, whether in discomfort because he feared how the females would receive his ideas, or because he was insinuating sex in mixed company with a former teacher.

Figure 1. Drawing by Ralph S., age 17

Perhaps attempting to occupy a more intermediary position, the other participants, save Bert T., also employed the dual stick figure symbols. And all of them except Nigel, who removed it in conscious protest, added the triangular bottom to distinguish the female from the male. As I reflect on the visual meaning and analyse what seems banal to these participants (the code for women and men or femininity and masculinity is apparently shared, or universal), I wonder about the triangular shape to mean woman and its coherence with anatomy. These participants articulate it as a representation of a skirt, that is why Nigel protested because not all females wear skirts, but it can also be a reference to pubic hair. Unwittingly, the participants align gender with biology, thus enacting an essentialist perspective. Both Raj and Leo J. produced virtual copies of the same concept:

male stick figure on the left, labelled as 'male' or 'men' and female stick figure on the right, also labelled but as "women" or "female". The plural form of "men" and "women" connotes the public washroom even further. Raj's page has three small symbols lurking in the bottom right-hand corner, looking almost like an after-thought to represent alternatives to his gender binary. They are an infinity symbol sporting an arrow on one end and a cross at the other; one is a circle with an arrow and a cross; and one has two circles joined by the cross, while the bottom circle has the arrow. Because he did not explain these miniature sketches and because there is a scribble beside one of them, I tend to believe they do not relate to the bigger drawing at all. What he did explain is that although "you could be your own gender in itself", he asserts the world will expect that "you're either one or the other". He is not quite ready to claim that gender fluidity can be a public phenomenon; for him, it is a private affair. The only way he could insert transgender into his gender model, was to accede the transgender individual could use the washroom designated 'family' as opposed to conforming to the other two options. The discourse of gender is invariably tied to the available binary societal structures that best speak to gender and sex; thus, the public washroom is not only a symptom of societal expectations, but also a structure to which Raj and others subscribe.

Figure 2. Drawing by Raj, age 16
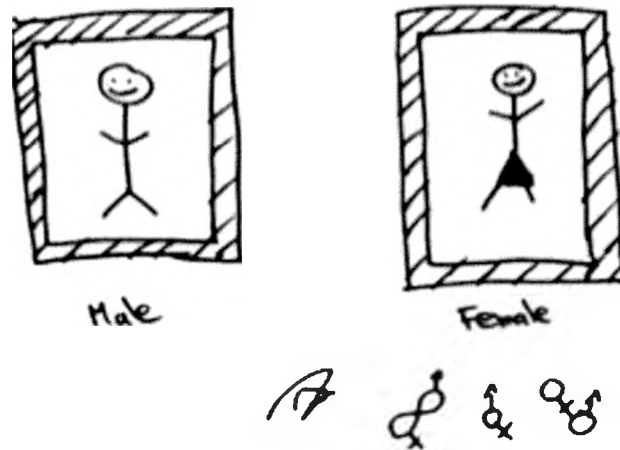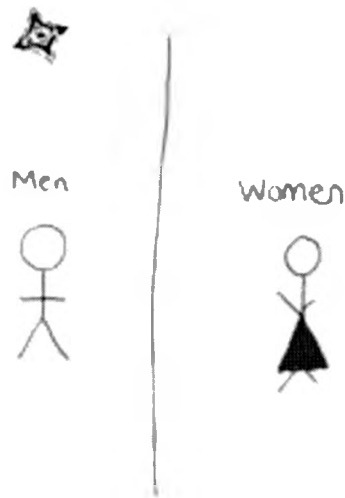

Figure 3. Drawing by Leo J., age 16

Some distance from Ralph S.'s violent and misogynistic renderings, and one step

further from the essentialism of Raj and Leo J., sits the gender model that includes an

acknowledgement of a third gender. Lynn T. called this middle ground "other?", but it

occupied only a very small portion of the page dominated by her stick figures labelled

"girls" and "boys". She explained her intention was to convey the indifference of the world to transgender people:

> Most of the world do not care,... like you're a girl to the rest of the world, you guys are guys and that's how they'll see you and they don't care if you're like, 'oh, I feel special, I'm in between', they don't care unless you're like explicitly in between, you know? Unless you make the news. Or like unless you're a guy who dresses in a dress and a wig. Then they'll be like, 'ok, you're just weird'. Like they don't categorize you into like your special category or like how you feel or whatever, they're like, 'you're just weird'. Guy, girl, weird. (age 17/18)

Unfortunately, Lynn T.'s acceptance of gender fluidity is qualified by a basic intolerance for anything that defies the norms. Rather, she frames it as 'the world''s intolerance, not her own, but is quick to degrade the third category as "weird", or, as she adds later, "confused" as denoted by the question mark. She also identifies that only a highly visible performance of gender fluidity, almost describing a drag expression, will garner attention from the normalized public. But even these people will suffer judgement. In her scenario, the best option for gender fluid individuals is invisibility; the worst, to be pathologized and then also dismissed. Nigel, as he described, does not differentiate between the 'male' and 'female' characters visually. Neither does he distinguish the third category he calls 'Undecided/Other' except through labelling. These three identical figures sit in a triangular configuration, also implying some sort of equality amongst them. Ironically, he explains his protest is embedded in his distaste for labelling people, but it is through labelling that he is able to define each category. Gray elaborates on the other category by describing gender fluidity as a movement, or a transition between the 'men's' and 'women's' categories (again, she also labelled them as if they belonged on a public washroom door). Actually, she has added two extra categories; one to embody the

transition from man to woman; the other, from woman to man. She explained that because "people are still limited in what they can be" they must "force themselves into one of the two categories" but it does not have to be the one that matches their biology. If a male person psychologically identifies as a woman, as long as he eventually makes his way to the female side through appearance, he will feel more comfortable because there is a space that exists for him. As with Lynn T., Gray qualifies her tolerance for fluidity by setting parameters for acceptability.
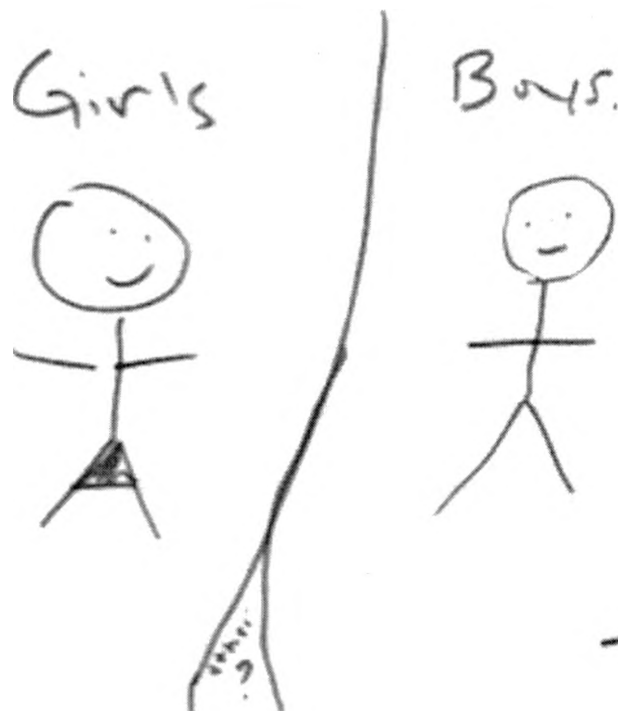
Figure 4. Drawing by Lynn T., age 17/18
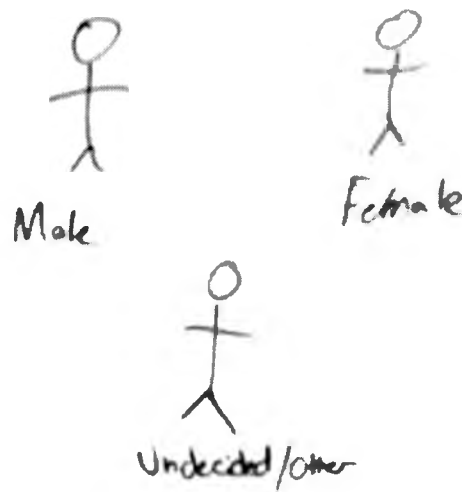
Figure 5. Drawing by Nigel C., age 16

The only apparent departure from the group was Bert T.'s vivid drawing, but even

that is still strongly rooted in gender binarism, despite his own claims to the contrary. Bert

T. employed the use of speech bubbles, rendered figures only a little more embellished

than the stick people, labelling, and symbols. The figure on the left, which we assume to

be a male because of the top hat and pants, says, 'I'm a woman, But I look like a man'.

The figure on the left does the exact opposite: wearing a dress with unmistakable cleavage

popping out the neckline, high-heeled boots, and long curled up hair says: 'I'm a man, But

I look like a woman'. She is also supposed to be "three times as tall as the man" but where

the two figures' heads reach the same height, the male figure's body stops (without feet) at

the female figure's waist. The caption on the extreme right-hand side states: 'Who's to say

what gender anyone is. The only gender is all of them' which is followed by a "common

symbol in the transsexual world, it's the eternity sign" that has a cross dropping off one

side and an arrow poking up on the other.   He called his a "propaganda poster" for gender fluidity presumably because it announces the cause of transgender promoting an infinite number of genders. Although he does reverse the genders or problematize the authority of appearance, he is still representing two available positions.
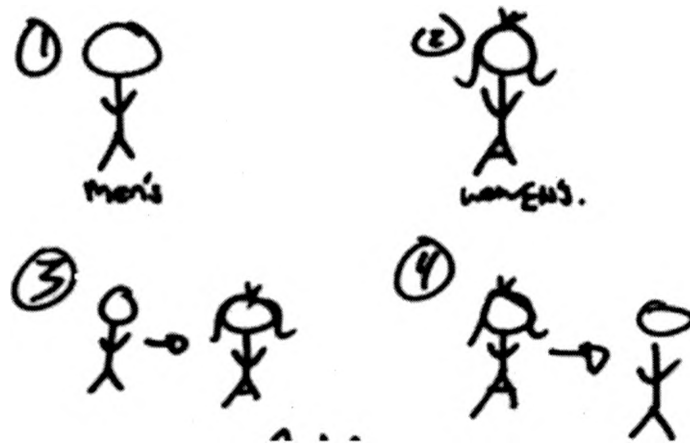
Figure 6. Drawing by Gray, age 16

Figure 7. Drawing by Bert T., age 16

Because I had read about Tauchert's concept of Fuzzy Gender, I had envisioned the student-participants might render a wider array of visual possibilities. I had encouraged the use of symbols, writing, labelling, arrows; I would have been happy with a series of dots, lines and circles as long as they could explain how it represented gender for them. But the drawings came fraught with essentialism, biologism, binarism, and bathroom ideology. I did not expect them all to draw bodies especially ones that connoted public facilities. Even they noted their free use of the stick people symbols commonly denoting male and female public washrooms. Gray expressed a criticality about this iconography to which both Raj and Leo J. retorted:

> Gray: About that washroom thing, why don't girls wear something on the top and guys wear something on the bottom for the pictures? Like, it would make more sense to me that way.
> Raj: Tradition.
> Gray: But what tradition?
> Leo J.: It's always been like that.

Both Raj and Leo J. seem indifferent if not resigned to the universal icons for female/ femininity and male/masculinity that are supposed to bypass language barriers. These 'universal' signifiers are problematic in that they reinscribe traditional binary classes of gender on the public. Gray wanted to problematize the assumption that these images express gender. But no one questioned why each of the participants referenced the bathroom in conjunction with a representation of gender. The only answer I can surmise is that this structure is the only available way they can conceive of gender in a public space. Further, I did not expect the one self-claimed rebel ("I kind of clearly didn't take it the same way everyone else did", Bert T.) to remain so fixed in the dominant system he was so keen to protest. His picture did elicit one sympathetic response from Leo J. who asked,

"[Bert T.] are you like running a campaign we don't know about?" To which Bert T. explained his history working as an LGBT online mentor/peer-counsellor. Clearly, Bert T. and the others positioned him to be the most liberal-minded of the group without acknowledging his conceptual limitations.

Incidentally, five of the seven artist-participants put the male figure on the left; whether this has some significance in relation to societal washrooms, I am uncertain (as in the placement of male washrooms to females'), but it does speak to the principle role of the male: we read and write left to right, so these participants are representing the male character first. Interestingly, if my rudimentary theory is correct, it makes sense that the other two who placed the male figure on the right-hand side (Lynn T. and Ralph S.), also claim an Asian language as their native tongue which reads right to left and top to bottom. The details reveal more about the artist-participants' ideas than what they can explain; it is what is most banal, even to them, that represents part of the normative gender ideology they reference and enact on a daily basis.

Butler (1993; 2004) reminds us to seek the limits of a discourse in order to learn exactly what that discourse encapsulates, what is excluded and what is included. The participants rendered their visualizations of gender norms and gender expressions. And thus, I questioned how their models actually worked to exclude or deny certain individuals. I was looking for a self-criticality that did not arrive; rather, they defended their drawings, even though these were admittedly quick sketches. Lynn T. claimed her "other?" category included everyone else who did not fit into the other two binaries; Bert T. objected to the category "other" because it is "to group many different people of many different self-

beliefs, self-opinions, and self-gender, in a group together and it's more of a, 'we don't belong anywhere so we belong together'". Thus, his model is supposed to incorporate the infinity of genders, the un-categorization of gender through the "eternity sign...[as] a semi-universal symbol for everyone". However, he only replaces Lynn T.'s "other?" category with the eternity sign; the difference is not apparent in their illustrations, and becomes a distinction of semantics. Even Ralph S., after bearing witness to a discussion about gender fluidity from his cohorts, does not admit his illustration is exclusionary. Consistent with his earlier comments, he defended his work on legal grounds: "I included anyone from a legal standpoint, male or female...there's no 'other' or a blank space". Raj supported Ralph S.'s argument that society is the ultimate authority; regardless of how an individual may want to identify, they eventually must conform to what society deems appropriate. Leo J. began to acquiesce to gender fluidity, admitting he did exclude people, but then reasserted the gender binary because "not enough people are willing to change that". And only Nigel C. seemed to allow for some self-criticism admitting he did not include everyone, but then excused this flaw by claiming, "no matter what you do, you can't really cover everything". He did not see this inability to include all as a limitation of his concept, but a rather acceptable actuality; not everyone needs to belong, he stated. Unfortunately, he did not elaborate on this response: it is unclear whether he could summon any real-life examples or what he knows of the lives of people who have been excluded.

Sartorial Descriptions

Beyond the drawings, in the verbal part of the interviews, the participants located

gender in clothing or sartorial (Renolds, 2009) choices and in other ways the body is

stylized. It seems for these adolescents, brand names broadcast more about one's identity

than simply how much money that person invests in wardrobe. Many of the participants

were well-versed in name-brand clothing, especially what the girls wore. Ralph S. easily

defined that "girls wear Uggs and skinny jeans" and "some sort of Hollister or A&F top

with a zip-up sweater or some other combination"; "guys mostly wear jeans and a

shirt..." (age 17). Clothing marketed for boys, or masculine clothing, somehow escaped

naming even though supposedly Ralph S. would be wearing it. He was more attuned to the

specifics about feminine clothing, the brands and the combinations. He was also able to

elaborate what clothing determined about the type of girl: "girls aren't very good at math,

or [do not] seem to be very interested, and those that are obviously don't wear Uggs and

jeans" (Ralph S., age 17). Ralph S. cites a normative and stereotypical image of adolescent

girls. His views seem terribly antiquated, and although no other participant articulated

their understanding of gender in quite the same way, they are not his alone.

Gray's observations agree with Ralph S.'s identification of the hegemonic feminine

uniform: "'normal' girls clothing--the tight T's and the Lululemons or tight jeans" (age

16). She distinguishes between the "classic girly-girl things" (i.e. the "'normal girls'

clothing") and the "baggy boyish clothing" that she and some of her friends wear as

pseudo-transgressors. But it seems identifying with this latter group, they find comfort and

security. They see themselves as modelling an alternative to their peers:

> I have had several occasions where girls have come up to me and complimented me on what I'm wearing when I was wearing my brothers' things, which goes to show that even if a girl were to wear guys clothes all the time, it doesn't mean that they'll be judged in the wrong way.

Because she admits this alternative clothing style is shared amongst a group and because she and her friends seem to escape punishment for acting outside the norms, this type of tomboyism is not quite a transgression. But her choices are not impervious to all criticism; indeed her tomboyism does subject her to regulatory practices as I investigate in subsequent sections.

Research has already established that "women use clothes to perform their identity, at times conforming to cultural norms and other times subverting or rejecting them" (Wilson, 1987, as cited in Willett, 2008, p. 421); Gray sees her fashion choices as renegade or unique, but they are tempered by the fact that the fashion industry determines what is made available to the public; the "seemingly free choice of consumer goods" is a fallacy because consumerism "in fact, regulates and manages individual subjectivities" (p. 421). So Gray is limited in her protest. She and Lynn T. agree about inadequate options for girls' fashions:

> Lynn T.: I own, like, American Eagle and those guys' polos, I own quite a few of those and like nobody, yeah I know, they're so much better quality than girls' polos. Like they rip us off.
> [laughter]
> Gray: It's so true...they do. You have to pay like $35 for those strip of fabric.
> Lynn T.: nothing: see-through

These female participants object to having to pay more for a single t-shirt than their male cohorts. They also have to buy and wear double layers because they find the fabric too sheer. They express their frustration at the construction of women and girls in popular

culture as avid shoppers who prefer sexier or revealing clothing. In light of the

participants' discussion of consumption, Marjorie Garber's (1992) ideas on dress codes are

relevant. She renews the term 'sumptuary law' to comment on social, not civil, regulations

in fashion in modern society. She also sees gender expression through fashion intersecting

with "class, status, rank or wealth" (p. 23); clothing implicates an individual's position in

society, contributing, maintaining or destroying it. My participants' comments allude to an

unwritten sartorial regulation, or a kind of sumptuary law, that defines hegemonic

femininity.

Sartorial Transgressions

Those who transgress in gender will also do so in how they style the body, through

fashion choices, according to the participants. And identity is inextricably tied to fashion

which "begins to get real interesting, however, in the case of people who don't fall clearly

into a culturally-recognized identity" (Bornstein, 1994, p. 3). Ralph S. explained "you can

easily tell who the homosexuals are...because they dress very differently...not really

conforming to society per se..." (age 17). Yet, the "fairly loose clothes" he attributes to an

unconfirmed lesbian act as a marker for her homosexuality result in what for him must be

conformity to some sort of code.   Gray insinuates the hidden code of appropriate gender

expression by explaining that if "an individual dresses a bit differently they'll be known as

an outcast...they'll be a minority group" (age 16). Although she does not outline what

"differently" entails, she seems confident that it is recognizable and thus subsequently

punishable.   In contrast to these statements, Renold (2009) finds that "girls have access

now to a range of sartorial femininities that extend way beyond the clichéd pink and fluffy

representations of 'girly' culture to be found in stores such as "Girl Heaven" (see Russell and Tyler 2002) or toys such as Barbie" (p. 236). Granted that Renold was describing a younger group of girls, elementary school-aged, my participants also do not relate to "pink and fluffy"; rather their illustration of hegemonic femininity appears to be "Uggs and skinny jeans". But both describe a rigid system of allowable feminine body decor which can pose problems for those who resist for personal or financial reasons. Gray is candid about the amount of money necessary to support the hegemonic feminine image, one that is taken-for-granted or normalized at her school:

> [Richview] is known as the rich-kid school, I will not lie, they actually labelled that in the newspaper...they're well-to-do kids...they can wear the clothes...spend $200 in a day and still eat lunch, ...If you don't have the money, then make up for it somehow...[It] puts a big pressure on people who don't...just because they don't have the money already means they can't dress the same which means they'll be outcast which means they'll act differently... (age 16)

Gray explains the covert operations that not only act to define gender norms but also segregate students by financial class and thus work to delegitimize the unprivileged. But she speaks of it as an outsider herself: she uses "they" instead of "we" and certainly seems to understand the consequences for those who do not belong to the "rich-kid" group.

Raj (age 16) also understands these sartorial regulations centering around the skinny jeans. He accedes that "girls wear skinny jeans" but adds "some guys wear them too" and then suffer ridicule for their transgression. The skinny jean is a marker for hegemonic femininity and equally for masculine transgression, depending on its wearer. But Raj, although an unlikely spokesperson for rebellious behaviour, validates a male friend's right to wear the skinny jeans:

> ...a friend of mine...he is really into street culture...[he] avoid[s] popular brands, it just so happens skinny jeans are for that...he's not gay at all...it's comfortable...he's just like normal, he just has a varied taste and style...I commend him for that for being different...

Although Raj does acknowledge his friend's behaviour is risky, he insists it does not necessarily function as a marker of his sexuality; indeed, he wants to redefine "normal" to allow for someone who is "different". Unwittingly he does subscribe to the heterosexual regime (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003) by distinguishing homosexuality ("he's not gay at all") from "normal". If challenged on this point, Raj may rescind his words in light of another scenario:

> I stopped saying ['oh, that gay'] a while ago...I used to say it a lot too...but one of my friends told me he was gay... I was just watching what I said around him...just cause you're wearing tighter clothes, what's wrong with that?

Raj shows great sensitivity and amenability to new situations; he is especially able to identify when the issue becomes personalized. If a friend is involved, Raj is most receptive. He is willing to assert his contrariness if it is in defence of a friend. Here he even permits "tighter clothes" on a male friend even although he is completely aware that it is non-conformist behaviour.

Lynn T. also understands the significance of specific types of clothing impacting an individual's identity but she also wishes to resist the system. She recalls her childhood in China as something idyllic where gender pressures were foreign concepts:

> China is in poverty so it doesn't matter what you wear as long as you have something to wear...in a poor society everybody comes together and helps each other... and in Canada, a more wealthy society everybody kind of segregates themselves...in China nobody really complains...nobody even notices cause nobody cares, you don't act a certain way...take a look at the people from where I came from, you wouldn't even be able to tell if that's a

guy or a girl, but if you look at everybody...they look the same, just farmers...the girls have short hair because they don't wash...they're pretty much the same so nobody can judge...there they just have one style of shirt because somebody makes them and that's the only person who makes them there...

Lynn T.'s analysis of China offers a different world to what she undeniably experiences in Canada. Without elucidating what she knows of the system of gender in Canada, she indirectly shows her understanding of it by depicting its antithesis in China. And her comments are sobering: she outlines poverty and need, practicality and survival which contrast to the Canadian adolescent obsession of wearing the 'right' outfit. Intertwined with this construction of gender is another construction of China as a nation of poverty, presenting a homogenous culture which she distinctly contrasts to her perception of Canada as primarily wealthy with no class divisions. Here, unknowingly, she subscribes to binary constructions outside of gender, notions of western superiority versus Orientalism. Gender and culture are inextricably linked in her understanding of gender expression and construction. For Lynn T., her background in China allows her to transgress Canadian gender norms without even believing she is much of a rebel whereas a similar background for Ralph S. has formed a very different mindset. He prefers to thwart any transgressions of gender expression; further he seems to align his understanding of gender in China with contemporary Canadian society. For him, both do and should continue to operate within the dominant gender binary system.

Many of the participants were able to identify one highly visible gender non-conformist in the school. Although all of them might have valuable observations, I focus on those who claim he was a friend, thus anticipating a more authentic interpretation. To

his peers, this individual's nonconformity was located primarily in his appearance. He "dresses like a girl a lot...skirts, paints his nails" (Gray, age 16). Bert T. described him as "very feminine...very comfortable in heavy makeup, mascara...big platform boots" (age 17). Gray wondered about his motivations: "I don't really know if he just feels like wearing that or if he wants to be more girly...he gets a lot of shit from people, I won't lie" (age 16). And Bert T. acknowledged that "shit" came in the form of the friend suffering "a lot of second glances" which meant, 'oh, he's still here, what a freak'" (age 17). What they are describing about their friend (who Bert T. nicknamed 'Jay' for the purposes of anonymity in the research process) seems to be a form of 'showing' his nonconformity, or how Filax & Shogan's (2004) Jack described as a way "that others could tell he was different" (p. 87) in his sexuality and his gender. His choices were less than tame: the heavy makeup and platform boots connote drag or hyper-femininity rather than a gentle feminization. He performed his identity in ways beyond body stylization, as I will describe in the next section.

Other Markers of Gender

The visible body is intricately tied to the expression and understanding of gender but it can present beyond the static image to include how the body moves and interacts with others. The participants easily constructed fashion as integral to expressing and understanding gender identity, but they cited other markers of gender just as fluently. Gray introduces some of them:

> I was going to say even just to define someone as to what their gender is, if
> you see them, it's not just by how they look, ...[clothing choices] also could

> be just what you have in your closet that day and it's technically what you wear everyday. But it's also the way you walk, your swagger, maybe, if you hear them talk, it's the way they talk, how their voice sounds, what they say and how they say it. It's not just by appearance. (age 16)

Gray is adamant that appearance, or at least how a person stylizes the body, is not the exclusive means to figuring gender. She wants to defer significance from the clothes implying they are not always conscious choices intended to reflect gender; they could be the result of very practical reasons ("just what you have in your closet that day"). Raj extends the list of other markers of gender to include "how they look at you, like when you're talking to them, what they're like, subconsciously doing" (age 16) which Gray retorts is "their body language, like if they put a hand on a hip or something". However, these descriptions still reference the body because they are expressions of the body; they do not deny physicality, they are not beyond appearance, as Gray asserts. Further, these participants do not assign a certain gender to these characteristics assuming that it is obvious; and Raj does not elaborate on how what the person is "subconsciously doing" contributes to determining gender. I can only postulate the "hand on the hip" is a feminine trait but I do not know if they would attribute that to a female or male. Raj also offers the example of music as a marker of gender: listening to Taylor Swift is "girlie". Nigel was able to describe the dominant discourse of femininity as "women sitting around talking, shopping, reading magazines...with higher pitched voices" (age 16). To this picture he ties the physicality of a woman. The sex and the gender are again inextricably linked. Ralph S. deems the high-pitched voice is decidedly feminine, but when it belongs to a male, it is suspected to be a product of homosexuality. Diction further determines the individual's sexuality as transgressive: "if you say 'fabulous' a lot...like the movie, 'Chuck and Larry',

the son always says fabulous and people think he's gay...he says he's straight, just

different..." (Ralph, age 17). Sexuality and gender are so fused here that Ralph S. cannot

stop at the idea that a man with these traits (high-pitched voice and saying 'fabulous')

could simply be feminine. For him, and the audience of the television program he cites, it

automatically becomes a question of homosexuality.

Other markers of gender do not necessarily guarantee a successful assessment of

one's gender. Paechter's (2001) definitions of sex, gender assignment, gender identity, and

gender role are pertinent here. Leo J. acknowledges the ambiguity or uncertainty involved

in gender assignment when it occurs on a daily basis:

> You see someone on the street, the best you can do, I think,is that you can
> have just a suggestion or an opinion or a belief of what they might be like
> but you can't really know what their gender is until like you've actually
> talked to them and gotten to know them. Otherwise it's just a guess based
> on...past experiences or what other similarities that have been given to you
> to compare to. (age 16)

Leo J. disturbs the equation of visuality and knowing gender. He cautions that appearance

is not the ultimate source of gender because these alternative markers of gender are

inconclusive. The relationship between gender assignment and gender role is tenuous and

flexible; how one is perceived depends greatly on how that individual chooses to present.

A transgender person may desire the gender assignment opposite to their biology (their

gender identity is in conflict with their sex) and so embodies the behaviours that comprise

the desired gender role.

Appearances can be deceiving and wavering. Examining how transgender youth

negotiate their own expression highlights this disconnect between gender assignment and

gender identity. As Rasmussen explains, "a post-structuralist theoretical

perspective ...sees... sex and gender as things that are relational, and thus constantly

renegotiated" (2009, p. 440), the discourse is complex. Transgender individuals can alter

their appearance very quickly to alter their perceived gender, or their gender assignment, in

times of social danger. As I have already reviewed, the friend that the participants

identified as gender non-conformist adorned his body in markers of hyper-femininity. But

the participants noted other ways he performs a non-normative gender. Bert T. shared a

key scenario where the essence of his friend's performativity was revealed:

> ...when we're like walking down the street, he doesn't even think about it,
> he just automatically tones it down...he walks a different way, he moves a
> different way....it's amazing the changes...it's almost as if he's a different
> person...the day where we were walking to his bus stop and two guys came
> up behind us...when he turned to them...the first thing they did was burst out
> laughing and ridiculing him because he was wearing makeup...'check out
> this faggot and his makeup' ...he forgot to tone himself down, ...to walk like
> a normal person, to act like a normal person and talk like a normal
> person...like a normal boy, yeah...and he's never done it again since... he just
> acts different...you don't see the makeup he acts so different.

Here Bert T. recognized how his friend had to consciously survey each new environment

and adjust his actions according to how safe he felt. He described walking and talking as

markers of gender that his friend is able to alter. He even noted the success of his friend's

performance; the way he walks and talks as "a normal boy" is so passable, his makeup

seems to dissolve or become insignificant. Without the whole package, makeup is only

makeup. Accompanied by a certain walk, a certain talk, a certain "way of carrying"

himself, that makeup is part of an embodied gender performance. In this sense, Paechter

(2001) can offer some insight into the transgender individual's performance. Paechter

(2001) cites Butler's (1990, as cited in Paechter, 2001) performative theory of gender to

explain the mechanism involved when a transgendered subject performs or enacts the

behaviors belonging to the desired gender. A male-to-female transgender, for example,

will have to unlearn the ways of walking as a man to adopt a more feminized lilt, to be able

to align closer with the feminine gender role (p. 49). Bert T.'s friend certainly performs

transgender, although exactly how he identifies is unclear because I did not have access to

him as a participant. But he does perform in a conscious way, as Bert T. insinuated and as

Paechter would agree. He can switch his gender performance according to need; and

despite the societal backlash he suffers, he seems determined to pursue this duality for

now.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on visuality and embodied gender to highlight how

the participants in my study made sense of gender expression and explicitly gender fluidity.

The research revealed that each participant navigates personal understandings and

embodies complexities and contradictions even if slight as they articulate and grapple with

their understanding of gender variance. At least one participant was familiar with the term

'fluidity' in gender, some others seemed rather to imply it. Only two refrained from

sharing this ideology, preferring to maintain a more conventional and rigid philosophy.

And yet, throughout the focus group discussion, despite the differences in opinion, no

person became confrontational with any other; the participants were either well-trained and

polite or mature in their restraint.

The investigation of sartorial descriptions and transgressions arose out of a repeated

motif: the skinny jeans. It was easy to take notice of this pervasive symbol of hegemonic

femininity throughout the interviews. Coupled with a certain brand yoga pant, or a certain Australian surfer boot, I too could paint the picture of the trendy, feminine, privileged adolescent. What struck me then was the familiarity or nonchalance that even the boys possessed in describing this image. I question still to what end it serves for them to be knowledgeable about girls' clothing, right down to the brand name.

Overall, this chapter has provided some insight into the question of gender non-conformity and the significance of providing a space for youth to articulate their understanding about gender expression, gender fluidity and gender transgressions. In the following chapter, further knowledge about the regulatory practices of gender regimes are highlighted from the standpoint of youth to produce a politicized knowledge about the consequences of gender variance.

Chapter 5: Data Analysis Part II.

Introduction

In the previous chapter I organized themes under gender conformity and non-conformity, and visuality and embodiment. These ideas follow nicely here into an examination of the participants' descriptions of scenarios of gender regulation and their understanding of consequences for transgressing certain gender norms. I also include a focus on analytic categories of compliance and rejection as they relate to my understanding of the students' willingness to interrupt gender normalization in schools. Always a rigorous selection process must be a necessary part of interpretation.   Because my data collection involved several stages (the focus group, the drawings, the written responses, the second interviews of eight individuals) I had ample data from which to select. It is important to reiterate that the work of theorists such as Butler (1990; 1993; 2004) and Halberstam (1998) provided me with analytic categories through which to make sense of the data particularly in terms of identifying issues and themes related to disrupting gender binaries, gender regulatory practices and gender harassment.

Analysis is a unique process because from it emerges ideas that were not necessarily forethought or sought. Although I had read about tomboyism (Halberstam, 1998; Renold, 2009), it was not until I looked more closely at Gray's stories that I concluded a proper examination was necessary.   It also fit that Ralph S. had some interesting experiences worthy of attention as a counterpart; thus, girls' and boys' transgressions I separate. The central image of regulation, inspired by the work of

Halberstam (1998) and Rasmussen (2009), is certainly the public bathroom. Again, without actively seeking this line of questioning, the participants discovered this problem independently. To this problem I added the possibility of a transgender washroom in schools to provoke responses from the participants. Further, a short nod to the locker room as a site for regulation also found its way from one of the participants' stories.

Part I. Gender Regulation and Consequences

Girls' Transgressions: Tomboyism

The participants continued to conflate sexuality and gender in describing gender transgressions but then they also honed in on another related issue: the perceived difference between the allowances for boys versus girls. One participant, Raj, answers "there are guys and then there are girls and there are guys that are gay" (Raj, age 16). The transgression beyond the line of acceptable gender is most obvious in boys who are then labelled as transgressive in their sexuality as well. It is assumed thus, through this comment, that girls are permitted many more liberties in their performance of hegemonic femininity than boys are permitted in their performance of hegemonic masculinity. Lynn T. describes this inequality in terms of clothing: "girls can dress [laughter] in guys' clothes but guys can't dress in girls' clothes" (age 17/18). In her own individual interview, Gray's ideas mirror Lynn's:

> Guys definitely don't have the flexibility that girls can...it's more accepted
> now that girls can wear ...guys' clothes..but guys can't exactly wear Roxie
> and get away with it...(a really girly brand)...a couple of my friends...they
> wore something more girlish...not just a pink polo...apparently it's cool, I
> don't know what's going on there...but he wore something more girlish and

> people just looked at him all day....'what is he wearing?', 'just leave him
> alone'... (Gray, age 16)

Gray does not want to subscribe to the regulations for gendered dress; she feels the need to

defend friends who transgress in this way, especially the boys because the girls do not need

her help. Bert T. also identifies certain liberties available to girls that if attempted by boys,

in reverse, would be punished through a heterosexist lens:

> There are tons of girls in my school that like are kind of like they do a lot of
> sports, they never put on makeup, they never do their hair, they're dressed
> like a guy, they snowboard, skateboard, whatever, like they're, like nobody
> says anything about them. They just let them be. They're pretty cool, like.
> But guys on the other hand: if a guy wears nail polish, you either think,
> 'emo' or--which is another subject--or like 'gay'; like, it's like just like two
> reactions. (age 16)

Bert T. describes hegemonic femininity and variations of femininity that he claims are

equally acceptable for girls to adopt at will. And just as others have reported, masculine

transgressions are more strictly regulated and often elicit the attribution of homosexuality.

He does introduce the one caveat available to boys that will exempt them from some social

punishment: 'emo' is a form of body stylization related to music choices that sees its

portrayer in black, tight clothing, donning black makeup and emitting masochistic or self-

wallowing vibes. But, just as Bert T. determined this "is another subject" which requires

further study.

The conflation of sexuality and gender transgression appears over and over in the

findings. And the restraints on girls performing gender are loose compared to that

dictating the boys' behaviour. But Lynn T. offers a rationalization for this imbalance:

> Girls can act manly, and guys if they're feminine, people will just make
> the conclusion that he's gay...mainly because in the past, guys were
> thought higher than girls, if girls act more masculine, it seems that

> they're just playing the role of guys, but it would be weird for guys to act
> like girls because it would be like they were stepping down... (Lynn T.,
> age 17/18)

Here Lynn T. cites an historical argument, that of feminism allowing women freedoms to

be able to wear a vast range of clothing, to be able to behave in a vast range of ways. She

argues if a boy were to act like a woman, that is, to be feminine, he would be relinquishing

his higher status as a male citizen; a girl would want to acquire that status and does so by

acting like a boy, or being more masculine. Unwittingly however, by describing the

distaste of femininity, her argument degrades the position of woman, thus re-affirming the

gender hierarchy. Halberstam (1998) notes this perceived imbalance in gender allowances

of boys and girls: "we tend to believe that female gender deviance is much more tolerated

than male gender deviance" (p. 5) but contends that what is permissible in childhood is

irrelevant to how we construct "parameters of adult male and female gender deviance" (p.

5-6). Lynn T. does not acknowledge the limits placed upon girls or femininity. She sees

girls as having more freedoms, rather than realizing that by girls acting "more masculine"

they are in fact, not acting within a liberal scope of femininity, but rejecting it entirely.

This happenstance intersects with Renold's (2009) observations of tomboyism in primary-

school aged children: "Central to tomboyism, then, are the power relations involved in

girls' appropriation of hegemonic masculinity and rejection of stereotypical "femininity"

that is often theorized as a bid for social power" (p. 231). It seems the problem for

femininity is doubled; as much as women have struggled for equality/equity, their rejection

of hegemonic femininity and subsequent embrace of hegemonic masculinity cancels any

progress feminism has gained. And, further, because this backlash is invisible (i.e. that is, girls who act as tomboys do not see themselves as anti-feminist) it is more pervasive.

Halberstam (1998) explains the motivation of tomboys as believing they can inherit the "greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys" (p. 6). These girls revel in their performance of a gender opposite to their biology and one that they perceive as affording more social leniency, without having to identify as transgender or denying their girl identity. But "tomboyism is punished...when it appears to be the sign of extreme male identification...and when it threatens to extend beyond childhood and into adolescence" (p. 6). As an adolescent, Gray does not quite name herself a tomboy except to say she and some of her friends are close: "a few of us tip the scale on being a tomboy" (age 16). Her definition of tomboyism centers around clothing: "the girls who are more comfortable wearing the more baggy boyish clothing are labeled as tomboys--or in an extreme case, a dyke" (age 16). She identifies the slippery slope tomboyism rides to transgressive sexuality.

Gray had previously indicated that her clothing choices resulted from practicality; throughout the interviews she seems to insinuate her choices are evolving into a sort of protest of hegemonic femininity empowering other females to do the same. Gray indicates being a pseudo-tomboy "can make a big difference for the other girls in school that may feel like wearing boy clothes all the time and don't feel secure enough to" (age 16). She acknowledged a certain power embedded in her clothing choices, especially when she *and* her friends presented a united front. However, she has also relayed scenarios when she felt

less than empowered. One instance implicated her fashion choices as integral to gender identity:

> The other day I ran out of clothes in my closet and I went to my brother's room and I raided his closet and I had to go to my friend's house and I came out with jeans that were three times my size and a rugby shirt and I was walking down the street and so many people were staring at me, I was like, 'hi'. And then we went outside and we started playing football, and there's a girl dressed as a guy playing with all these guys. They must've thought really bad things. But anyway. Um, that's also, it's biased by appearance; if they got to know me they would know clearly, I'm a girl instead of just being a guy.

Gray is certain of her own identity. She is not transgender, she is moderate in her beliefs of gender fluidity, and I am not sure how comfortable she would be with Halberstam's (1998) term, "masculine female", if it were to be applied to her; but she also claims femininity as part of her identity. Further, the way she wants to dress and perform is contradictory to *hegemonic* femininity. To her there is no disconnect between playing football and saying, "I'm a girl", but she believes that others will see one ("they must've thought really bad things"). Supposedly those "really bad things" would be that she is gender fluid and to this presumption she feels insecure.

Gray's paranoia of social punishment for her perceived gender non-conformity might be justified. Another incident actually resulted in a tangible reaction to her masculine traits:

> ... so I was in grade seven, and we had a sub and I was sitting, we were sitting in a U-formation and I don't know where the teacher was at but I was doodling so I didn't know and ah we were going down the row and we were answering the same question over and over and over and there were three big grade eight guys in front of me, so clearly she didn't see me, and then she's like, 'kay, next?', and then I said my answer and then something must have happened, like an interruption or something, and she's like, 'okay, the guy who was just talking, please repeat your question', and I was like, 'I'm

a girl, hi'. And she's just like, she just looked at me and she's like, 'oh'.
She didn't even know what to say. And I started laughing because I thought
it was hilarious that she thought I was a guy but of course, she never got that
wrong again.

What is pertinent here is not so much that Gray's perceived masculine characteristic
resulted in a public blunder, but that her reaction was unexpected. In essence she did suffer
a social punishment, but she fails to accept humiliation, even in the retelling. Instead of
recoiling into silence, she "thought it was hilarious" and even pardoned her friends for
furthering the targeting: "my friends made fun of me for it, but that's ok". She is aware of
how others perceive her to be less than feminine, accepts that eventuality, but seems to
continue without tempering her behavior or her dress. Somehow she feels confident
enough to play at 'boy' things as a girl while still retaining her 'girl' or feminine identity.
She wears rugby shirts and baggy jeans because she finds "guys' clothes really
comfortable"; but for Gray, who is certain about her own identity, it cannot be just that the
clothes are roomier, or the cloth softer; for her, it goes beyond a physical comfort.

Yet this comfort is challenged not only by her peers and in her school environment
but by her family, specifically her own mother. Hauge (2009) sees that adolescents who
conduct "their bodies in ways that generate[] disapproval by family and peers" (p. 296) are
doing so as an effect of the myriad ways they learn to negotiate their own subjectivities.
Gray claimed her chosen clothing upset her mother's sensibilities:

> My mom grew up in a setting where she was supposed to be the one in the
> dress and everything so when I go out in public wearing those things she
> always criticizes me and she always, I would even go to the point to say,
> makes fun of me because I'm wearing those things and I'm not what she
> thinks is a girl. She's always saying, "[Gray], why aren't you more of a
> girl?" instead of saying, I don't know, "[Gray], why don't you wear more

what your friends wear?" She just goes out right to the point and says, 'why don't you dress like a girl?' (age 16)

Gray frames her mother's actions as an inability to accept the way Gray dresses, not merely an intolerance. Further, although Gray does not state that the way she chooses to dress is a form of gender expression, she does admit her mother sees it that way. To her mother it is not about style or fashion, but a fear that her daughter is doing 'girl' incorrectly or inadequately. If Gray were younger, she might escape this "parental fear" ; but because she is an adolescent, the non-threatening tomboyism changes into something more austere (Halberstam, 1998, p. 5-6). This parental pressure mirrors the case of Jill by Filax and Shogan (2004) whose foster mother "admonished her to act like a girl, keep herself clean and tidy, and wear dresses more often" (p. 83). Jill also suffered criticism because of her voice, similar to Gray's experience. But this pressure for Jill was futile because she "didn't even know how to act like a girl" (p. 83). Even though Jill could not perform girl in the appropriate way, she still asserted, "I am a girl" (p. 86), just as Gray claimed that same position after her low voice confused a teacher. Being a girl means performing a normative gender that is perpetuated in schools as belonging to a system of "two-sex, two-gender, one-sexual orientation" (p. 82) and once Jill was offered the opportunity to simply fix her situation by transitioning to the other side as a visible male, only then did she assert her true identity as a gender non-conforming individual, a "queer dyke" (p. 85). Interestingly, despite Gray's rejection of the normalized feminine, she also believes in a binary system where transgender is acceptable only temporarily in transition from one gender to the other. For Gray however, gender is a complex operation.

Renold (2009) examines tomboyism citing Butler (1990) and Halberstam (1998).

She concludes that while girls perform hegemonic masculinity as tomboys, this reveals the

"illusory nature of gender" (p. 228), disrupting the notion that masculinity is inherent to

boys or male bodies. Butler (1990), for example, highlights that masculinity is enacted as

"an effect of ongoing performances that create the illusion of a coherent and convincing

gender identity" (Renold, 2009, p. 227). Lynn T. illustrates a scenario that exemplifies this

disconnect between gender and the body:

> I grew up in rural China so I played with rocks, sticks, mud, and I like
> played with guys and... like if you looked at my childhood pictures, you'd
> probably be like, she's a guy, I had like this haircut, I wore like the little
> tank, like the shorts. Like I pretty much looked like a guy, right? And then
> when I came here [to Canada] I kind of, I was kind of felt pressured to be
> more girl-like, I remember the pressure, and I remember how to ...
> concentrate on the language. I also remember like trying to be a girl. Like
> somewhere along the way I was just like, screw it, [laughter] .... But then
> my sister, she was born here ... she went to preschool here, she went to
> daycare, kindergarten, and she's been educated like the Disney princess, like
> there's Barbie princess, like she knows every single one and like she just
> loves them and she's like, 'I don't want to stop, I like what I like' and like, 'I
> want to play the piano', 'I don't want to do that' and it's just, it's totally
> different. 'Are you my sister?' We're like nothing alike.

Lynn T. associates the distinction between her own gender expression and her sister's with

a difference in place of upbringing. For her, gender is knocked from its footholds to the

body by environment, or geographical context. Lynn T. does not name herself a tomboy,

but describes herself as a stereotypical boy which is defined as "tomboyism", according to

Renold (2009). But she does articulate the regulation apparent in her Canadian community

to perform 'girl' in a correct way. As a new Canadian, Lynn T. suffered the pressure to

conform to a new society, full of new customs, laws and language, which was only

compounded by gender expectations far more rigid than what she remembers from her

childhood in rural China. What she describes in her sister is a performance of hyper-femininity (Renold, 2009) which repulses her. Even though Lynn T. performed girl in a masculine way, she reflects on her own childhood as reinforcement for a rejection of her younger sister's complete embrace of hyper-femininity. In hindsight, Lynn T. positions herself as a rebel.

Boys' Transgressions

On a contrary note, Ralph S. offers a different perspective on male and female transgressions. He reflects on his own childhood gender play:

> Every boy sometime in their life played dress-up...I did that, I don't see myself as a transvestite...when I was young I thought everyone had a penis, I never saw the other side...for a girl, for her to be playing with GI Joes...society would see her as a tomboy...[it's a] double standard... (Ralph S., age 17)

Here he disagrees with the other participants' observations that girls are allowed more freedom in how they choose to perform their gender. He concedes girls run the risk of being labelled a tomboy for their transgressions. For him, boys have the freedom; his masculinity was never in question, at least to himself, even though he played at the limits of gender normativity by dressing up. Indeed, males hold primacy for Ralph S.; in his mind as a child, "everyone had a penis" which situated the male as the default gender against which all other genders (or, in Ralph S.'s ideology, *one* other gender, females or femininity) are measured. As an aside, it is important to note here that Ralph S. also targets the penis as the marker of masculinity, thus conflating sex with gender. Further, he

recalls another instance of performance, this time, as an adolescent donning a costume for

Halloween:

> I came to school with high heels, fishnet stockings, and a dress...[I thought]
> let's mess with everyone, but I have no intention of being gay...if I do that
> every day people will be like, 'dude,...'; the principal told me to put pants
> on...I had underwear on...no slip on ....guys don't close their legs, girls
> always have to close their legs... (Ralph S., age 17)

Ralph S. associates his pseudo-gender non-conforming expression (wearing typically

feminine clothing) with perceived homosexuality; for him, the two are conflated. He

bypasses this potential insult because the transgression was a single occurrence; otherwise,

he is certain he would suffer harassment. He is also able to offer yet another distinction

between normalized girls and boys or femininity and masculinity, that of the positioning of

the legs while sitting. Youdell (2005) investigated the act of sitting as it is expressed by

teachers, students, males and females. She notes that "this simple bodily activity cites and

inscribes multiple discourses of the sexed body" (p. 255).

Even in this instance, Ralph S. maintains his masculinity is safe from ridicule:

"people don't see me as sort of a cross dresser or homosexual, they see me as a very manly

man...". He asserts this is the common perception amongst his peers. No one will question

him or his masculinity. Yet this assurance contrasts with another scenario he offered about

his friends:

> Like, in the summer...my friends decided, they got drunk and I'm the
> designated thinker...They got drunk so they decided you know what? 'dude,
> let's smoke your pants.' [laughter] So they took off my pants, I'm like, four
> huge guys--they took off my pants and they started to smoke my pants. (age
> 17)

Unfortunately, I did not pursue the conclusion to this story. I do not know how it relates to Ralph S.'s own identity because I was not permitted to ask about personal gender identity. I do not even know why the 'friends' decided to 'smoke the pants', what that means, or how they 'took off [the] pants'. And the context is unintelligible; it does not relate to the flow of discussion at the time. It appears to be a random recall (even though I doubt it is random for Ralph S.). But it does allude to some sort of physical harassment, or even sexual. Filax and Shogan (2004) describe a similar scenario happening to their subject, Jack, who suffered in grade seven when "a group of boys pulled Jack's pants down to his ankles while he was getting his books from his locker" (p. 87). For Jack, this was a case of homophobic sexual harassment. Ralph S. did not imply homophobia, but he did admit he was the target of the group of "four huge guys". Ralph S. laughed along with the other participants when he relayed this story. For him, it is not significant, or at least, he did not admit its significance, but he did think it important enough to talk about it. And I cannot ignore its direct contrast to his stoic assertion that he is the "manly man".

Returning to Ralph S.'s story of his cross-dressing Halloween costume, I then posed the scenario that another person, in some different circumstance, might not have the same sense of security to play at gender expression, specifically a boy more vulnerable in his gender identity. To this, Ralph S. was unable to articulate a response. Now, in light of my reflection on Ralph S.'s story of the pants, I note the irony. In the alternative scenario where a 'vulnerable boy' is contrasted to Ralph S., I positioned him, Ralph S., as most secure. But these other seemingly unrelated observations unsettle this theory. Halberstam (1998) offers further insight: "insufficient masculinity is all too often figured by Asian

bodies or upper-class bodies" (p. 2). These "stereotypical constructions of variable masculinity" (p. 2) work to locate hegemonic masculinity. It is unclear whether Ralph S. is responding in some way to the Asian male stereotype and thus compensating by exerting a hyper-masculinity (i.e. "manly man") or if he is reporting how he genuinely believes his contemporaries perceive him. Again, as with Gray, I note an unfinished examination of a complex gender identity at play.

The Bathroom Problem: A Site of Regulation

As with most of the data within this project, there is a certain fluidity or connectedness amongst the themes, probably interpreted as thus because of the topic of fluidity in gender. Most themes are interrelated and permeate beyond the categories I have defined; for example, the relationship between sex, sexuality, and gender underlies most of the themes, and sartorial transgressions are about embodiment and also regulatory practices. However, I have positioned one significant theme as the hub, as if all themes lead to this: the bathroom as a site of regulation and conformity, creates implications for non-conformity, and reaffirms norms of embodiment. The findings from the drawings naturally evolved into an analysis of the public bathroom. Some of the scenarios the participants described were situated in the lockerroom also, a close cousin to the bathroom in its implications for gender. Of course, Halberstam (1998) provides the seminal analysis of the "bathroom problem", offering her own experiences of gender surveillance, regulation, and the severe consequences for gender non-conformity. Rasmussen (2009) contributes to the bathroom discourse:

> ...toilets don't just tell us where to go; they also tell us who we are, where we belong, and where we don't belong. I therefore consider the space of the toilet using a post-structuralist theoretical perspective that sees space, architecture, sex and gender as things that are relational, and thus constantly renegotiated. Such a framework enables a consideration of some of the ubiquitous assumptions that underpin school toilets and the implications these have for all members of the community on a daily basis. (Rasmussen, 2009, p.439)

Rasmussen articulates the centrality public washrooms inhabit in ongoing normative practices. The participants recognized the symbolic significance of the washroom; for them it stood as a tangible representation of gender norms. Indeed, it was the only way they knew how to talk about how gender is constructed in society. The structure of the binary division of gender in the washroom reflects the same binarism in gender ideology: "Symbols on toilet doors take for granted that bodies fit into two neat categories, and then proceed to sort them based on this presumption – a presumption rarely questioned in the production of toilet signage" (Rasmussen, 2009, p. 440). But for the participants, instead of the ideology informing the physical, they saw the architecture as much more permanent than their own ideas. That is, if the washrooms claimed two genders, then whether they wanted to admit another third or fourth category, was irrelevant because the space was not allotted. Raj admitted his worry once the discussion had introduced gender fluidity: "Well, with the different types of genders, if there's like, if there are more than two, like do you use the guys' bathroom or the girls' bathroom?" (age 16). Ralph S. and Lynn T. shared Raj's anxiety about disrupting societal norms. Their words intimated a sort of paralysis or powerlessness: when faced with the limitations, they seemed to accept those structures instead of conceiving of ways to overcome them. Leo J. explained their thinking is based on available structures: "we associate genders by a visual aspect...the washrooms, it's

either men or women". Here he also established the primacy of the visual on our sense of knowing. What we see to be real is what we understand to be real. But then he sympathized with the plight of the non-conforming individual: "...what if there is someone that doesn't fit into that category?...I wonder why we have to follow these visual cues...these two sides that don't really incorporate a different possibility". At least Leo J. expressed a concern about the inadequacy of these structures and seemed willing to imagine a different reality; Raj and the others are more uncertain of these uncharted grounds.

When confronted with the possibility of building transgender washrooms in schools, the participants were suspicious. Even Leo J., who earlier wished for a better world that would acknowledge the gender non-conformist, now altered his perspective: "I think there are rules against that". He was reflective, however: "that means there's something wrong with the rules...pretty tough rules". But he also predicted that few of his peers would feel comfortable using the space, even if they did identify as something close to transgender because of the public scrutiny they would suffer: "it would create so much drama". Gray supported this projection: "I don't think it's a good idea...not because of them but because of what other people would say..conservative people are like, 'you're born this way, you stay this way'". She suggested the solution that would protect the individual as well as provide them a safe space would be to label the washroom as a family washroom to "keep it on the DL, the down-low". However, this proposal does not align with the reality of a school environment where youth attend as individuals without their entire families.

Although Lynn T. was the one to ask me about the concept of transgender washrooms (she had read about it in the newspaper), she was highly skeptical of its benefits. She called it a "girl slash guy" washroom and claimed "nobody's going to go in because...it's just weird, you're sharing a washroom with guys". Here she identified with other females, females similar to her own sensibilities who would position 'guys' as the opposite sex. She must have been imagining herself using the facility, but failed to recognize that she would not be the targeted population for the washroom. The transgender individual would not align with either the "guys'" or the "girls'". Further, her analysis is contradictory: at first, the individual who uses the washroom would suffer scrutiny: "people might look at them and be like, 'oh, she just went into the transgen [sic] washroom'"; alternatively, she also claimed the banality of the washroom: "it's just a washroom, you go in to pee, it's not like a huge deal". For the gender conformist, this latter statement may be true. This person would not be challenged for choosing which washroom to attend because they satisfied the regulations: their gender matched their sex, at least, by all appearances.

Rasmussen (2009) notes the significance of the washroom for the gender non-conformist: "Many toilet users might approach these spaces with an easy familiarity. However, for some, public toilets, within and outside of schools, are a source of confusion, misrecognition and anecdotes." (p. 442). Although Lynn T. denied the implications of the public washroom, she did acknowledge that transgender people still have to fight for acceptance: "I don't feel like the transgender washroom does anything...because it's really hard to change the view of everyone in society". The problems are too immense for "transgender people to be like normal, I kind of doubt it in my lifetime". She occupies a

defeatist position. Despite her dismissal of the relevance of the washroom, it is a highly

politicized space, that through analysis reveals much about the rigidity of gender norms.

The idea of the transgender washroom incited reflection on the boundaries of such norms.

But it also served to break the assumed connection between gender identity and

gender assignment (Paechter, 2001). For example, Jagose notes how masculine females

are pathologized "when gender attributions...[are] radically at odds with how you might

imagine your self" (Jagose and Halberstam, 1999). The space of the washroom is highly

regulated and policed for such transgressions of gender conformity, to which both

Rasmussen and Halberstam can personally attest. Following Halberstam's (1998) story of

her misidentified gender in the airport washroom which summoned a confused security

guard, Rasmussen (2009) shares she too has suffered misrecognition in public washrooms

numerous times. The public bathroom is a conundrum because it intermingles private and

public spaces, thus imposing the gaze of dominant society onto very private matters. How

one negotiates gender expression is a highly personal, yet also highly political, act,

especially when it is visible to a peer group of youth.

This public gaze also falls upon the space of the locker room in schools which is a

necessary, although unfortunate, component of a curricular subject. The space is more

often unmonitored by teachers and thus left to the unofficial, but powerful monitoring of

youth by their peers. One participant talked about the locker room as a problem for both

her male and female friends. In the case of the former, she could only speculate and report

on hearsay:

> ...always behind your back...never to your face...the whispers and the
> shadows...mostly it's locker room talk...the people in gym are always the

> rich kids...mostly the guys, I feel so bad for [a male friend] in grade 9...they
> will talk about the things they hear...they'll actually hardcore make fun of
> him...they'll just rant about him...he always wears rainbows, I love
> it...everyone is always like,'why's he do that?'....I don't know why it
> aggravates...it also mystifies them...they're not like him...not very open-
> minded people...everyone...I feel so bad for people who are different in
> Grade 9.

Gray reflected on the problems embedded in the curriculum that mandates physical

education for all in grade 9; she seemed more sensitive to male youth, especially those who

were in any way removed from hegemonic masculinity. Although she can sympathize and

even support her friend who "wears rainbows", she is not permitted into the locker room

where she might be able to interrupt the repercussions her friend endures.

About where she is permitted to be, the female locker room, Gray recalled a situation

she was able to describe from a first-hand perspective: "yeah...my one friend...she's not

fat...she's still shy of what other people think...she hides to change...not really goes on the

sly, but doesn't change in the open". Gray did not theorize her friend's reasoning, she just

recalled how surprisingly quickly her friend fled the open changing area insinuating an

insecurity in body image. This scenario might reference female body issues but is also

implicated in gender discourse because presumably, the insecurity stemmed from a self-

perceived inadequacy of performing a standard of hegemonic femininity. Rasmussen

(2009) argues that "school toilets, are ... a space where sex, sexuality and gender come

together; ... For some young women, toilets are spaces for refining a heteronormative

gender identity" (p. 441). The school toilet, the school locker room, both are implicated in

the regulatory practices of gender identity which is in itself a complex process for every

individual, especially the gender non-conformist. The notion of the 'restroom' is a

misnomer; nothing close to rest can be allowed to happen in a public space so fraught with anxiety.

Other Forms of Regulation

Beyond the space of the bathroom, the hallways, the school yard, even classrooms can become spaces of gender regulation. Regulation is akin to policing or self-governance in the sense that the norm is upheld by certain agents of the dominant culture--those individuals who subscribe to heteronormative standards. I asked about the consequences for individuals who failed to conform to gender norms. In the focus group, the participants used the term 'harassment'; but after further investigation in the individual interviews, their perceptions of harassment at their own school varied greatly.   Some of the participants struggled to identify actual scenarios where this harassment took place. They recognized some gender non-conformists may suffer social consequences, but this they called "creating drama", seemingly downplaying its severity. These participants were also reluctant to acknowledge gender caused any sort of real problems in their school:

> ...I don't feel like it's that big of a deal...it's not harassment to the point where that person might cry....because there's a slight joke to it...and everybody is pretty hard-faced...everybody has their fair share of gossip.... [Richview] was sort of brutal for that aspect...has a habit of gossiping and talking about people... (Lynn T., age 17/18)

> I think lots of people are comfortable just being themselves, they seem so natural, so true. It's hard to imagine that they are really different underneath, that they're not liking what they have to be...I can't imagine anyone having to be isolated...maybe they don't come to class, never heard of them because they just don't show up to school... (Leo J., age 16)

Neither Lynn T. nor Leo J. could recall a specific case of harassment of a gender non-conformist, thus they also could not identify with that person's plight. Lynn T. reframed harassment as "gossip" which she dismissed as humour. Leo J. reported an optimistic view of his school which looks ignorant only in light of the responses of other participants. He stated "it's hard to imagine" that these people are at odds with their own identity which they feel they cannot express in school; but he also does not completely deny the possibility. He did postulate the scenario that these individuals simply avoided classes altogether, thus explaining why he could not have encountered this problem. Later he was able to speak as if he did recall specific incidents, although he refrained from describing any in detail. These are the scenarios of "drama":

> ...verbal abuse...there's always the rumours that go around...'he's kind of weird'...it's always hush...it will keep spreading, they'll be larger and larger groups that feel that way...there's this drama around him that he didn't really start.

With authority Leo J. describes the mechanism of gossip or rumours that work to destroy a person's reputation or social image in their peer group. Unfortunately, he could not summon an example to apply this process to a gender non-conformist.

The social structure of adolescents, or how they organize themselves according to social status, and how they navigate that hierarchy, implicates the practices of gender regulation. Another participant, Raj, delved into an analysis of the peer group and its impact on the actions of the individual. He claimed "if there's gossip......don't make a big scene, lay low...a lot of people are self-conscious...they don't want to cause too much attention to themselves...go with the flow...". Raj

chose to remain ignorant to the details of the gossip in protection of his own well-

being. He described certain individuals who shied away from "too much attention"

locating them as insecure and powerless. Later he was able to elaborate upon the

dynamics of the peer group impacting an individual's action:

> ...like peer pressure type thing... but if you're in a group just go on the group
> consensus...if there are a lot of people...one person's the odd person
> out...fear of like being made fun of, like told your thoughts are wrong...just
> be normal whatever that is.

Raj admitted his paralysis in social situations; he alluded to feeling threatened to act

independently from his peer group. Martino (2000) writes of the social hierarchy in

schools, specifically among boys, that works to maintain itself through "othering"

practices. The "popular boys become the gatekeepers of acceptable and desirable

behaviour" who "through a regime of abusive practices, ...places certain boys on the

outside as targets for harassment" (p. 106). Gray was also adept at describing the

operation of social hierarchy:

> The jock guy has a bit higher ranking and...he can go way down on you
> because you're not as talented....if you're at the bottom of the food chain
> and you try to stick up for someone else you're going to get clobbered...

Raj understood that to oppose the dominant group is to risk getting "clobbered" or

becoming a target himself. But Gray also wanted to revoke the power instilled in the

"jock guy" class: " if they could change them and the people who are friends with them...if

we just made a couple of examples like that..". Raj did not share Gray's gumption. He can

admit harassment occurs at his school but chose to stand outside of it for his own safety.

But he was also able to recognize that "normal" is a construction: "I don't think normal is

anything". He was not blind to its falsity but was reluctant to act beyond normal.

Although gender harassment was difficult to identify for many, Nigel C.

expressed with certainty that it did exist at his school. He explained his

understanding of gender regulation and the consequences of transgressing:

> If we don't stay within a reasonable range of other's expectations, we are
> seen as 'weird' or 'strange'. From that can come social exclusion, bullying,
> and various other ways that teens sometimes resort to using as a way to
> express their displeasure with the differences.

Some other participants specified the actual "various other ways" that teens employ to

"express their displeasure":

> It's always behind someone's back...I've seen comments about people;
> sometimes they're malicious, but fueled by something else like jealousy
> or competitiveness. (Oleana, age 18)

> I don't really see anything physical......always talked about behind their
> backs... (Raj, age 16)

Unfortunately for Bert T., he was the only one who could remember vivid scenarios

involving his friend whom he dubbed Jay for the purposes of this project:

> One of the school dances...me and Jay and we were dancing...a few guys
> came up to him and pretended to grind him...he was so sickened by that he
> had to go home..I guess almost sexual harassment.

No one can deny the distinct description of harassment here. Beyond 'gossip',

beyond 'drama', even beyond verbal abuse, Bert T.'s friend suffered terribly, both

physically and as Bert T. deemed, sexually, at the hands of his peers. Bert T. added

his friend would receive "stuff like emails and notes on his locker, like 'get the f**

out of here, faggot'". These scenarios stand in vivid contrast to the participants who

either denied that harassment occurred at their school or ignored it as a possibility.

Despite the relative congenial way the participants engaged with each other, one

comment now stands out as explicitly harmful, especially after reviewing how close

Bert T. must be to his friend Jay to have experienced such atrocities with him. In the

focus group, one participant proposed Jay must have a mental illness to be able to

express himself in such transgressive ways, to suffer the social consequence, and to

pursue his expression relentlessly:

> It's not that like he's different, it's that he, he just like doesn't stop he just
> creates more opportunities for himself, like other people just ignore it and
> just like turn around, do you know?

The participant assigned the problem of harassment to the victim, pathologizing his

nonconformity even further. The regulation of gender, even in this supposed safe space,

and among these polite and seemingly sympathetic individuals, persisted. I only wonder

now how Bert T. and Gray, who also claimed Jay as her friend, felt about this attack and

how they were able to remain silent and not come to his defence.

Part II. Regulation's Compliance and Rejection

This last scenario that occurred in the focus group speaks to the ways adolescents

react or avoid reaction in the face of gender harassment. In this scenario, neither the victim

was present nor were the individuals unsupported. Yet, not one spoke out to argue against

this re-victimization of Jay. Their actions proved harassment is rampant, and the targeted

'others' must assume a form of resiliency, or coping strategy to overcome their daily

struggles. To an earlier question, Raj responded, "I don't want to cause a public scene...I

don't really do anything...I don't want to get involved". Halberstam (1998) explains the

"rewards for conformity quickly come to outweigh the rewards for social rebellion" (p. 5).

Wyss (2004) also found her informants were apt to remain silent (p. 722) against gender attacks. These youth are positioned as compliant bystanders, refusing to disrupt the cycle of harassment.

Other participants claimed they would take a different stand. Through an active rejection of harassment, they suggested ways of combating the harsh regulatory practices they witnessed. Gray argued for a peer group that could support the gender non-conformist. In isolation, the targeted individual would be vulnerable; but her friend, Jay, seems to take the gossip and other milder forms of harassment "pretty well...because he has his community of friends that back him up" (age 16). Bert T. concurred that Jay feels safe because "he knows there is someone like me ten feet away...who will jump to his defence right away" (age 16). He argued a community is essential in resisting the harmful normative practices other teens can inflict on the gender non-conformist. Indeed, he identified the peer group as more significant to disrupting harassment than even teachers or administration in a school. Beyond simply surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals, both Bert T. and Gray identified active defence is necessary. The victims of gender harassment require "more people [to just stick] up for them, especially the hard core jocks" (Gray, age 16). Again, Gray cited the power of the individuals who sit higher in the social hierarchy; but she does not believe they can be heroes on their own, they need others to inspire them, to empower them.

The notion of empowerment also derived from my discussion with Oleana who disparaged the impact teachers had on these episodes of gender violence. Further, she also

rebuffed the suggestion of a support group situated within the school to help the troubled

gender non-conformist. Her proposal was much more sophisticated:

> ...a more subtle integration...I think it's more [about] educating teachers, on
> how to encourage students to support one another;...[it should be] integrated
> throughout the curriculum...it's probably impossible considering how much
> hegemony there is throughout...I think it's probably too idealistic... group
> work, some teachers choose the groups themselves, to get people to work
> together, it encourages them to be respectful because you know you went
> through something together; not to be [overt] but subtle, to gain the
> respect... if you're able to build relationships on a regular basis, you're more
> accepting.

Oleana offered many thoughtful suggestions here and proved to have a keen

understanding of the dynamics within a school among students, teachers, and their

interactions with curriculae and each other. Her central idea is about "a...subtle

integration" of interrupting the hegemony that must work on an ongoing basis and be

incorporated in a way to empower students. She described an organic process of

resiliency, or a way to oppose gender harassment and regulation. The notion of an

"ongoing process" is supported by Cook-Sather (2002) in her description of

educational reform relying on continual consultation with students (p. 12). Further,

Cook-Sather validates the voices of students who "have the knowledge and the

position to shape what counts as education, to reconfigure power dynamics" (p. 3).

Oleana's proposal that students work together to combat a heterosexist ideology

within the school answers Cook-Sather's call to authorize students' perspectives.

Finally, she underlines that critical pedagogy "calls for the empowerment of

students" to alter their thinking about their assumed knowledge of themselves and

others (p. 5).

Conclusion

It was a conscious choice to end on a positive note through a consideration of student empowerment. Although it really does extend beyond my intentions for this project, there is an awkwardness in deconstruction without a proposal for reconstruction. Specifically, whole studies have detailed harassment stories exclusively; but because my purpose was to garner a more general image of gender fluidity understandings, it would be incomplete to ignore how students themselves felt that they could address harassment in their own schools. Primarily, I employed the ideas of one participant but refrained from adding her statements in other sections. Due to unforeseen circumstances, she attended only the second interview and was not privy to the first discussion. In this respect, her stories were distinct and at times unrelated to the other participants'. The focus group influence must have affected the other participants because their comments are more often interconnected. It fits then that the one who was absent from the group influence should possess a unique perspective on the problem of gender in schools.

I called the final section a compliance and rejection of regulation because of the dual response to how students could repair the damages done to gender fluidity in schools. For those who admitted a more compliant stance, at least I applaud their honesty. The others may have positioned themselves as rejectors, but without a story to prove they have already actively interrupted gender harassment, it is still just conjecture.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Reflective Summary

This thesis represents my attempt to assess a group of secondary school students'

understandings of gender fluidity in one school in South Western Ontario. Implicitly it has

also been a study about my own process of assessing how youth negotiate their grasp of

gender expression, how they articulate their assumptions and thus act upon them. I see this

project as a glimpse into a greater body of work, that belonging to the students themselves.

The knowledge I have harnessed from these participants is only a temporary one, a

moment in their ongoing understandings that they will continue to develop, and which will

likely fade in and out of their consciousness many times over again. As Cook-Sather

(2002) argues, "students [can] actively construct their own understandings" and, in this

sense, need to be positioned "as active creators of their knowledge rather than recipients of

others' knowledge" (p. 5). But the research is significant beyond how it contributes to the

participants' self-awareness because it contributes to a discourse about gender in schools.

It is important that research accesses the real-life perspectives and experiences of students

in their own language to ascertain how programs of gender reform can be tailored to effect

efficient and notable change. I have focused on the complexities embedded in their

observations of others' expressions of gender and the consequences of transgressing gender

binaries, as they have witnessed them. How this knowledge impacts current school

policies or whether it inspires other reforms is a task belonging to another study.

The research investigates how students interrogated notions of gender rigidity and gender fluidity, to what degree they subscribed to each, and in what ways they made visible (or invisible) gendered individuals (both gender conformists and non-conformists). Various queer, feminist, and transgender theoretical frameworks have informed my research questions. Cook-Sather (2002) describes post-structural feminism as a way to "problematize power relations in schools and society" (p. 5), which expresses my overriding goal. I have drawn on the work of Butler (1990, 1993, 2004), Kumashiro (2002), Lather (2008), Britzman and Anzaldúa to develop a position I call the transgender metaphor. Anzaldúa describes the position of the inhabitants of the Borderlands as one excluded from heteronormativity through gender and culture. Her work is integral to understanding gender fluidity and gender nonconformity. The transgender metaphor, in essence, focuses on the conceptual significance of a gender non-conforming or transgender person negotiating gender against rigid gender norms, thus leading to an emancipation of gender, or a restructuring of the binary system of gender, which accepts a variance of gender expressions. Moreover, a queering of gender has implications not only for the visibly and self-identifiably queer, but it also has the potential to liberate every gendered individual from the constraints of a heteronormative ideology that polices gender norms. Hence, it helps to expose the regulatory system that enforces a certain degree of rigidity and polices the boundaries of what is to count as legitimate masculinities and femininities. In fact, a transgender politics as informed by the work of Ekins and King (1997, 2001), Tauchert (2001), Bornstein (1994), and Feinberg (1998), or the act of transgressing gender norms, is a metaphor for the deconstruction of heteronormative gender and a

reconstruction of genders that accept the blended, multifarious possibilities of self-expression. Kumashiro and Lather contribute to the concept of unknowability, that which describes the terrain I have explored by pursuing the research questions; as well, they argue that unknowability is the locus of the oppressed and requires attention. Their work intersects with Butler's ideas that the borders of knowing are significant for understanding the invisible, banal, and taken-for-granted discourses as they pertain to gender expression. The concept of unknowability is perceived only at the limits of knowledge, which helps to define what constitutes normative knowledge, especially that which regulates gender. In addition, Anzaldúa's (1999) work about the inhabitants of a borderland translates into my understanding of the position of transgender. Unknowability, borderlands, and knowing the limits are conceptual markers that have formed my line of questioning. Not only was I accessing the idea of transgender, which is a gender occupying the unknowable middle ground, I was also pursuing a space of understanding that is otherwise rendered invisible due to its banality.

Asking students about the gender-queer in a school that is known for its conservatism sounds like a problematic pursuit. It was encouraging that the participants claimed little experience discussing anything close to the topic, or that they struggled to recall certain scenarios; at first, I feared they dismissed the topic as useless or irrelevant, but in the banality of their comments I have found increasing significance. That which is invisible is potent because it can infiltrate and then embody societal norms, norms that have proven to be exclusionary to the gender diverse population. I should add that my thinking of the gender variant, or the gender non-conformist, does not align with a political

identity of transgender. The ways of being other than gender normative are much more

vast than the minority population who subscribes to queer identity. Masculine females, in

any and all degrees of masculinity, feminine males, in any and all degrees of femininity,

and any other combination of 'gendered' behaviours, may be labelled queer in academic

discourse, but do not always position themselves as such. This research is for all of them:

those who present as queer or not; those who express transgressive gender; those youth

who pass as conformist, while feeling otherwise; those who fear regulatory practices; or

those who question their identity.

At length I have considered the usual conflations of sex, sexuality and gender. It

will take more time to thoroughly grasp all of their occurrences and their consequent

implications. But for the purposes of this study, it is enough to cite my dissatisfaction with

current misuses of the terms, and to report also on the collision and fusion embedded in the

participants' responses. From them it is not an irresponsible act; only the academic field is

accountable for its errors or confusion. At least the participants possessed an awareness of

this conflation and some were able to theorize the intersections between homophobia and

gender transgressions.

Certainly, the discourses of gender intermingle with those of visuality and

embodiment also. A study on gender would be incomplete if it did not take into account a

knowledge of how we come to know gender through visual markers and signifiers. The

work of Ekins and King (2003), and Tauchert (2001) inspired me to ask about gender

understandings in the form of visual expressions, drawings instead of conventional talk.

Hayes creates the notion of the visible which, although related to the visual, is much more

politically charged. Coupled with Namaste's (2000) invisibility discourse which describes the violence inflicted on transgender individuals, Hayes argues that the act of making the gender non-conformist visible or invisible is both exploitative and exclusionary. Prosser's (1998) *Second Skins* provides a structure to analyse other embodiment issues such as sartorial choices or body stylizations related to gender expression. And the seminal work of Butler (1990, 1993) establishes the notion of gender performance that is enacted through the body, on the body, but also beyond the body.

Unfortunately, a study on gender fluidity is incomplete without acknowledging the real-life violence and harassment these individuals suffer simply because they do not or cannot present in a heteronormative way. The work of Wyss (2004), Sykes (2004), Filax and Shogan (2004), and Namaste (2000) build the knowledge about how this violence is inflicted, in what forms, and how the victims maintain their resilience. At first glance it might seem fortunate that my participants provided few examples of harassment as a direct result of gender transgressions. But the stories from Bert T. about his friend tell a different tale. These are severe, violent, and uncharacteristic of the picture the participants outlined of their school. For many of them, the worst they saw was "gossip" or "drama". Thus, it is most unfortunate that these students were unable to detect when real violence, not just drama, occurred around them. Either they were self-absorbed, poor observers, or did not deem what they witnessed as problematic. All possibilities are sorry conclusions to draw and I would rather refrain from passing judgement, but it is certain that something at the student level is missing if these afflictions are able to continue.

Violence results from transgressing norms of gender and such norms are highly regulated in youth societies, comprising their own languages, but indistinct in their severity. Again Butler's (2004) work is relevant. The attention she bestows upon gender as norm and the normalization of gender constitutes invaluable knowledge in the field. How the participants described gender regulation most often surrounded the visuality discourse. They readily recognized obvious transgressions in dress, or other body stylizations. Upon further reflection however, some of these real-life scenarios of non-conformity presented as ambiguous; the participants could not actually discern if the non-conforming person was targeted based on gender or some other unknown reason.

The themes that emerged were most intriguing for me if they bore a visual motif: the notion of the bathroom problem, sartorial descriptions of skinny jeans, and the visually rendered gender definitions became mental pictures I could retain during analysis. Most fascinating was the emergence of the bathroom as a site of spatial regulation and for structuring gender binaries in the everyday lives of students in school. The participants' drawings underlined their absolute dependency on this societal structure for conceptualizing gender. Without direction and few guidelines, they unwittingly presented a more unified picture of their whole understandings. Even the apparent attempts to be distinct reinforced a binary system. It is as if they felt powerless against the institutional force of societal norms for installing gender binary structures and frameworks. The bathroom is a more permanent structure than the mere architectural strength it possesses.

Implications and Significance of the Research

Gender fluidity embodies today's Janus, or two-faced issue: it presents challenges to established norms and conservative ideas and it describes the way a growing number of youth identify. Of course, my research was not designed to arrive at these conclusions; rather, I devise them from the body of literature available. Filax & Shogan (2004) urge a disruption of gender norms: "in opening up alternatives for gender, we question the presumed coherence between and among sexed bodies, gendered behavior, and sexuality" (p. 81). By detaching masculinity from maleness and femininity from femaleness educators and school leadership can make room for those gender diverse individuals who already inhabit our schools. And by allowing for their complex identity negotiations, more youth can find ease in their self-expressions. It follows that the less a student is occupied by fear of punishment for acting true to themselves, the more their focus can fall to other curricular and intellectual activities.

By centring on the voices of students this qualitative study is validating to their own personal sense of self and can also lead to empowerment that can inspire further action and potential reform. Student voices are an invaluable "contribution....to the improvement of students' school experience" (Rudduck, 2007, p. 587), because they enable students to seek solutions to their own unique problems instead of awaiting adults to interpret for them. Students are often wanting "opportunities to talk about teaching and learning and the conditions of learning in school" (Rudduck, 2007, p. 591). Certainly, the perception and treatment of gender diverse individuals are prime conditions affecting potential learning. The participants mentioned only cursorily their pleasure in being asked

to talk about anything; for some of them the topic was irrelevant to their own motivation for joining the project. Students want teachers and other adults in positions of authority to listen to them, to engage in a discourse about their own observations and ideas of themselves. It takes relatively little to activate a sense of agency in these youth.

Because students' descriptions of their own environment can lead to "system-wide review and change" (Rudduck, 2007, p. 593), schools not only need to encourage student expression but also to resolve to create structural opportunities that will not only listen but activate student needs. Rudduck also argues that the good graces of one teacher is not enough to effect real systemic change; as well, one project such as this is insufficient to make a mark on the lives of gender non-conformists in schools. At the very least, it can encourage individual students to continue the discourse in their own lives.

Finally, to answer any elementary suspicions that gender and schools do not mix, gender is a pervasive and inescapable issue even in education. Schools operate on the "Cartesian duality [that assumes] only minds, not bodies, are to be involved in teacher/ student interaction" (Johnson, 2006, p. 253); but this leads to false and faulty results for teachers and the students who are either ignored for their gender fluidity or targeted because of it. Students at the best of times are already in precarious negotiations with their own identity; add gender non-conformity to their palette and they are handling a multitude of miseries. Students are gendered beings, this is a fact; and our evolving understanding of their suffering around gender identity can no longer be ignored in the classroom. The work that has to be done is not merely to acknowledge the gendered body, but to disrupt the system of normalization that excludes certain gendered bodies from others: "dismantling

social constructs such as 'gender'... is necessary in order to better understand how these constructs get deployed in service to systems of domination" (Johnson, 2006, p. 254). Grossman, et al (2009) argues for educational policies that consider the gender diverse population of students: "schools [must] foster the inherent worth of each student regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression" (p. 43). Implications abound not only for the classroom teacher but more importantly for the system-wide structure of schools.

Current school diversity policy glosses over the position of the gender variant student, preferring to incorporate their experience into a general acknowledgement of sexual diversity. Further, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) argue the harmful treatment of these individuals is more likely attributed to bullying and thus addressed in anti-bullying seminars, again in a general sweeping acknowledgment of othered students (p. 163). More attention needs to be paid to the transgender student to combat pervasive and silent transphobia. A discourse about gender variance needs to be initialized and incorporated into both board and local school-based welfare policies.

Effecting change in schools requires access to teachers and empowering student voices through school policy and practice. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2005) provide a framework for addressing gender and social justice in the form of a "school-based welfare policy" (p. 165) through three concrete ways. First, building teacher and student threshold knowledge about gender variance and fluidity is the starting point to promoting a tolerance and acceptance of gender diverse students. They suggest facilitating anonymous surveys of student experiences to assess the nature of current understandings of gender expression.

In this way, school change capitalizes on student voice, acquiring an accurate gauge of the student climate and empowering students in contributing to their own school experience. They also suggest the benefit of staff meetings and other professional development forums: "it is far more difficult to ignore the documented experiences, insights and concerns of students in our schools" (p. 165). I add that discussions that include students with teachers is a most efficient and unique option because, again, students are empowered and it facilitates a communication between teacher and student beyond the curricular rigidity of the classroom. As their second step in the framework, Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli recommend a review of school-based policy through a social justice framework that explores power as it is related to gender and sexuality (p. 165). Primarily, they ask for an examination into the pervasive use of the terms compulsory heterosexuality, heterosexism, and homophobia within the subtext and context of policy documents. I add that transphobia should be added to the list. Finally, the third step in the social and gender justice framework is to address the curriculum. Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli warn against a tokenistic addition of gender issues in health and physical education programs. They propose a program not based in tolerance, but in combating the hate and dismissal of transgender and gender variant students. They insist a school-based commitment to gender justice must create curriculum that is intellectually engaging, connected to the students' real-life experiences, elicited in safe, supportive classroom environments, and conducive to celebrating difference (p. 166). Gender justice, through an understanding of gender variance, is no simple task; it requires constant attention, multiple means of address

through policy and curriculum, and a commitment from teachers and school policy writers and practitioners to be successfully incorporated into the school-based lives of students.

Next Steps, Future Research

Several times I noted my discontent at the constraints of this project. Not that I had time or energy to pursue any more data, but certain insufficiencies left me thinking about the next project. The individual interviews allowed me closer range to ask about personal motivations for joining the project. It delighted me that these students were so dedicated to participate at all, and that they proved animated and engaged in an activity that was non-requisite. It occurred to me that they had leadership tendencies already established. They cited the open forum of the project as one enticement; for others is was the promise of a further examination of a topic that intrigued them. In any case, further research could devise a longitudinal study that sets up and then charts gender activists in secondary schools. These participants considered this their project, not one for which they were merely participants. Additionally, one wondered if we could meet online more regularly to share our ideas on the topic. This sense of ownership is precisely the type of quality upon which another project could capitalize. If I were to extend this project, I would send the students into their schools with a plan of action, perhaps one they had formulated together in another focus group, to address the specific problems of gender regulation amongst their peers. After frequent re-groupings over the space of one school year, for example, the researcher could chart their progress through various methods. It would be a combination of research on activism with action research.

One further thought is the curricular consideration of gender theory in the Visual Art classroom. A future project could analyse the visual responses more thoroughly of participants either within a curricular framework or outside it in the form of personal journaling. Drawing gender understandings is only an initial idea that requires more development, but I would caution against the essentialist paths already travelled in this type of research. More suitably then would be an address of transgender issues through visual art means or using drawing to access the school-based experiences of gender variant and transgender students.

Conclusion

Gender fluidity and diversity is a concept foreign to many, but complicated for those who live it in these educational environments. Tolerance is not a goal; rather, an enlightened understanding not only of the plight of gender non-conformists, but also the multifarious ways gender is negotiated amongst all gendered bodies is necessary. "Engendering" means to come into being, to evolve; gender is semantically and in reality a process of becoming. It never ends, it is never static and it can never be ignored as an educational issue as long as gendered bodies are teachers and students.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

<u>Information and Consent Form: Focus Group</u>
Gender Diversity and Youth
The University of Western Ontario
1137 Western Road, London, Ontario, Canada, N6G 1G7
519-661-2111

<u>Introduction</u>
I, Jennifer Ingrey, am a Masters student in the Department of Education at The University of Western Ontario and the information I am collecting will be used in my thesis. My supervisor, Dr. Wayne Martino, Associate Professor in Diversity and Social Justice Education at The University of Western Ontario, will oversee this project.

<u>Purpose of this study</u>
You are being invited to participate in a research study looking at gender diversity in schools. Specifically, you will be asked to share your perceptions of gender. The aim of the study is to learn more specifically about your understanding of gender diversity as you see it in schools. This is a study about your impressions and perceptions of gender identity as a youth and not about how you identify yourself.

<u>Research procedures for this study</u>
If you choose to participate in the study, you will be one of only five individuals invited to participate in a focus group interview. You will not have to share anything that makes you uncomfortable.

You will be interviewed on two separate occasions, each requiring approximately a one to two-hour time frame. The interviews will take place in a small group setting of your peers, whereby I, the researcher, will pose questions to the group and to individuals where appropriate. You should be prepared to answer questions in front of the group as a way of contributing to the discussion. The tone of the interview will be serious and respectful but also informal and comfortable. After the first group interview (lasting approximately 1 – 1.5 hours), you will be asked to read an excerpt of a novel and write a brief journal response expressing your reactions to the text. The reading activity should take you between 15-30 minutes to complete and your written response should take between 30-45 minutes both of which you can complete on your own time. You will submit your writing to the researcher and also have the opportunity to share your responses orally with the focus group if you choose at our second and final group interview which will be a follow-up to the first interview. It will last approximately 1 hour. Both interviews will take place in a public setting: a school or public meeting space in the library or community centre.

Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no known risks if you participate in this study. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

To ensure your confidentiality, your research records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office and destroyed after one year. Your records will include the audio tapes of the interviews, the transcripts from these tapes, and any written work (journal response) you choose to submit for the study. You will have the opportunity to revise and edit the transcripts from your interviews.

Specific things you should know about confidentiality
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published. If we find information we are required by law to disclose, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Other pertinent information
If you have any questions about this study please contact Jennifer Ingrey or Dr. Wayne Martino. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact: Director of the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at (519) 661-3036.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research study. You do not waive any legal rights by signing the consent form.

I have read the Information/Consent document, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signature of Research Participant   Date

Signature of Legally-Authorized   Date
Representative
(if participant is under the age of 18)

Appendix B.

Information and Consent Form
Gender Diversity and Youth: Examining the Space in Between
The University of Western Ontario
1137 Western Road, London, Ontario, Canada, N6G 1G7
519-661-2111

Introduction

I, Jennifer Ingrey, am a Masters student in the Department of Education at The University of Western Ontario and the information I am collecting will be used in my thesis. My supervisor, Dr. Wayne Martino, Associate Professor in Diversity and Social Justice Education at The University of Western Ontario, will oversee this project.

This is a letter for consent to participate in the same research project to which you have previously agreed, with an adjustment to the procedure.

Purpose of this study

You are being invited to participate in a research study looking at gender diversity in schools. Specifically, you will be asked to share your perceptions of gender. The aim of the study is to learn more specifically about your understanding of gender diversity as you see it in schools. This is a study about your impressions and perceptions of gender identity as a youth and not about how you identify yourself.

Research procedures for this study

You have already participated in the first stage of the process which involved a focus group interview in September. You have also been asked to submit your written responses to the reading and discussion questions arising from that initial interview.

The initial plan was to have you reconvene for a second focus group interview, to which you had already consented. The adjustment to the process is the following: if you choose to participate in the final stage of the process, you would sit for a one-on-one interview that would act as follow-up to the focus group discussion in September. The interview should last approximately one hour and will be conducted in a room in a public school setting where the confidentiality of the interview can be maintained. The interview will be audiotaped and transcribed into written format.

The purpose to this new plan is to build upon the ideas from the focus group discussion and allow you, the individual, more time and space to express your own opinions without having to negotiate the group dynamic. You will not have to share anything that makes you uncomfortable nor will you have to divulge anything about your own gender identity.

Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. There are no known risks if you participate in this study. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

To ensure your confidentiality, your research records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office and destroyed after one year. Your records will include the audio files of the interviews, the transcripts from these digital files, and any written work (journal response) you choose to submit for the study. You will have the opportunity to revise and edit the transcripts from your interviews.

Specific things you should know about confidentiality
If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used and no information that discloses your identity will be released or published. If we find information we are required by law to disclose, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Other pertinent information
If you have any questions about this study please contact Jennifer Ingrey or Dr. Wayne Martino. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject you may contact: Director of the Office of Research Ethics, The University of Western Ontario at (519) 661-3036.

You will not be compensated for your participation in this research study. You do not waive any legal rights by signing the consent form.

I have read the Information/Consent document, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name of Research Participant (printed)

Signature of Research Participant   Date

Signature of Legally-Authorized   Date
Representative
(if participant is under the age of 18)

Appendix C.

Focus Group Interview Guide Questions

Ground rules:
- mutual respect
- express yourself, but don't interrupt or speak over someone else; let everyone speak in due turn
- build on what others say

Questions:
(Description)
(present)
1. What is gender? How do you understand it?

2. What is the use of gender? (i.e. the knowing of someone's gender, social purpose?)

3. Who gets to define gender of a person?

4. How do you know someone's gender? (i.e. how can you tell someone's gender?)

5. How much room for error exists in figuring out someone's gender? OR: if you ever determine someone's gender wrong, what are the consequences? Think of examples.

6. What are the different types of gender? What do different genders look like? How easy is it to define these different genders? Think of specific examples.

(interpretation)
(present)
7. If you had to make a visual model to describe different genders, what would it look like? **(on chart paper, markers, together)**

8. Examining your model, does it seem to have room for everybody? Who does it exclude?

9. What are the ways of being a certain gender in the 'right way'? What are the wrong ways of being a certain gender? What does it look like if a person is not accepted as a certain gender?

10. If someone is not accepted because of their gender, what are the consequences for them? Think of examples from your school.

(interpretation)
(past)
11. How do your parents, teachers, other people in positions of authority, understand gender and how does it compare to your opinions? (i.e. What is different and what is shared between your ideas and those of your elders? To what do you attribute these differences?)

12. From where do you think your idea of gender derived? Try to define all the sources of influence that helped you form your understanding of gender.

(interpretation)
(present to future)
13. How much do your teachers and school staff know about what goes on amongst your peers, specifically in regards to gender identity and interactions? And what sort of impact do your teachers have on the goings-on? If your peers don't understand someone's gender, how do they handle it?

14. What needs to change in schools so the consequences for not being gender a certain way can change? If you think things can improve, what suggestions do you have for improvement?

15. Collect demographic information: age, grade, extra-curricular activities, connection

Appendix D.

Focus Group Interview Novel Excerpt and Journal Response Questions

Instructions

Read the excerpt provided for you from the novel, Luna, by Julie Anne Peters (pp. 48-51). Think about the passage. You may begin writing a free-flowing response at this time.

Then, read the prompting questions provided for you. You may answer them one after another, or answer them holistically in your writing. You can structure your entire written response as you would any other journal: paragraphs, but free-form, first-person, colloquial/everyday language.

If you are stumped by a question, you can skip it and replace it with more of your own ideas on the topic.

Questions

1. Regan says, "there were lines you didn't cross, in clothing, behavior, attitude...people could accept if you moved along your own gender scale...to a point" (p. 50).

Are there lines that you witness at your school? in your social group? Describe them.

2. Regan's brother was "a girl all the time...it was hardwired into his brain" (p.51).

How much do you believe that being a certain gender is "hardwired"?
If someone doesn't fit into society's expectations of gender, whose fault is it? The person's or society's? Explain.
What happens to people who don't fit?

3. Regan's brother thinks "his body betrayed him" (p. 51)

Generally, how do teenagers feel about their own bodies?
How do you think teenagers can be betrayed by their bodies, their own physicality?

4. "The way people viewed Liam, as a boy, meant he had to play to their expectations" (p. 51).

How much of others' expectations do teens have to follow?

5. Any other thoughts? Add anything that you identified with or not. Identify a key line or phrase (even if is already highlighted above in the previous questions) and explain its significance to you.

source lately. That was another thing; they were always doing stuff together. Like dating. The last time Mom and Dad went out on a date was ... I can't even imagine them dating. Mom and Dad?

'I left the number of the Arts House and restaurant by the phone,' Elise told me, slipping on the coat David held open for her. 'Thank you, darling.' She smiled up at him, lovingly. I hadn't seen my parents share a private look like that since ... Never.

'Tyler has a runny nose, but don't worry about it, Regan.' Elise pulled a tissue out of her purse. She bent down and swiped Tyler's snot, adding, 'He's getting over a cold. Which he caught at that day care.' Her eyes narrowed at David.

'I know, I know.' He held up his hands. 'We should never have left him there, even for a morning. Those places are breeding grounds for bacteria. That's why we praise Buddha for Regan.'

Did they really? Were—

'Waygone, come watch me draw a T-Wex.' Cody tugged on my hand.

Marelle shot to her feet. 'Regan's going to play Barbies with me. Right?' She planted herself in front of me, her curly hair springing everywhere all over her head. 'You promised.'

'I did.' I straightened her bow barrette. 'I can't wait, either.'

'I've been thinking about it all day. Why don't you go set up your Barbie village and I'll check out this T-Rex just for a sec?' I winked at her.

'Thank you, Regan.' Elise squeezed my arm. 'You're so good with them.'

David pulled open the front door. 'We'll be home by ten thirty at the latest. If anything happens, the phone numbers are on the corkboard by the phone.'

'I told her that.' Elise slapped David's back. 'I swear, you're

Chapter 6

Elise and David Matera were the parents I wished I had. I'd been baby-sitting for them since I was twelve, and hoping any day now they'd adopt me. They were a regular family. They loved their kids. Really loved them. They were always hugging and kissing and playing games with them. Cody was currently in his 'why' phase. He must've asked David a hundred times now, 'Why is the sky blue?' and each time David would patiently explain. 'Because every color in the rainbow has a wavelength. Like this.' He'd demonstrate on Cody's drawing paper. 'When light passes through the atmosphere, the wave gets scattered. It spreads out.' He'd squiggle the lines. 'The blue we see is actually millions and millions of scattered blue lights. Tiny little pinpricks of light, all streaming into our eyeballs at once.'

'Wow,' Cody would breathe.

I would, too. I mean, I didn't know that. I doubted my dad did. I know he didn't because when I asked him the same question he said it was because God's a boy. If God were a girl, the sky would be pink.

'What about sunrise and sunset?' I'd asked.

Dad had looked dumbfounded. 'You kids. You think too much.'

It frightened me how shallow the gene pool was that Liam and I were wading in.

The Materas were my single source of income. A constant

going senile." She turned back to me, rolling her eyes. "The kids have eaten, but I left you a pan of lasagna in the oven in case you hadn't. I really appreciate you coming early. Also," she lowered her voice so the kids wouldn't hear, "I baked brownies for you and hid them in the cupboard. A little study snack."

See? Perfect parents.

As soon as they left, the baby pooped his diaper. Mirelle and Cody plugged their noses and split to opposite ends of the room. While I changed Tyler's Pampers on the dining room rug, Cody drew his dinosaur with green Magic Marker at the table.

"Do you want to be Bride Barbie or Working Woman Barbie?" Mirelle called from the living room.

What a choice. "Bride," I answered.

Cody said, "I got a new GI Joe. Want to see him?"

"You bet."

He dropped the marker and motored into his bedroom. As I resnapped Tyler's onesie, it struck me how ordinary these kids were. "They fulfill their gender expectations," Liam would say. Whatever that meant. All I knew was you'd never mistake Mirelle for a boy, or Cody for a girl. Tyler was still a baby, so he didn't count. If you dressed Ty in frilly clothes, people would probably coo over him and call him a "pretty little girl."

Pretty. A word for girls. The way handsome described boys. Liam was right, people did use boy and girl language. They expected different behaviors. When kids acted "out of role," as Liam put it, they were labeled tomboys or sissies.

There were lines you didn't cross, in clothing, behavior, attitude. Like, if I wore lipstick and lace to school, nobody would even notice. Well, they might, since I'd never worn either. I wasn't that girly-girly. People could accept if you moved along your own gender scale — be a princess one day and a slob the next. Same with boys.

To a point.

The gender scales didn't extend equidistant in both directions. For example, if you were a girl you could be off the scale feminine and that'd be fine, but if you acted or felt just a little too masculine, you were a dyke.

Same for guys. Macho macho, fine. Soft and gentle, fag.

What if you happened to be born off both scales, between scales, like Liam? Then you were just a freak.

I know that's how Liam felt. He told me once there was no place for him in the world, that he didn't fit anywhere. He really was off the scale. Boy by day, girl by night. Except, he was a girl all the time, inside. It was hardwired into his brain, he said, the way intelligence or memory is. His body didn't reflect his inner image. His body betrayed him. The way people viewed Liam, as a boy, meant he had to play to their expectations. Dress the part. Act the role. And Liam was good at it, expert. He'd had all those years of practice. It had to be horrible, though, day after day after day, seeing all around him what he wanted so desperately to be and never could.

"Waygot? Look at me!"

I perked to attention.

Cody emerged from his bedroom, clutching his GI Joe, and clunking across the entry in an old pair of Elise's high heels. I had to laugh. So much for gender expectations.

David and Elise never forced Cody and Mirelle to play with boy or girl toys exclusively. Or to dress the role. David even bought Cody a baby doll last summer when he begged for one. Cody's interest in playing with her lasted about two minutes before he was back throwing dirt clods at the neighbor's dog.

The whole gender role expectation thing was too confusing to me. Why couldn't people just be accepted for who they were?

Appendix E.
J. Ingrey; Gender Diversity
Second Interview: Individual

Interview Guide Questions

1. INITIAL MOTIVATION.
   What motivated you to participate in the project?

2. PROCESS.
   What did you think about the focus group dynamic?
   What did you think about the reading/writing activity?

3. FOLLOW-UP.
   What would you like to add or follow-up or continue from the last interview?

4. SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE.
   How do you know how gender is understood at your school? Provide
   SPECIFIC EXAMPLES. "the atmosphere of gender"; "gender diversity"

5. SOURCES OF OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER.
   How are we taught about gender?
   How does cultural/ ethnic background affect your understanding of gender?
   (specific examples)
   MEDIA: How does media affect your understanding of gender? (specific
   examples of gender descriptions)

6. GENDER HARASSMENT.
   What are the consequences for not behaving in a gender appropriate way at
   school?
   What negative treatment of marginalized gendered people have you
   witnessed?   (more instances of how gender diversity is "just not accepted")

7. HELP FOR TROUBLED KIDS IN SCHOOLS.
   How can individuals help harassed kids/ troubled kids?
   What are the limits placed on teens who might want to be activists?
   How can the school system help? (re: discussion with guidance
   counsellors: suggestions for people who are in need but perhaps are
   reluctant to share with guidance counsellors?)

Appendix F.

APPROVAL OF MEd THESIS PROPOSAL   FORM A

If the proposed research does not involve human subjects or the direct use of their written records, video-tapes, recordings, tests, etc., this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal should be delivered directly to the Office of Graduate Programs & Research for final approval.	If the proposed research involves human subjects, this signature form, along with ONE copy of the research proposal and THREE copies of the Ethical Review Form must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Programs & Research for final approval.

IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE A COPY OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL (INCLUDING REVISIONS) TO THE THESIS SUPERVISOR AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE.

Student's Name ___Jennifer C. Ingrey_____   ID # 2015360_____

Field of Study _____Equity and Social Justice Education_____

TITLE OF THESIS ___Gender Diversity and Youth. Examining the Space in Between_____

DOES THIS RESEARCH INVOLVE THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS: YES √ NO

Name of Thesis Supervisor   Dr. Wayne Martino _____

Name(s) of Members of the
Thesis Advisory Committee   _Dr. Goli Reza-Rashti___

APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

Graduate Student

Thesis Supervisor

Advisory Committee
(at least one)

Ethical Review Clearance

Review #   09 05 – 16 Date June 26/08

Associate Dean GPR   Date 5/07/08

A STUDENT MAY PROCEED WITH RESEARCH WHEN A COPY OF THIS FORM CONTAINING ALL APPROVAL SIGNATURES HAS BEEN RECEIVED.

A COPY OF THIS PROPOSAL MAY BE MADE PUBLIC AND KEPT ON A TWO-HOUR RESERVE IN
THE FACULTY OF EDUCATION LIBRARY

Appendix G.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Western USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE
Education

Review Number:	0805-11
Applicant:	Jennifer Ingrey
Supervisor:	Wayne Martino
Title:	*Gender diversity and youth: Examining the space in between*
Expiry Date:	February 28, 2009
Type:	M.Ed. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date:	June 26, 2008
Revision #:	
Documents Reviewed & Approved:	UWO Protocol, Letters of Information & Consent

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or e
new information which may adversely affect the safety of th
that any changes require a change in the information and con
be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Jason Brown (Chair)

2007-2008 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Jason Brown	**Faculty (Chair 2008)**
Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	**Faculty**
Dr. Jacqueline Specht	**Faculty**
Dr. Wayne Martino	**Faculty**
Dr. J. Marshall Mangan	**Faculty**
Dr. Immaculate Namukasa	**Faculty**
Dr. Robert Macmillan	**Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Researcl**
Dr. Jerry Paquette	**UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (**

The Faculty of Education	Karen Kueneman, Research Officer
1137 Western Rd.	Faculty of Education Building
London, ON N6G 1G7	kueneman@uwo.ca
	519-661-2111, ext.88561 FAX 519-661-3029

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

Appendix H.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Western USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE
Education

Review Number:	0805-11
Applicant:	Jennifer Ingrey
Supervisor:	Wayne Martino
Title:	*Gender diversity and youth: Examining the space in between*
Expiry Date:	February 28, 2009
Type:	M.Ed. Thesis
Ethics Approval Date:	January 5, 2009
Revision #:	2
Documents Reviewed & Approved:	Revised Study Method, Letter of Information & Consent describing revised method.

This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

No deviations from, or changes to, the research project as described in this protocol may be initiated without prior written approval, except for minor administrative aspects. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information and consent documentation, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval

Dr. Jason Brown (Chair)

2008-2009 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board

Dr. Jason Brown	**Faculty (Chair)**
Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki	**Faculty**
Dr. Jacqueline Specht	**Faculty**
Dr. John Barnett	**Faculty**
Dr. J. Marshall Mangan	**Faculty**
Dr. Immaculate Namukasa	**Faculty**
Dr. Robert Macmillan	**Assoc Dean, Graduate Programs & Research (*ex officio*)**
Dr. Jerry Paquette	**UWO Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (*ex officio*)**

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Curriculum Vitae

Name: Jennifer C. Ingrey

Post-secondary   University of Western Ontario
Education and Degrees: London, Ontario, Canada
                                   1995-1999 B.F.A.

                                   University of Western Ontario
                                   London, Ontario, Canada
                                   1999-2000 Bachelor of Education

Honors and Awards: Gold Medal, Visual Arts Department,
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                                   1999

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Related Work Experience: Occasional Teacher
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                                   Waterloo Region District School Board
                                   2001-2004

                                   Teacher
                                   Thames Valley District School Board
                                   2005-2008