Borders that matter: trans identity management

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BORDERS THAT MATTER: TRANS IDENTITY MANAGEMENT

by

Reese C. Kelly

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Abstract

This dissertation presents the responses, strategies, and meaning-making processes that forty trans (transgender) people engaged in when confronted with or when preparing for the possibility of encountering two different types of identity checkpoints, or what I regard as “borders”: situations where sexed bodies and presentations of self would be matched against identity documents or records, and the use or attempted use of sex-segregated facilities. The project addresses the questions: In what ways do trans people prepare for and respond to identity inspections in border crossing scenarios? What strategies do they employ in order to successfully border cross? What effect does identity misrecognition or invalidation have on trans lives?

This work provides a new model and language for conceptualizing the ongoing and interactive process of trans identity management, featuring the following terms I developed: border-crossing, administrative recognition, threatened subjects, threatening subjects, strategic normativity, and strategic hybridity. I argue that there is no clear and coherent trans identity narrative. Instead, trans people strategically choose which practices and narratives to mobilize depending on each situation they encounter. Overall, my work contributes to the fields of sociology, feminist, queer, and transgender studies, and more broadly, to surveillance studies, biopolitics, and theories of cultural identity.
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To my brothers, my sisters, and my others.
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Last, when recounting the individuals who have shaped my life, I couldn’t help but think of my nana, Faith Hull, who taught me about privilege before I even knew what the word meant. Above all, she understood me. After she passed, I found in her home a photo of myself as a child under which was taped a newspaper fragment with the Helen Keller quote, “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” Nan – I love you, I miss you, and I do know how good I have it.
To live in the Borderlands means you

are neither hispana india negra espanola
ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata, half-breed
caught in the crossfire between camps
while carrying all five races on your back
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means knowing
that the india in you, betrayed for 500 years,
is no longer speaking to you,
that mexicanas call you rajetas,
that denying the Anglo inside you
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

Cuando vives en la frontera
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,
you’re a burra, buey, scapegoat,
forerunner of a new race,
half and half—both women and man, neither—a new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to
put chile in the borscht,
eat whole wheat tortillas,
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;
be stopped by la migra at the border checkpoints;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,
the pull of the fun barrel,
the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;

In the Borderlands
you are the battleground
where enemies are kin to each other;
you are at home, a stranger,
the border disputes have been settled
the volley of shots have shattered the truce
you are wounded, lost in action
dead, fighting back;

To live in the borderlands means
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off
your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart
pound you pinch you roll you out
smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive the Borderlands
you must live sin fronteras
be a crossroads.

An Introduction to Trans Situated Experiences

The only time I got pulled over by the police was for something stupid like a broken headlight… I pulled [my license] out. [I thought] oohh this does not look like me… I never even thought about it until that very moment…. I’m like “Oh shit”… I hand [the officer] my license because that’s what he wants to see and he comes back up and is shining the light on me…”This isn’t your license.” I’m like, “Yeah it is.” It didn’t look like me anymore. “Is this your sister’s license?” I said, “No. I don’t have a sister. That is my license.” So, I have to start explaining to him…I said, “I’m a transsexual. Do you know what that is?” And he looks at me like I’m a guy that wants to be a girl. I’m like, “No actually I’m the other way around.” There are a few of us. I was that person and now I’m transitioning to be a man. He’s like “Uh, ok”…. He looked at me some more and said “Yeah, I can see that without the beard,” so he ran everything else, checked out that it was fine. I got my little ticket and went on my way…. It took a couple minutes but he got it…. I was kind of shocked that he was ok with it. He didn’t go off the deep end…. But, that was a really awkward moment. I’m like oh my god is he going to do a strip search on me or something? But actually he was very good about it and I was in shock. I really was because I thought I was going to be given a real hard time. (Syd, a Caucasian trans male in his mid forties)

Until I was ready to go to female bathrooms, I only went to single bathrooms and I did that for a while. It is amazing how I knew where all the single bathrooms were. I had them picked out in my mind… I knew where I could go and where I couldn’t go… [In places without single bathrooms], I would hold it. Absolutely. It got to the point where I wouldn’t drink any liquids at least an hour before I left the house…. Anytime I was leaving work, I would kind of make myself use the restroom before I left…. I had a system in place and the system worked… I remember the first time I went to a female restroom. Actually, I had to stand in line and I was just like oh my God, someone’s going to clock me and it is going to be an ordeal and some chick’s going to say something stupid, you know? And this girl just turned around and she started talking to me and I was like, Oh my God girls talk in the bathroom, to each other?… I was like, oh wow, this is so cool. (Gabrielle, an African American trans woman in her mid thirties)

This dissertation presents the responses, strategies, and meaning-making processes that forty trans people engaged in when confronted with or when preparing for the possibility of encountering two different types of identity checkpoints, or what I regard as “borders”: situations where sexed bodies and presentations of self would be
matched against identity documents or records, and the use or attempted use of sex-segregated facilities. I open this manuscript with these brief anecdotes from Syd and Gabrielle in order to highlight the fact that trans people’s experiences at identity checkpoints are in many ways unique to the trans experience, but also connected to and suggestive of other types of identity policing¹. In everyday social interactions, it is generally expected and assumed that one will be clearly identifiable as male or female, and that this sex (and corresponding gender identity as a man or a woman) has been unchanged since assigned at birth. Of course, this is not always the case as people are becoming more trans savvy, but it is undeniably the norm.

On a broad level, it is not uncommon for people to encounter questions such as, “Is this ID really yours?” or “Do you really belong in this space?” especially if, in the first scenario, their appearance has changed significantly since taking the ID photo, and in the second scenario, the person is perceived as an outsider or a threat. Trans people are one of many types of institutionally and socially vulnerable populations who are characterized as fake, threatening, and/or pathological. As a result, they are positioned as unqualified to authenticate the validity of their own gender identity. One question this project addresses is: How are situations of identity inspection or interrogation different for trans people?

In this project, I examine the ways in which institutions manage gender identity and, likewise, how individuals navigate circumstances where their trans status may become visible as the result of a non-normative presentation of self or through marked inconsistencies in their sex/gender embodiment, presentation of self, personal history,

¹ All names of participants have been changed to ensure confidentiality.
and/or documented identity. The stories presented in this dissertation destabilize and problematize how we understand the trans experience. They are reflections of a new historical moment where there is no clear and coherent identity narrative that trans people are compelled to give. Instead, trans individuals are strategically choosing which practices and narratives to mobilize depending on each situation they encounter. Furthermore, their stories illustrate a desire for intelligibility and inclusion, not the politicization of trans identities nor a call for collective action.

*Trans in America Today*

The relationship between sex and gender is a contested one both inside and outside of academia. Popularized in the 1970s with the oft quoted, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir 1953), the feminist notion that biology is not an essential determinate of social position created analytical distinctions between the body, sex, and socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity (Kessler and McKenna 1978; Rubin 1975, 1984). Sex was perceived as natural and essential in opposition to socialized gender roles. In recent years, scholars have presented a critique of this division, arguing that bodies, like gender, are also socially constructed (Butler 1990; Fausto-Sterling 2000; Kessler 1998; West and Zimmerman 1987). The body is recognized as the place where gender is “instituted and inscribed,” collapsing many previously argued sex/gender distinctions (Butler 1990: 136). The adage may be rewritten as, “One is not born, but rather becomes male or female.” These academic developments have profoundly influenced the ways that sex, gender, and sexuality are studied.
Paralleling developments in gender theory, there has been a proliferation of visible gender expressions, embodiments, and identities in the United States. In addition to the already existent categories of man, woman, and even transsexual, people are openly identifying as transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, bigendered, and third gendered, to name a few. While some trans people seek out medical technology to alter their bodies through hormones and/or surgery, a large number opt out of medical intervention altogether (Beemyn and Rankin 2011; Ekins and King 2001; Grant, Mottet, Tanis, Harrison, Herman, and Keisling 2011). Among those who avail themselves of medical technologies, decisions around which procedures to undergo and which hormones and dosages to take vary considerably, and only a small percentage of trans people will ever undergo genital reconstruction surgery (Beemyn and Rankin 2011; Grant et al 2011). Thus, accompanying a proliferation of emerging identities is an increasing number of bodies that fall outside normative categories of maleness and femaleness. Given such expansive variation in identification and experience, I make every attempt to use terminology presented by research participants and scholars. However, when making more comprehensive statements, I will use the term “trans” to identify people who have moved away from the sex/gender designation assigned at birth and the term “cis” to describe those who identify or align themselves with their assigned sex/gender. The reasons for making these choices and a more comprehensive definition of trans and cis are presented in the section entitled Terminology and Concepts.

The state of trans politics in America today is highly shaped by a drastic increase in trans media visibility and by the mainstreaming of a trans rights movement that parallels the contemporary gay and lesbian rights movement. In the last decade, there has
been a remarkable shift in trans media visibility away from pathological, criminal, or “freak show,” representations, relegated predominantly to talk shows, towards more normalizing personal narratives disseminated across wider audiences. Notably, the major motion picture Transamerica (Tucker 2005), which depicts the physical and social transformation of a trans woman, grossed $9 million at the United States box office and earned lead actress Felicity Huffman a Golden Globe Award (IMDb 2008). In the same year, the Sundance channel released a documentary on the daily lives of four trans college students called TransGeneration, and the popular Showtime network series the L Word added trans man character Max Sweeney to the cast (Simmons 2006; The L Word 2008). In 2007 and 2008 Oprah featured a number of transgender guests on her daytime talk show from “the pregnant man” Thomas Beatie to transgender children, teens, and families (Oprah 2008). Also in 2008, trans woman Isis King appeared as a contestant on Tyra Bank’s reality show America’s Next Top Model. Soon after, Chaz Bono, previously known as Chastity and child of the famous entertainers Sonny and Cher, returned to the media spotlight by publicly announcing his gender transition. Chaz appeared as a contestant on the prime time reality television show Dancing With the Stars, and released a memoir and documentary about his gender transition (ABC 2011; Bono 2011; Bailey and Barbeto 2011). These are just a few of the numerous examples of the increasing visibility of trans people in the media. While this has prompted a greater cultural discourse around transgenderism and trans rights, it must be noted that these new representations are not necessarily better than previous portrayals of trans people as “freak shows.” In fact, the current coverage of trans people resembles the 1950’s news media boom starring “Ex-GI becomes Blonde Bombshell” Christine Jorgensen and the
lesser known Charlotte McLeod and Tamra Rees (Meyerowitz 1998, 2004; Skidmore 2011). The coverage is limited to those espousing the hegemonic “born in the wrong body” narratives and to primarily white, middle-class, heterosexual, and American representations.

In addition to the marked change in media visibility, significant changes in civil rights legislation and anti-discrimination policies have also materialized. As of April 2008, over one hundred jurisdictions nationwide, including thirteen states and the District of Columbia, have adopted laws to ban discrimination based on gender identity and expression (TLPI 2008). Similarly, several states, including New York and Kentucky, have passed laws prohibiting discrimination in public employment on the basis of gender identity and expression (TLPI 2008). Nationwide and statewide polls show that people in the United States have a surprisingly high level of understanding and acceptance of transgender people (ESPA 2008, HRC 2002). A Human Rights Campaign survey, conducted in 2007, reported 72 percent of respondents across the nation agreed with the statement: “Fairness is a basic American value and employment decisions should be based solely on qualifications and job performance, including for transgender people” (HRC 2008). In an even more recent survey conducted in New York State, the Empire State Pride Agenda reported 78 percent of New Yorkers are in favor of passing a law to protect transgender people from discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations (ESPA 2008). In spite of an increasing number of legal protections, however, many scholars argue that such policies benefit only those trans people who can successfully argue that they are citizens who deserve protection (Aizura 2006; Spade 2011). Those who can make these claims are disproportionately white, heterosexual, and
middle-class trans people (Aizura 2006; Spade 2011). Instead of protecting most trans
persons, these policies end up providing support to institutions such as the prison
industrial complex, marriage, and the military, that have negative impacts on
marginalized trans communities (Spade 2011).

Overall, the environment for trans people in the United States remains tenuous.
Despite legislative changes, trans people remain a demographic that experiences
discrimination, poverty, unemployment, HIV infection, incarceration, and abuse at
percentages well above the general population (Spade 2011; Grant et al 2011). In 2011,
the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task
Force released *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender
Discrimination Survey*, documenting the state of transgender individuals in the United
States. Based on survey data from 6,456 people, the report documents that, among other
things, respondents: were nearly four times more likely to have a household income of
less than $10,000 per year than the general population; experienced unemployment at
twice the rate of the general population, with rates for people of color up to four times the
national unemployment rate; reported less than half the national rate of home ownership;
and reported over four times the national average of HIV infection. Respondents also
reported various types of discrimination due to their transgender or gender non-
conforming status including evictions (11%), being refused a home or apartment (19%),
and being refused medical care (19%).

On top of the high levels of discrimination, a culture of increased surveillance
adds further challenges to the lives of trans people. America’s institutional and cultural
responses to the September 11th, 2001 attacks on New York City and the Pentagon have
had serious consequences for trans Americans. Fear and anger directed towards “outsiders,” people considered unpatriotic and threats to national security, have led to increased national surveillance and policing. A central part of this regulation is increasing demands on identification documents and restricting immigration, asylum seeking and travel both domestically and internationally. After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the Department of Homeland Security and government officials passed laws restricting movement within the United States as well as across international borders. As of January 1, 2008, citizens were required to present a passport when traveling by land or sea to the Caribbean, Canada, and Mexico as part of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 (DHS 2011). The Department of Homeland Security instituted passport requirements such as digital photos in 2005, and radio frequency identification (RFID) chips containing personal biometric information and face-recognition data in 2007, in order to decrease the likelihood of fraudulent documents (Brandt 2005; Songini 2006). In 2008, the Transportation Security Administration started using body-scanning machines at ten of the nation’s busiest airports to see through passengers’ clothing during random screenings (DHS 2011). These security measures make it harder for trans people to manage disclosure of their identities and their pasts, for sex/gender “others” may be seen as threats to security. Even if trans people are not viewed as a threat, the “outing” of their status provides security personnel with the legal rationale for harassing, detaining, and barring their movement across borders as a result of transphobia. Social and legal challenges and risks are a daily reality for those who live outside or beyond normative conventions of sex/gender.
For all trans people, regardless of gender expression or embodiment, identity management is a critical process, which results either in intelligibility and inclusion or social disapproval, rejection, discrimination, and even physical harm. There are two distinct issues with trans identity management, although many trans people will experience both of these to a degree. First, some people want to be recognized within existing classifications of male or female, but are unable to attain a body that aligns with normative notions of maleness or femaleness and/or unable to acquire identity documents that match their identified sex. In many instances, these individuals do not have the resources or desire to complete the requirements of medical sex reassignment or legal sex reclassification. In some cases, individuals are unable to change all of their identity documents even after a medical sex reassignment because of state policies regarding birth certificates and the inconsistencies in which reclassification policies are enforced (Spade 2011). Second, individuals seeking to live outside of the binary classification system must negotiate a culture that forcefully compels sex and gender normativity. Such individuals may identify with and match the sex marker on their identity documents, but their expression of self challenges traditional notions of maleness and femaleness or masculinity and femininity. At first glance, these two issues may look the same, the regulation of sex/gender “others.” However, the negotiation of that “otherness” will differ depending on how trans individuals understand and seek to embody or present their identity. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that gender expressions and embodiments are highly racialized and, as such, racial, national, and ethnic identities become intertwined with any threat trans people pose as sex/gender “others” (Gehi 2009; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011; Spade 2011; Vidal-Ortiz 2009).
**Terminology and Concepts**

The word *trans* in this manuscript refers to individuals who have moved away from the sex assigned at birth and/or the gender identity traditionally associated with it.

This definition is a modification of Susan Stryker’s characterization of *transgender* in her book *Transgender History*. Stryker, a trans historian, states:

I use it [transgender] in this book to refer to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender. Some people move away from their birth-assigned gender because they feel strongly that they properly belong to another gender in which it would be better for them to live; others want to strike out toward some new location, some space not yet clearly defined or concretely occupied; still others simply feel the need to get away from the conventional expectations bound up with the gender that was initially put upon them. In any case, it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place—rather than any particular destination or mode of transition. (2008: 1)

Since there is no particular script or trajectory to being trans, other than a moving away from an assigned classification, trans people’s bodies, identities, and expressions of self vary immensely.

Now common language in scholarship on trans+ communities, the words *cis*, *cissexual*, and *cisgender* were relatively unknown until popularized by trans scholar and activist Julia Serano in her 2007 book *Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*. Complementary to trans, cis describes individuals who identify as and align with the sex assigned at birth (cissexual) and/or the corresponding gender identification (cisgender), written as “cis man” or “cis woman.” In some instances it might appear that the differences between cis and trans individuals are

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I use the term trans+ here to denote the inclusion of cis people within trans communities such as partners, family, friends, and admirers whose inclusion in events, spaces, and politics is shaped by an affective, sexual, intimate, or otherwise relationship to trans people.
negligible. I’ll simply state that both cis and trans are analytical concepts to be tugged at, reshaped, and held as questionable. I urge the reader to treat trans and cis like other identity categories I mobilize in this manuscript, as culturally specific and continuously contested.

Trans was chosen over other potential terms for several reasons. First, trans is stylistically appealing because it is shorter than listing a series of terms and more useful than an acronym in which many of the identities start with the letter T. Also, to consistently list terms such “genderqueer, transgender, and transsexual” would be to privilege a few identities over the many while reinforcing the assumption that identity categories are discrete, stable, and mutually exclusive, when indeed they are not. The distinction between terms, especially between transgender and transsexual, are rife with contradictions and representation politics that detract from the ways in which individuals use the labels for self-definition or community affiliation. For instance, transgender, popularized in the 1990s, is currently the most widely accepted umbrella term for those who are non-normatively sexed and/or gendered, and is used to encompass a range of identities including transsexual. It is also, however, criticized for its anti-transsexual roots. The term transgender is often associated with the privileging of those identities and expressions that most visibly “transgress” gender norms over those that transition from one sex to the other (Valentine 2007). The transgender/transsexual distinction has also been reinforced in scholarship that characterizes transsexuality as gender variance that is “lived,” serious, and “real” and transgenderism as playful and superficial (see Aizura 2006). These characterizations of the transgender/transsexual distinction, however, minimize the complicated ways in which individuals align themselves with
identity categories and downplay the cultural contexts through which these labels arise and gain significance. The medical establishment, scholars, activists, policy makers, and trans individuals are each invested in this distinction to different extents and for different motivations (Valentine 2007). It is for these reasons that trans is used throughout this manuscript often alongside gender variant which describes people who deviate from societal norms of maleness and femaleness, but who may or may not change their sex or gender identity. In general, since some individuals who fall within the characterization of trans refuse to identify with this term or do not use it for self-identification, I defer to the labels and identities of participants throughout the analysis whenever possible. Likewise, when evaluating previous scholarship, I use the terminology of the researcher such as “transsexual,” “cross dresser,” or “transgenderist,” even when this language appears inaccurate or outdated.

In order to adequately capture the multiple vectors of oppression through which trans subjectivity is shaped, I coin the phrase “cis normative binary sex/gender system,” which I use throughout this manuscript. A cis normative binary sex/gender system is structured on the disciplinary regimes of cissexism, sex and gender normativity, and the gender binary. I will briefly summarize each of these concepts. First, I have combined the terms sex and gender into “sex/gender” in order to highlight the fact that, while often productive to separate, these analytical concepts are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Sex and gender are almost always working in concert with one another, and the multifaceted relationship between the two is especially salient in the lives of trans people. The concepts of sex and gender normativity and the gender binary are not new to trans studies. In brief, the phrase “sex and gender normativity” refers to the socially
constructed standards and guidelines that govern which bodies, expressions, and identities are perceived as normal, natural, real, and of value, and which are not. Normativity emphasizes the distinction that “normal” is a perception, not a fact. The gender binary is a classification system that reproduces the notion that there are only two dichotomous and complementary sex/gender categories (male/man and female/woman). At the heart of these systems is the belief that sex/gender is easily ascertained and immutable. In other words, it is assumed that one is readily identifiable as male or female at birth and continues to identify and appear as this sex (and its coinciding gender) throughout the life course. These concepts account for the ways in which movement away from a sex or gender category is policed. However, they do not fully capture the particular qualities of trans subjectivity.

A conscious and deliberate shift in sex/gender self-identification is what distinguishes trans identities and experiences from cis ones. In society, it is not just the movement away from sex/gender categories and expressions that is regulated, but also the (re-)alignment with a new category and/or the refusal to identify with a sex/gender altogether. Serano describes this particular system of inequality as “cissexism,” “the belief that transsexuals’ identified genders are inferior to, or less than authentic than, those of cissexuals” (2007: 12). She states, “The most common expression of cissexism occurs when people attempt to deny the transsexual the basic privileges that are associated with the trans person’s self-identified gender. Common examples include purposeful misuse of pronouns or insisting that the trans person use a different public restroom” (2007:13). Distinguishing between trans and cis specific forms of sex and gender production and policing is important. However, the use of “sexism” in its
different forms implicates a simplified and inaccurate view of power relations as top/down. I believe that the rigorous process of naturalizing dichotomous and complementary sexes and genders and the privileging of certain expressions, practices and embodiments over others is best represented through the language of normativity and the gender binary, both of which signify the productive and repressive effects of power.

*Chapter Overviews*

This project explores the logics and strategies that trans people employ during interactions where their identities may be called into question, and where there are direct consequences for identity invalidation and rejection. Following the introduction, I begin by reviewing texts that present social approaches to understanding the link between sex and gender as well as how these theories give way to trans theorizing and trans studies. The scholars and theories chosen for this section specifically engage in discussions of transgenderism, transsexuality and the queering of gender, which is not representative of sex and gender theorizing as a whole. The scholarship in this chapter, “Theorizing Trans/Gender,” is arranged chronologically and thematically, to trace the development of thought on trans subjectivity and to show how scholars critique, revise, and build upon previous theories and perspectives. In addition, the *Theorizing Trans* sections demonstrate the ways in which theories emerge from developments, tensions, and conversations occurring within feminist, gay and lesbian, and trans communities. The contributions of trans and gender variant identified scholars are central to these dialogues and intellectual developments. Overall, the shifts from social constructionism to postmodernism and trans theorizing are presented.
Chapter Two, “Transgender Identity Development and Management,” presents a review of social scientific empirical research on the construction and maintenance of trans people’s sex/gender identities. The bulk of this literature, published in the late 1990s and throughout the 2000s, relies heavily on a “coming out” model from scholarship on gay and lesbian identities to frame the process of transitioning. Trans people are perceived as passing through a series of developmental stages marked by the internal recognition of a differently gendered self, the disclosure of this discordance to others, and the shift in one’s presentation of self and embodiment with the ultimate goal of achieving both inter- and intra-subjective recognition. Research samples tend to be either female-to-male or male-to-female specific, although some recent studies include data from trans people across multiple and varied identities, bodily configurations, and expressions. While this research offers an understanding of the ways in which gender is accomplished during interpersonal exchanges, I argue that it is limited by the assumption that there is identity trajectory or unidirectional, developmental path that is driven primarily, if not solely, by a “core” sex/gender.

I contend that trans people make decisions about how to self-identify, whether or not to take hormones or undergo surgery, and what parts of their history they reveal to others in an ongoing, dynamic, interactive, and fluid way that involves self-knowledge and personal desires as well as societal demands and expectations. In this sense, trans identities still require a self-recognition of discordance like gays and lesbians, but the disclosure of their identities is not akin to a “coming out.” Since this literature does not account for the ways in which social structures shape identity construction and maintenance, I also review empirical research that addresses the ways that trans people
are shaped by, excluded from, or inadequately incorporated into institutions. This research helps to illustrate the structural influences on trans identity management. Overall, this chapter shows that there is a disconnect between research on identity development and research on trans people’s relationships to institutions. In the following chapter, I propose a way of thinking about trans people’s lives that connects these two elements.

Chapter Three, “Border Crossing: A Framework for Conceptualizing Trans Identity Management,” presents a new lens through which to examine trans identity management as an ongoing, interactional accomplishment. Drawing from geography and cultural studies, I adopt the language of borders and border crossing to present trans subjectivity as identity management instead of identity development. The primary function of borders is to divide two or more social orders and to distinguish one population from another. Some borders are more highly restricted than others and, in general, they are not a fine line of distinction, but a permeable zone that shifts and changes over time. The borders central to the lives of trans people are those that involve real power dynamics, and where clear distinctions between “us” and “them” are reproduced. These borders are not necessarily physical boundaries, but situations where people are required to align themselves with one sex/gender or the other and where a failure to be validated as an insider results in invalidation, exclusion, rejection, detainment, or even harm.

To address the different ways in which trans people’s identities might be interrogated, I separate the types of borders into three main categories: sex classification borders, normative embodiment borders, and lived gender borders. Sex classification
borders are situations where one’s identity, body, and presentation of self are matched up against identity documents or other personal records. Examples of sex classification borders include showing one’s passport to security agents when traveling internationally, showing one’s driver’s license to a bouncer at an age-barred venue, or providing a resume to a potential employer. Normative embodiment borders are sites of sex-segregates facilities such as public restrooms, college housing, and hospital rooms. While one’s alignment with one sex/gender or the other is highly salient at these borders, in virtually all day-to-day interactions it is expected that people appear as cis men or women. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, but in general there are few spaces where additional identities are recognized. Therefore, in addition to the preceding border categories, I account for the possibility that one’s sex/gender identity is called into question at any moment as an encounter with a lived gender border. In order to successfully “border cross,” trans people will enact strategies of bodily comportment, presentations of self, and personal history management, which may or may not be accurate reflections of how they self identify.

In Chapter Four, “Research Methodology,” I outline the methods used to collect and analyze the data for this project and present an overview of the participant demographics. In order to obtain rich and detailed data about the decision-making and meaning-making processes that occur in dynamic social interactions I conducted semi-structured in-person interviews. In sum, I interviewed forty trans individuals, representing diversity with regards to sex assigned at birth, gender identity and expression, hormone and surgical status, race and ethnicity, sexuality, relationship status, nationality, educational attainment, occupational status, religion, disability, veteran
status, and location. It is common for scholars conducting qualitative studies to utilize a
grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis when the overall goal is to
generate concepts or identify themes as they emerge in the data. In my project, however,
I begin with a clear theoretical framework of border-crossing with the goal of collecting
data that reflects, critiques, and refines this model. In this manner, I developed an
interview protocol modeled on what is often called a “theory-driven model of
interviewing,” which provides the opportunity for subjects to engage with, contest, and
refine the theory in their responses (Pawson 1996). Likewise, I applied a theory-driven
methodology to the process of coding analyzing data, based loosely on a “multi-grounded
theory” approach (Golkuhl and Cronholm 2003). The results of my analyses are
presented in the succeeding chapters five and six.

Chapter Five, “Administrative Mis/Recognition: Identity Management at Sex
Classification Borders” presents an examination of the ways in which trans people
manage their identities at sex classification borders. In Part I, I provide an analysis of the
ways in which trans people account for their identities across a range of identity
checkpoints: from highly restricted security checkpoints at airports to moderately
restricted borders such as interactions with students and teachers in a classroom. I argue
that, in addition to inter- and intra- subjective forms of recognition, trans people also seek
administrative recognition – the verification of one’s documented identity. At sex
classification borders, identity verification occurs through the inspection and comparison
of identity documents, and other personal records, against a person’s visible
comportment. Trans people’s access to institutions, organizations and social spaces is
shaped, in part, by the common experience of having inconsistent, outdated, or inaccurate
identity documents (Girshick 2008; Namaste 2000). Even for those who are able to reclassify their sex, it is not guaranteed that their new identity will be validated across agencies, institutions, and organizations. As a result, trans people are often denied access to social and material resources, support systems, and entry to various facilities as a result of administrative misrecognition.

Demands for administrative recognition include consistency across identity documentation, and also appeals to normativity in the body, appearance, and across other signifiers such as race, ethnicity, nationality, that specific to each context. Based on my data, I found that trans individuals enact what I call strategic normativity, temporary bodily comportments and narratives of self that align with context specific norms of gender, race, ethnicity, and sexuality, with the overall goal of achieving administrative recognition. Strategic normativity may or may not include the disclosure of one’s trans status, because, for some, disclosure leads to misrecognition, while for others it makes recognition a possibility. Through the deployment of strategic normativity, some individuals did achieve administrative recognition while others did not. My findings suggest that a consistent implementation of strategic normativity results in more consistent experiences of administrative recognition.

In Part II, I present stories of individuals involved in the process of changing their name and sex marker on identity documents. I argue that the pathologization of trans identities, and the cis normative policies and practices that shape the sex reclassification process, situate trans people as unqualified to authenticate their own gender(s). Sex authentication, a necessity for achieving administrative recognition, is shaped by trans/intersex distinction and rests upon cissexist policies, protocols, and practices of
individual agents within the various parts of the sex reclassification and identity change processes. Based on my data, I found that trans people engaged in practices of strategic normativity and strategic hybridity in order to achieve sex authentication and process a formal sex reclassification. For those participants who embodied hegemonic notions of gender, or who could claim an intersex identity, these attributes provided proof of their “true” sex, and rendered their trans status invisible or insignificant. Still, some trans people were unable to or did not desire to meet the cis normative binary standards for sex reclassification and sought alternative means to achieving administrative recognition.

In Chapter Six, “Embodying Gender: Identity Management at Normative Embodiment Borders”, I investigate the ways in which trans people manage their identities when preparing for and upon entering and occupying a variety of sex-segregated facilities including bathrooms, locker rooms, hospital rooms, and college dormitories. These normative embodiment borders are single-sexed spaces or groupings, usually sectioned off by physical barriers, which are frequently part of a set or pair: one for males, one for females. One assumption is that achieving intersubjective recognition as a man or a woman would result in inclusion and incorporation in these spaces. While being normatively gendered would certainly contribute to the likelihood that one achieves inclusion in a sex-segregated space, this is not the only factor by which normative embodiment borders are constructed and enforced.

In Part I, focus specifically on ways in which notions of “us” versus “them” and “safe” versus “threatening” shape trans peoples experiences in sex-segregated facilities. I found that decisions on which bathrooms to enter were highly based on the participant’s sex/gender identification as well as the fear of being seen as a threatening subject –
someone perceived as a dangerous intruder, or of being a threatened subject – someone who is at risk for enduring the violence or aggression of others, often contingent on the visibility or knowledge of their gender incongruence. Upon encounters of gender policing in bathrooms, trans people’s perceptions of these experiences and their responses to border enforcement are shaped by the ways in which they conceive of their identity in relation to cis normative binary categories.

In Part II, I examine the strategies that trans people use to garner inclusion in sex-segregated spaces and the role that other participants play in maintaining and reconstituting the border. In response to gender policing at sex-segregated bathrooms the participants in my study enacted a variety of strategies in order to be included in these spaces. Many trans people avoided public bathroom use altogether or selectively chose bathrooms that were unisex or in low-traffic areas where they minimized interactions with others. Other individuals tacitly resisted the enforcement of normative embodiment borders by striking compromises over bathroom use with coworkers or making requests for accessible bathrooms. In addition to these single-handed border-crossing strategies, some trans people also called on friends, family members, or acquaintances to serve as border ambassadors, cis and normatively gendered individuals who accompanied them into sex-segregated facilities. While the presence of border ambassadors assuaged the discomfort of some of the interviewees, the reliance on their authority reproduced the notion that trans people are unqualified to authenticate their own identity.

In Part III, I explore the role that personal history and documented identity plays in the regulation of gender at sex-segregated facilities. In situations where border enforcers were privy to the identity documents and records of the participants, I found
that staff, administrators, and other personnel responded to the presence of trans people by imposing administrative sex differentiation – the bureaucratic and administrative enforcement of a sex binary based on cissexual norms of male and female bodies. In the stories included in this section, trans people were not completely denied access to facilities. Be that as it may, they experienced deliberate acts of exclusion and marginalization rather than being fully incorporated into these spaces alongside cis people. Even those who perceived this exclusion as beneficial, the end result of being formally treated as a gendered “other” remained. At first glance these instances may appear to be administrative misrecognition, but they are not. The individuals in this section are not facing exclusion under the premise that they are not who they claim to be. Instead, they face exclusion on the very basis of the recognition of their trans status, and the rigid enforcement of cis normative sex/gender binary policies and protocols.

In Chapter Seven, “Border Crossings and the Future of Trans Politics,” I present an overview of the findings from Chapters Five and Six and discuss the ways in which they contribute to previous scholarship and theories on trans identities. Overall, the findings in my study suggest that institutionalized and interpersonal gatekeeping of trans people is expansive and diffuse, existing well beyond the relationship that trans people have with the medical community. In the past, scholars such as Sandy Stone and Viviane Namaste have advocated for a politics of trans visibility and trans-specific forms of institutional and social recognition. However, there are clear limits to what types of agency trans individuals can enact based on their race, class, gender, sexuality, occupational status, and so on. Furthermore, legal scholars remain critical of the effectiveness of trans-specific legislation and policies. I argue that my findings reflect
individualized, not collective, forms of resistance, which further obscures any projections for a future of trans politics. This chapter is concluded with a discussion of the limitations of the study, my role as a trans researcher, and ideas for future research.
Chapter One  
Theorizing Trans/Gender

Social Constructionist Theories

Sociologist Harold Garfinkel (1967) led the way in promoting the social construction of gender in his book *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, in which he argues that meanings in everyday situations are mutually produced and sustained by the members of a society. Gender is not a natural condition, but a “managed achievement” attained through the process of presenting and interpreting social cues that indicate whether one is a man or a woman. Garfinkel thought that, for gender “normals,” these cues were a taken-for-granted backdrop in social interactions, which he sought to reveal. Garfinkel’s exploration of gender folkways centered on “Agnes,” a woman, appearing to be intersex, who came to a Gender Identity Clinic in order to obtain genital surgery to become female. Because Agnes’ body was not “normally” sexed, Garfinkel determined that she had to work to achieve her sex status. He states:

*The work of achieving and making secure her rights to live as a normal, natural female while having continually to provide for the possibility of detection and ruin carried on within socially structured conditions I call Agnes’ “passing.”* (1967: 137, emphasis in original)

Agnes’ “passing” always involved anticipating what may be asked of her by doctors, strangers, and acquaintances, and answering questions in such a way as to present a consistent and coherent female identity. Garfinkel found that Agnes was skilled at deflecting questions about her personal biography. In response to such inquiries, she presented herself as modest or shy and encouraged others to talk about themselves, which allowed her to evade questions and had the simultaneous effect of making her appear more feminine.
Garfinkel was astounded by Agnes’s awareness of the everyday routinized aspects of gender that “normals” took for granted. He called her a “practical methodologist” because she was able to treat “natural facts of life” as social facts. Garfinkel noted:

We learned from Agnes, who treated sexed persons as cultural events that members make happen, that members’ practices alone produce the observable-tellable normal sexuality of persons, and do so only, entirely, exclusively in actual, singular, particular occasions through actual witnessed displays of common talk and conduct. (1967: 181)

In reality, however, Agnes was sexed male at birth and had been taking synthetic female hormones making her appear to have testicular feminization syndrome, which she revealed to Garfinkel years after her surgery (Garfinkel 1984). Nevertheless, this did not discredit Garfinkel nor invalidate his findings. The combination of Agnes’ transsexuality and the ruse that she played on Garfinkel served only to confirm his theory that gender is the product of an interactive social process.

Eleven years after its initial publication, Garfinkel’s ethnomethodological approach to gender was reinterpreted and reconfigured from a feminist perspective by sociologists Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna (1978). Kessler and McKenna, like Garfinkle, start from the premise that one actively displays cues to convey his or her gender. However, Garfinkel’s notion of “passing” implies that the “displayer” does all of the “work.” “The problem with conceptualizing ‘passing’ as discrete management devices,” state Kessler and McKenna, “is that this emphasizes its deceptive features and overlooks the ongoing process of ‘doing’ gender in everyday interactions that we all engage in” (1978: 126). In social interactions, people do not passively “read” another’s gender, but actively assess the cues presented and “attribute,” or designate, a gender to that individual. Once an initial gender attribution has been made, that gender designation
provides a filter through which all new material gets processed. This interactive process of display and interpretation, Kessler and McKenna named “doing gender.”

Interested in the role of the body in gender attribution, Kessler and McKenna (1978) used plastic overlays to create images of figures with differing male and female bodily configurations. Adults were shown a set of figures and asked to assign a gender to each one. Characteristics such as facial hair, breasts, genitalia, and hair length were varied across the images, and in some cases removed completely, in order to assess which individual or combination of signifiers were the greater determinants of gender. Kessler and McKenna found that, when present, genitals played a central role in gender attribution and became the filter through which many other, but not all, cues were interpreted. The presence of a penis, for example, resulted in a ninety-six percent male attribution rate regardless of the presence of other gender cues such as long hair and breasts. The presence of the vagina, however, did not have the same eclipsing effect, and was ignored as a female cue by one-third of the participants. These findings suggest that the penis is the dominant cultural signifier of gender, whether visible or assumed. In addition, Kessler and McKenna found that when no genitals were present, “male” was attributed to the majority of the figures.

Kessler and McKenna claimed that although largely obscured by clothing in everyday interactions, people assign one another a set of genitalia based on their reading and interpretation of social and bodily cues. Kessler and McKenna refer to these unseen, but assumed genitalia as “cultural genitalia.” Once an individual assigns someone cultural genitalia, all other social cues are interpreted as reflections of this genital configuration. Kessler and McKenna provide the example of a child who viewed an
image of a person in a suit and tie and stated, “It’s a man, because he has a pee-pee” (1978: 154). In this scenario, the unknowable, but assumed “pee-pee” was used to verify the gender attribution of “man” instead of the masculine markers of the suit and tie. In other words, the suit and tie are not passively read as signifiers of “man,” but actively reinscribed as symbols of what someone with a penis would wear. A result of this process of interpretation is that the body becomes secured as a site of “truth” about gender, and the fact that cultural norms dictate our reading of bodies is rendered invisible.

Kessler and McKenna’s theory of gender attribution explains why Garfinkel and the doctors at the Gender Identity Clinic did not regard Agnes as a transsexual. The doctors initially perceived Agnes as a woman, attributing her female “cultural genitalia.” As a result, Agnes’ penis became coded through this initial female gender attribution as something that was “wrong” with her body, not that which proved her maleness. Instead of labeling her as male, the doctors saw her as a female with an intersexed body. Agnes, then, was not perceived as masquerading as a “normal” woman, but, in spite of her body, producing her own “truth” of femaleness through biography, appearance, and behavior. Reading the tale of Agnes as a transsexual who was able to garner a successful gender attribution from Garfinkel, Kessler and McKenna reveal the centrality of “cultural genitalia” in the process of “doing gender.”

Following the logic of Kessler and McKenna, Sociologists Candice West and Don Zimmerman (1987) reiterate the constructedness of gender in everyday life by differentiating gender display (Goffman 1976; 1977) from the accomplishment of gender. The notion of gender display, as developed by Goffman refers to the “conventionalized portrayals” of “culturally established correlates of sex” (1976: 69). In other words,
Goffman believes that gender is “a socially scripted dramatization of the culture’s idealization of feminine and masculine natures” (1987: 130, emphasis in original). Goffman argues that these dramatizations are “scheduled,” displayed at specific times to frame other, more important, activities. Unlike Goffman, West and Zimmerman (1987) claim that gender is not something that occurs at optional or chosen intervals like a display; instead, gender is an ongoing accomplishment embedded in everyday interactions. They state, “In everyday life, categorization is established and sustained by the socially required identificatory displays that proclaim one’s membership in one or the other category,” or what they call the “doing” of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). In order to account for the social aspect of sex, West and Zimmerman also differentiated “sex” from “sex category.” Sex is defined by physical criteria alone whereas sex category is determined by physical criteria as well as any claims to that category. From this perspective, transsexuality is the discordance between sex and sex category instead of the discordance between sex and gender attribution.

West and Zimmerman depart from Kessler and McKenna by pointing to the fact that even though Agnes’ genitalia was not immediately observable and did not contribute to the initial gender attribution, it was nevertheless present and one of many cues available for the doctors to read and interpret in their ongoing interactions with Agnes. Where Kessler and McKenna thought that it was Agnes’ female cultural genitalia that became the filter through which all other cues were interpreted, West and Zimmerman do not give that much credit to cultural genitalia. Instead, West and Zimmerman believed that Agnes had to constantly reproduce evidence of her femininity in order to preserve her sex categorization of female.
In order to preserve her sex categorization as female, West and Zimmerman argued that Agnes did not need to live up to some ideal of femininity, but to constantly produce herself, through social interactions, as a normatively gendered woman. Overly feminine behavior might have aroused suspicion just as masculine behavior would. West and Zimmerman assert:

Doing gender consists of managing such occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the outcome is seen and seeable in context as gender-appropriate or, as the case may be, gender-inappropriate, that is...at the risk of gender assessment. (1987: 136, emphasis in original)

“Doing gender” is learning and producing gender difference in social interactions. It is an unavoidable aspect of everyday interactions because even when people aren’t consciously displaying femininity or masculinity, others are always continuously categorizing people as women or men.

Embedded in social interactions, gender also plays a central role in organizing institutional arrangements, argued West and Zimmerman. They claim that because gender naturalizes sex differences it also establishes hierarchical social arrangements based on sex differences as natural and normal. Heterosexuality and the gendered division of labor are reified through the naturalization of the gender binary. In so far as this relates to transsexuality, West and Zimmerman proclaim that, “the physical reconstruction of sex criteria pays ultimate tribute to the ‘essentialness’ of our sexual natures—as woman or as men” (1987: 145, emphasis in original). In other words, transsexuals do not challenge the sex and gender paradigm, but serve to reinforce it. From this perspective transsexuality paradoxically reconstructs hetero patriarchy and essentialized notions of sex through acts of corporeal gender deconstruction.
The notion that gender is “accomplished” as something that individuals “do” as opposed to sex which is “assumed” on the basis of one’s gender, remained the dominant model for analyzing sex and gender in the social sciences well into the 1990s. West and Zimmerman represented a larger trend in modernized gender theorizing where sex classifications and gender are perceived as social products. The model of “doing” gender, and similar conceptions, provided scholars with conceptual tools to further critique previously taken for granted social arrangements including labor, the family, and heterosexuality. Although highly useful for examining hierarchical relationships and structural inequalities, these theories are unable to explain how the gender binary is produced and maintained. Questions remain: How and why is sex and gender difference forced upon bodies, expressions and identities? In what ways are people compelled to fulfill normative genders? Social constructionism offers a critique of the meanings attached to bodies and identities, gender difference, but offers little critique or understanding of the identity categories themselves. As a result, applications of this perspective have focused on re-valuing femininity and the position of women, but not re-evaluating what it means to be a man or a woman, or male or female.

More significantly, these perspectives do not account for differences between trans and cis experiences in doing gender and the cultural contexts through which these differences arise. Because social constructionists did not account for how the gender binary is produced, they often relied on the very biological and psychological notions of sex they critiqued in order to explain gender difference. In essence, social constructionists promoted the notion of a “core” and unified gender identity. This only perpetuated the pathologization of transsexuality, since it was assumed that a “core”
gender identity naturally matched one’s assigned sex. Along these same lines, extreme anti-trans rhetoric emerged in academic and in feminist communities, claiming that transsexual women were still innately males. Notably, Mary Daly (1978), Janice Raymond (1979) and later Sheila Jeffreys (2003; 2005), characterized transsexual women as “dupes” of gender, technologies of patriarchy, and “rapists” for violating women’s only spaces. It was not until the inception of post-modern “queer theories” of gender in the early 1990s that such negative sentiments towards trans people began to shift. However, many academics, feminist and non-feminist alike, continue to favor this social constructionist approach to gender, dismissing post-modern accounts as not being grounded in lived experiences. Even so, the current social constructionist framework of doing gender does not allow for critical trans theorizing.

*Post-Modern Gender Theory*

Feminist philosopher and queer theorist Judith Butler established a new framework for conceptualizing sex, gender, identity and agency, with her notion of gender performativity (1990; 1993). In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler critiqued feminist theorists for promoting a universal and unifying notion of “womanhood,” based on the belief of a core gender identity. Butler claims not only that a core identity as a man or woman is false, but also that the perpetuation of binary gender categories as natural sustains compulsory heterosexuality. She is critical of the pervasive heterosexism existent in feminist theory and positioned her theoretical contributions from the perspective that heterosexuality is not a natural and fixed model for sexual desire. Butler argues, instead, that heterosexuality must repetitively recreate the conditions that produce
it as natural and stable. These conditions are not solely the subjugation of women for the benefit of men (Rich 1980), but also the repetitive and compulsive reinforcement of the gender binary. Butler claims that heterosexuality positions itself as natural and normative by repetitively and compulsively naturalizing “men” and “women” as dichotomous, opposing, and complementary categories:

The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire (1990: 30)

From this perspective, the gender binary and heteronormativity are inextricably linked and operate in mutually reinforcing ways. If the coherency of heterosexuality hinges upon the naturalization of the gender binary, then how are gender categories constituted and maintained?

In her theory of *gender performativity*, Butler asserts that gender is “the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1990: 179). Individuals engage in a “*stylized repetition of acts*,” a constant comportment and re-comportment into intelligible gender categories, as men and women and male and female. These performances of gender are neither arbitrary nor voluntary, but rather carefully constructed acts of gender expression and embodiment that are crafted to be understood and unquestioned by others. It is important to recognize that these acts are enacted within a rigid and regulatory framework, a “heterosexual matrix,” where reproductive heterosexuality is reinforced. The socially patterned, repetitive and compulsory “performances” of gender become internalized to the extent that people believe that their behaviors, desires, and expressions come from some internal source (1990: 179). The “truth” of gender is not something
that emerges from an essential or corporeal component of individuals, but rather it is produced through repetitive and compulsory gender performances.

The outcome of these “performative accomplishments” is that certain genders are presented as “originals” and others as “copies.” Through the perception that certain genders are “copies,” such as trans genders, those positioned as “originals” get inscribed as normal and natural. To understand how this process is achieved, Butler examined ways of doing gender that are deliberately intended to “copy” or parody by turning to drag. The transgressive achievement of drag is that, in some instances, drag undoes the copy/original distinction by challenging the belief that genitalia and gender performances are one in the same. “Gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin,” wrote Butler (1990: 175). The effect of drag is to reveal how all gender is an impersonation, to imitate the myth of a “true” and “natural” gender. Drag has the potential to demonstrate that no one “is” a man or a woman, but everyone is constantly “becoming” a man or a woman. While Butler’s analysis in Gender Trouble revealed the processes through which sex, gender, and sexuality coherencies are produced, her focus was primarily on gender and sexuality, leaving many to assume that sex is a stable referent to a performed gender. Moreover, many scholars and activists have mis-read Gender Trouble (1990) as asserting that “performances,” taken literally, are optional and that any sort of gender play is a challenge to the binary system and compulsory heterosexuality.

In her subsequent monograph Bodies that Matter (1993), Butler revisits the relationship between the sexed body and the performativity of gender:

If gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this ‘sex’ except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed
by gender, but that ‘sex’ becomes something like a fiction, perhaps fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access (Butler 1993: 5).

She claims that sex, like gender, ought to be conceived of as a set of cultural norms that regulate how the body becomes readable. Nevertheless, sex should not be absorbed into gender under the constructionist view that sex is an imprinting of gender on the body. The body is not “a site or surface” to be interpreted, but is itself “a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (1993: 9, emphasis in original). In other words, bodies are not to be thought of as matter, but as becoming materialized. Where gender performance is a parody for which there is no original, sex “citing” is the reiteration of hegemonic norms for which there is no referent. “Sex” must be constantly cited in order to materialize and therefore is unstable and a site of permanent contestation. Sex is, in fact, compelled to materialize, to be read, for it is part of regulatory practices that both regulate and produce the body.

The materialization of sexed subjects occurs through the repetitious production and rejection of those bodies, expressions and behaviors that fall outside the intelligible categories of male and female or intelligible signifiers of maleness and femaleness:

This exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet “subject,” but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject. The abject designates here precisely those ‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life which are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the ‘unlivable’ is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject. (Butler 1993: 3)

As Butler asserted, the abject is necessary for the production of the subject, but it also remains a constant threat to disrupt the presumed stability of the subject. From this
In addition to reaffirming the constructedness of sex, Butler also addresses the misconception that gender performances are optional and that all gender play is subversive in *Bodies That Matter*, in this case by returning to drag. Butler claims that drag is only subversive “to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality’s claim on naturalness and originality” (1993: 125). Using the film *Paris is Burning*, a documentary on the ball culture in New York City, Butler interrogated the ways in which drag challenges and reinscribes hegemonic gender norms. In ball culture, drag is less of a formal stage performance as it is a runway-type walk where competitors battle each other in different categories of gender performance. Although the standards of each category vary, most hold “realness” or how close one gets to the idealized norm of the gender they are presenting, as the ultimate goal. A successful competitor makes the gender performance look “natural” and is not “read” as a fake.

Butler questioned whether the “denaturalization of the norm” works to subvert the gender binary or reidealize it (1993: 129). To answer this, Butler examines the case of a Latina and pre-operative transsexual woman Venus Xtravaganza who is killed, presumably by a sex work client who discovers her trans status. In the film, Venus describes her desire that after becoming a “real woman” she would find a mate who would whisk her away to the suburbs and away from a life of homophobia, racism, and poverty. Venus’ ambitions to embody a hegemonic notion of womanhood characterized
by heterosexuality, whiteness, and a middle-class lifestyle is precisely what Butler
problematicized:

> If the signifiers of whiteness and femaleness…are sites of phantasmatic promise,
> then it is clear that women of color and lesbians…constitute a site of
> identification that is consistently refused and abjected in the collective
> phantasmatic pursuit of a transubstantiation into various forms of drag,

Butler perceives Venus as reinscribing hegemonic norms in her attempt to cross from one
set of identity prescriptions to another. She argues that it was Venus’ inability to signify
whiteness and femaleness that eventually resulted in her death. The process of
“denaturalization” that Venus engaged in challenges the presumed “naturalness” of
gender, but upon the exposure of her maleness, her performance of femaleness failed and
she was rendered unintelligible. Through this example, Butler distinguishes between a
queer/transgendering and a normative transsexuality, privileging the former as subversive
and the latter as a reconstitution of the hegemonic gender and sexual constructs it
purports to challenge.

Butler’s “troubling” of identity categories inspired a shift in gender studies
towards embracing embodiments and expressions of gender that challenge the gender
binary and compulsory heterosexuality. However, many interpret Butler’s writings as a
criticism of transsexuals for maintaining or aspiring to attain the norms that render them
marginal and oppressed in the first place. This interpretation is reasonable to the extent
that many trans people fulfill idealized gender norms, but then again so do cis people for
that matter. To hold trans people individually responsible for the reinscription of gender
norms is an ill-informed reduction of Butler’s analysis of the social, structural, and
discursive systems that drive compulsory gender normativity. Although she uses trans
and gender variant people to illustrate her arguments, Butler’s conceptualization of power applies to everyone.

Overall, Butler’s scholarship on sex, gender, and sexuality called attention to the ways in which individuals challenge or “trouble” binary genders, and it did not position certain gender identities as inherently subversive or normative. For example, Butler sympathized with the work of certain trans scholars and activists such as Kate Bornstein (1994) who claims that transsexuality is not about moving from one gender to the next but from one category to being transsexual. Bornstein claims to live within a new gender that is neither male nor female, but something else altogether. In response, Butler interprets Bornstein’s depiction of transsexuality as a “more radical move” because “it doesn’t precisely make the transition that it indicates, it becomes in a peculiar way an allegory of the process which it undergoes” (More 1999). Furthermore, Butler’s premise that the identities of male/female and man/woman are not normal, but “normative” allows for a greater exploration of expressions, bodies, and identities that lie outside of and challenge those categories. It is out of the work of Butler and postmodern theorists with similar stances on sex, gender, and sexuality that a rich vein of trans theorizing and research emerged throughout the 1990’s. In the following section, I will explore the ways in which trans theorizing is a reaction to and modification of post-modern theories of gender.

*Theorizing Trans I: Transsexual Narratives*

The first key position in trans theorizing is to move the voices and lived experiences of trans people to the center of conceptualizing trans subjectivity, which is
advocated by Sandy Stone (1991) in her notable “Post-Transsexual Manifesto.” In her work, Stone, an academic theorist, performance artist, and trans woman, is critical of the ways that transsexual narratives reflect the medical practices of gatekeeping as well as essentialist notions of gender. She wrote “Post-Transsexual Manifesto” as a response to Janice Raymond’s assertions that transsexual surgeries are part of a larger patriarchal medical regime in which male doctors are trying to create a race of artificial women to replace “biological females.” A feminist scholar and activist, Raymond referred to transsexual women as “dupes of gender” and “artificial women” created by men “according to man’s image” in her book *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (1979: xx). Raymond not only presented transsexuals as threatening figures, but as passive creations of the medical establishment. In response, Stone worked to debunk these assumptions by highlighting the ways in which medical gatekeeping and discourses of pathology shape transsexual narratives.

Through examining male-to-female transsexual autobiographies, Stone identified and questioned the presence of reoccurring themes regarding femininity, sexuality, and the body, that form what she calls a hegemonic transsexual narrative. Stone observed that transsexual autobiographies are characterized by an idealized notion of femininity, a rejection of maleness and masculinity, the belief in an internal female self, and the portrayal of sex reassignment surgery as an act of redemption. Heterosexuality is also emphasized, to the extent that many narrators present themselves as being asexual prior to surgery in order to avoid any experiences that challenge that identification, to which Stone remarks:
If there is any intervening space in the continuum of sexuality, it is invisible. And nobody ever mentions [masturbation]. No wonder feminist theorists have been suspicious. Hell, I’m suspicious. (1991: 227, emphasis in original)

The authors also erase any gray area between genders by presenting the movement from one gender to the other as a direct and unquestioned transition. For example, transsexuals often wrote of their sex change surgeries as the “specific narrative moment when their personal sexual identification changes from male to female” (1991: 225). Rather than taking these autobiographies as the “truth” of transsexuality, Stone held them as questionable, and interrogated the presence of the hegemonic transsexual narrative. To understand the forces that likely shaped these stories, Stone turns to the relationship between these texts and the medical and psychological texts of this time.

When gender clinics forged a relationship with academia during the 1960s, medical staff became more discerning over who was a “real” transsexual. They were more deliberate in their decisions over who would make the best and most attractive women post-transition and they participated in preening their patients by providing tutorials in femininity (Stone 1991; Stryker 2008). Candidates for surgery, Stone argues, were evaluated on the basis of their gender performance, not gender identification and “at the site of their enactment we can locate an actual instance of the apparatus of production of gender” (1991: 228, emphasis in original). Only those who fit a very narrow and hegemonic definition of femininity were allowed to undergo sex reassignment surgery. The emergence of The Transsexual Phenomenon (Benjamin 1966), the standard academic reference for gender clinics, also influenced what characteristics appeared in transsexual narratives. Stone insists that many transsexuals read the book before arriving at gender clinics and would describe their histories by the
criteria outlined in the book in order to achieve the surgery they desired. The unfortunate outcome is that the “other stories,” the other possible ways of understanding and embodying a different sex and gender identity, were largely silenced or muted throughout the decades that follow.

Stone claims that due to the relationship that transsexuals have with the field of medicine, the dominant narratives of transsexuality do not accurately depict transsexual subjectivity. While transsexuals alter their histories to obtain medical treatment, Stone found that their autobiographies, even when written well after having sex reassignment surgery, continue to reproduce the hegemonic transsexual narrative. Stone maintains that transsexual histories, once revealed, already include disruptions and challenges to the hegemonic discourses of the gender binary, but that transsexuals themselves have deliberately removed these disruptions. As she illustrates, part of this narrative filtering is a result of transsexuals trying to gain access to sex reassignment technologies by presenting a “symptomatology” defined by doctor Harry Benjamin. She postulates that, even after transitioning, transsexuals continue to alter their narratives in order to maintain a coherent and consistent self in their current gender designation as well as to avoid stigma and achieve social acceptance through the construction and reiteration of a “plausible history” (1991: 230).

Stone calls for transsexuals to stop denying and hiding parts of their history, for these parts of their subjectivity must be embraced and articulated as discourse that counters the hegemonic transsexual narrative. She contends that a counterdiscourse characterized by complete disclosure of one’s transsexual history could stand as a challenge to the culturally defined binary genders, whereas the hegemonic transsexual
narrative only reaffirms them. This politics of counterdiscourse mirrors Butler’s notions of cultural intelligibility and resignification. Butler suggests that the butch is subversive because she evokes sexual desire through expressing a gender at odds with her culturally intelligible female body. In this sense, butches and femmes do not “mimic” or “copy” heterosexuality, but displace it through resignifying the erotic. Similarly, Stone suggests that transsexuals could produce the same disruptive resignification by revealing the fragmentations and discontinuities in their gendered lives:

In the case of the transsexual, the varieties of performative gender, seen against a culturally intelligible gendered body, which is itself a medically constituted textual violence, generate new and unpredictable dissonances which implicate entire spectra of desire. In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries (1991: 231, emphasis in original).

Stone proposes that transsexuals be read as a set of “embodied texts,” a genre, from which they can disrupt, challenge and subvert dominant constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality. She encourages transsexuals to embrace their histories in order to reclaim their differences and to create a “deeper analytical language for transsexual theory, one which allows for the sorts of ambiguities and polyvocalities which have already so productively informed and enriched feminist theory” (1991: 231). Since Stone sees potentials for social change inherent in transsexuality, her work implies a critique of transsexuals who “pass” or deny their transsexual status. She argues that passing denies the “mixture,” the “intertextual possibilities of the transsexual body” (1991: 231, emphasis in original). Like Butler, Stone hails the experiences of trans people who openly challenge or disrupt the hegemonic trans narrative and whose voices create opportunities for new transsexual theorizing to emerge.
Stone’s demand for new transsexual theorizing rooted in transsexual lives is at the core of contemporary scholarship in transgender studies. She demands that transsexuals, who are privileged enough to do so, reveal the gendered discontinuities in their histories in order to decouple the transsexual narrative from medical discourses. In turn, these multiple and varied transsexual narratives may serve as a challenge to the compulsory coherency of sex, gender, and sexuality. However, as I will illustrate in the discussion of “border wars” that follows, Stone’s call for narrative variance nevertheless privileges trans narratives that challenge the gender binary and gender coherency as paradigmatic of postmodern queer theory. Transsexuals who desire to live as men and women with hidden transsexual pasts are open to criticism for not being a part of a gender revolution or for being antithetical to trans politics. Stone’s stance also reaffirms the assumption that people must “transgress” gender norms in order to reveal the instability of the gender binary, setting up a problematic hierarchical continuum from “gender defenders” to “gender queerers.” Furthermore, Stone’s call to action credulously assumes, like many misreadings of Butler, that some “genderqueers” can undermine the authority and power of the sex/gender system through individualized acts of gender transgression. That is not to say that if all trans people were to collectively and publicly disclose their histories that this would not have a political effect; it most certainly would. Be that as it may, public disclosure is not a viable option for trans people who would face violence, rejection, job loss, or any number of consequences as a result. Additionally, Stone’s call is not for collective action or a unified trans rights movement, but for individualized and voluntary acts of transgression.
Theorizing Trans 2: The Border Wars

In addition to Stone’s seminal essay, there are several other factors that contributed to the emergence of new ways of framing trans subjectivity in the early 1990s, such as: the increasing visibility of trans men in lesbian communities; the implementation of a womyn-born-womyn policy at the Michigan Women’s Music Festival in 1991; the publication of Stone Butch Blues (Feinberg 1993); and, the death of Brandon Teena in 1993. Each of these factors fueled controversies over the boundaries of identity and community and led feminist academics to re-evaluate their perspectives on trans identities, experiences, and inclusion in women’s communities, what came to be called the “border wars.” Theorists at the center of the border wars include, among others, Gayle Rubin (1992), Jay Prosser (1995) and Judith Halberstam (1994; 1998) who openly question the ability for postmodernism to account for a range of trans experiences, embodiments, and identities. They attempt to answer questions such as: What are the differences between butches and FTMs? How do we define the limits and boundaries of sex and gender? And how do we account for the uniqueness of certain experiences without limiting our understanding of sex and gender oppression? The contributions that have come to define the “border wars” focus predominantly on the tensions between cis women and trans men arguably because trans women were quickly dismissed as dupes of gender, non-women, and threats to feminism during this time. In this same vein, the “border wars” illustrate the skepticism and discomfort with maleness and masculinity even as challenges to femininity are lionized in women’s communities.

In “Of Catamites and Kings,” Rubin (1992), a cultural anthropologist, charts new territory by describing the overlap between transgender and lesbian concerns. Much like
the notion of a lesbian continuum (Rich 1980), Rubin argues that “butch” becomes the category for a range of gender “dysphoric” females, those who experience “gender feelings and identities that are at odds with their assigned gender status or their physical bodies” (1992: 472). In this sense, butch means more than the narrowly defined stereotype of the hypermasculine lesbian; it comes to define a broad range of investments in masculinity from females who dress in men’s clothing to those who alter their bodies to become male. Rubin illustrates the variety of ways that butches relate to their female bodies, identify with maleness, carry on sexual relationships, and express their masculinity. She argues that “there are more ways to be butch” than “there are ways for men to be masculine” since the female appropriation of masculinity “produces new significance and meaning” (1992: 474). It is also noted that other social factors, such as race, class, ethnicity, occupation, and age, play a role in determining the style of masculinity accessible to portray.

Lesbian communities are comprised of great variation in masculine identification and expression, but many lesbians, FTMs, and people of various transmasculine experiences and identities reject and despise any overlap in their experiences. Rubin notes that many lesbians are hostile towards both female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals, expelling them from their communities, and especially from women’s-only spaces. As Rubin laments, “despite theoretically embracing diversity, contemporary lesbian culture has a deep streak of xenophobia” (1992: 476). In acknowledging that there are differences between butches and FTMs, Rubin makes a vital move in trans theorizing by embracing the overlap. She asserts:

Although important discontinuities separate lesbian butch experience and female-to-male transsexual experience, there are also significant points of connection.
Some butches are psychologically indistinguishable from female-to-male transsexuals, except for the identities they choose and the extent to which they are willing or able to alter their bodies...The boundaries between the categories of butch and transsexual are permeable (1992: 476).

By highlighting and championing the similarities between butches and FTMs, Rubin’s goal was to promote an acceptance of trans men in lesbian communities. She admits that transsexuals pose a challenge to lesbian gender categories, but that this challenge should be a welcomed part of diversity in the lesbian community, and not a threat to its existence. Rubin’s essay paved the way for further explorations of FTMs, female masculinities, and trans male experiences.

One of the most significant contributors to the “border wars” is queer theorist Judith Halberstam with her (1994) essay on female masculinity entitled, “F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity.” In “F2M” Halberstam investigates the potential overlaps between female-to-male transsexuals and what she calls the “postmodern lesbian body.” She aligns herself with the postmodern position that sexualities and genders are to be seen as “styles rather than life-styles, as fictions rather than facts of life, and as potentialities rather than as fixed identities” (1994: 211). In this sense, there is no crossing of genders, because there is no referent (sex) to detach one’s self from. Halberstam argues that, from this position, the specificity of identity, particularly that of transsexuality, disappears. She boldly asserts, “we are all transsexuals” and “there are no transsexuals” (1994: 225). Transsexual female-to-males, to Halberstam, are just one of many types of expressions of female masculinity.

Halberstam substantiates this claim through her analysis of two films: a pornographic movie of Annie Sprinkle and her female-to-male transsexual partner Les Nichols and a movie about cross-dressing female named Bauer, entitled Vera. What
emerges from her analysis is that the “fiction” of masculinity for both Les and Bauer is expressed in the refashioning of their bodies, Bauer through clothing and presentation and Les through hormones and surgery. For Halberstam, genital modification surgery is superficial and cosmetic, remarking “masculinity or femininity may be simulated by surgery, but they can also find other fictional forms like clothing or fantasy” (1994: 219, emphasis in original). Nonetheless, gender presentation alone may not be enough to sustain a consistent fiction of masculinity. Les and Bauer’s masculinity is also reaffirmed through the appearance of heterosexuality in relation to their female partners.

Additionally, Halberstam finds that Sprinkle and Bauer’s partner, Clara, support the masculinity of their partners by “reading” and validating their “gender fiction.” In other words, Les’ and Bauer’s gender presentations must be supported by others to maintain coherency. When Clara forces Bauer to disrobe, in that instance she fails to read and validate Bauer’s presentation of sexuality and desire; the fiction is disrupted.

Halberstam’s analysis reveals that masculinity is constructed as much from the body as it is from the context of heterosexuality and from validating acts of “reading.”

In this essay, Halberstam presents transsexuality as anti-trans and anti-queer. In the case of Les, she considers the permanence of his crossing from a female to a male identity as reinforcing the hegemonic binary gender structure. She states:

By apparently understanding his gender performance as no performance at all and his gender fiction as the straight-up truth, Les Nichols takes the trans out of transsexualism. There is no movement, or only a very limited and fleeting movement, in crossing from a stable female identity to a stable male identity, and Les seems not to challenge notions of natural gender at all (1994: 219).

In this sense, Halberstam assumes that Bauer understands her masculinity as a performance, but that Les does not. Halberstam’s position on transsexuality is reinforced
through her invalidation of Les’ male gender identity and embodiment. She states, “Les makes her sutured skin her costume and responds therefore to Annie Sprinkle’s desire for a bisexual body” (1994: 224). Halberstam switches back and forth between masculine and feminine pronouns in reference to Les, while remaining consistent in identifying Bauer as female. As illustrated in her critique of Les, Halberstam does not see “trans” as an experience of a permanent gender crossing, but as the movement and instability of gender play itself. At the same time, she relies on the stability of the concept of female in order to analyze the expression of masculinity decoupled from the category male.

Soon after Halberstam’s publication, humanities scholar Jay Prosser (1995) came out with a sharp critique of her analysis. He condemns Halberstam, and queer theory in general, for positioning transsexuals as the archetype of queerness. Prosser recognizes that, from the perspective of queer theory, crossing from one sex to the other unveils the fluidity, fragmentation, and artificiality inherent in sex and gender identities. As a result, he argues, specificity disappears and the experiences, challenges, and narratives unique to certain identities become erased. He argues:

After the F2M/transsexual lesbian, there is no sex, gender, or sexual difference, only a universal queerness in which all categories are hybrids, in which borders are irremediably eroded and distinct plots untraceable. In this postmodern vision of generalized celebratory gender and sexual confusion, the specificity of the transsexual subject disappears and originary sites of homes—bodies and identities—are meaningless (1995: 487).

Prosser believes that the destruction of difference pushes transsexuals into a site of “nonbelonging” because while lesbians keep the referent they align themselves with, FTM’s are held to be “not male.” According to Halberstam, the F2M is a type of “female masculinity” as is the butch. Prosser asserts that, as a result, Halberstam fails to read the particular narrative of the transexual subject, since it is the specific experience of “the
transformation of the flesh” that defines their story (1995: 488). In a sense, Prosser is trying to ground the notion of “movement,” which Halberstam and queer theory hail, in the physical transformation that transsexuals undergo.

Prosser explicates his criticism of Halberstam with an analysis of Leslie Feinberg’s (1993) semi-autobiographical novel *Stone Butch Blues*, in which the main character, Jess, takes on a physical transition towards becoming male, only to transition back into an “uneasy borderland” where she is neither male nor female. Jess’ story of identity hybridity and incoherence seems to be, at first glance, the epitome of a queer narrative. Prosser points out, however, that Jess’ story is not about the play of gender-crossing associated with queerness, but that Jess’ suffering associated with gender embodiment is what situates the story more within narratives of transsexuality, a uniquely transgender narrative. Transgender, according to Prosser, is not the same as queer:

Transsexual subjects themselves have traditionally figured their transition as a final going home, a trajectory that is only worth its risks, complications and intense pain (somatic and psychic) because it will allow one to finally arrive at where one should have always been: the destination, the telos of this narrative (being able to live in one’s ‘true gender identity’) is all. Gender is not so much undone as queerness would have it as redone, that is, done up differently (1995: 487).

Where Halberstam’s theory of transsexuality is based upon leaving one’s body/identity, the “home,” only to realize that “home” was a construct all along, Prosser claims that, “there threads through *Stone Butch Blues* a distinctly unqueer yearning for home both in the body and in community” (1995: 490). The continual punishment that Jess receives even after finding home in her not man/not woman body, Prosser claims, is not a reflection of subversive queer potential, but reveals the material costs of crossing from one sex to another. Prosser asserts that this narrative is not a queer “fantasy of freedom

At the center of Prosser’s criticism is that what defines transsexual subjectivity is posited as the anti-thesis of queer: “realness;” finding home in one’s body and community; and, a consistent and coherent gender narrative. He believes that Halberstam, and Stone too, do not take into account these characteristics when accounting for trans subjectivity, especially the desire for realness that transsexuals feel. Prosser states that if Stone is making demands for transsexuality to be considered as a subject position and not just a transitional phase, that transsexuals must hold onto the specificities of their identities, to remain “unqueer.” He critiques:

Stone’s suggestion that transsexuals ‘disrupt’ ‘conventional gender discourse’ in the mode of drag or butch/femme flattens our the complexities, the contradictions and the differences of the transsexual narrative into generic queerness, ironically re-erasing transsexual specificity in a different (that is, queer) context in the very process of attempting to ground it (1995: 505).

However, Prosser agrees with Stone that creating agency and subjectivity for transsexuals begins with an open production of transsexual narratives, letting trans people tell their own truth. In what seems as a compromise with Stone, Prosser proposes that instead of claiming the identity of transsexual as she argues, that one might claim the identities of transsexual and man/woman. By doing so, trans people could acknowledge their distinct gender experience or journey without disavowing their identification as men or women.

In her book *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam (1998) responds to the critiques of “F2M” from Prosser and others by demonstrating the ways that the emergence of the transsexual identity effects the categorization of male masculinity and, more importantly, of butch. Halberstam’s primary concern is that, through the works of Prosser and others,
transsexuality has come to be associated with “real and desperate desires for re-embodiment” whereas butch is seen as “a playful desire for masculinity and a casual form of gender deviance” (1998: 143). She claims that her intent in “F2M” was to disavow these differences and to show how a variety of gender expressions are marked by some degree of movement. In retrospect, Halberstam claims that she was carving out cultural space for what she calls the “transgender butch.” The transgender butch is a female whose gender identity is “at least partially defined by transitivity,” which may or may not include someone who undergoes sex reassignment surgery (1998: 161). By using the term transgender butch, Halberstam, again, aims to promote an understanding that as much as there are physical differences between masculine females who take hormones and have surgery and those who do not, there is still a great degree of overlap in bodies and identities and many contexts in which the differences between female masculinities is less noticeable. She argues that by admitting that this overlap exists, one is able to problematize and complicate pathological models of gender deviance in categories of transsexuality and homosexuality.

Halberstam claims that Prosser tries to set queer theory against transgender identity where “queer theory represents gender with some notion of postmodern fluidity and fragmentation, but transgender theory eschews such theoretical free fall and focuses instead on ‘subjective experience’” (1998: 147). She worries that within transgender subjective experiences there is a limited understanding of lesbian masculinity in which lesbians and FTMs are understood to exist across a continuum where one identity is more or less masculine than others. From androgyny to very masculine, the continuum is often read as: Androgyny – Soft Butch – Butch – Stone Butch – Transgender Butch – FTM
This hierarchy of masculinity inadequately captures the complexities of
gendered bodies, identities and expressions. Furthermore, it reinforces the belief in a
“border” between butches and transsexual men. Prosser suggests that transsexuals move
forward to find home on the other side of the gender binary, but that relegates butches as

Halberstam criticizes Prosser who she claims:

… makes little or no recognition of the trials and tribulations that confront the
butch who for whatever reasons…decides to make a home in the body with which
she was born. Even more alarming, he makes little or no recognition of the fact
that many FTMs also live and die in those inhospitable territories
between…Prosser’s cartography of gender relies on a belief in two territories of
male and female, divided by a flesh border and crossed by surgery and

Halberstam is concerned with not only the reproduction of the boundaries between butch
and transsexual, but also the divide between male and female. She does not believe that
we should give up these categories, but continue to question our stakes in them and
realize that identity is characterized by hybridity and instability. “Some bodies are never
at home, some bodies cannot simply cross from A to B, some bodies recognize and live
with the inherent instability of identity” (1998: 164).

The interchange between Prosser and Halberstam reveals their different
conceptions of the ways in which trans subjectivity is structured by, and potentially
challenges, both heteronormativity and the gender binary. Prosser is concerned mostly
with the possibilities and limitations of identity recognition for transsexuals. He believes
that the transsexual experience is shaped by the moving away from one side of the gender
binary in order to find home either on the other side, as men or women of transsexual
experience, or somewhere in between, as transgender. He rejects characterizations of
gender as fluid, incoherent and unstable, for he believes it is the stability and coherency, or what I would consider recognition, that transsexuals explicitly seek. Prosser suggests that butches, for example, do not suffer from misrecognition in the same way that transsexuals do because they do not leave their female “home.” As a result, butches do not carry the responsibility of being the archetype of queer mobility and fluidity that transsexuals or transgender people do because of their seemingly stable sexed location. In contrast, Halberstam claims that there is no “home” whether you are male, female, and/or transsexual. Everyone’s gender is, to different extents and in different contexts, shifting, fluid and unstable. While this might be the case, Halberstam’s characterization of sex materialization (Butler 1993) as “fiction” collapses significant distinctions between the body and performativity that shape the lives of trans and gender variant individuals across the trans masculine and trans feminine spectrums.

These emblematic works begin to reveal the stakes that certain social and political groups have in defining identity difference and sameness. Not surprisingly, they propagate the same troublesome distinction between serious and playful gender expressions and identifications that Stone (1990), Butler (1990, 1993), and others fashion. Even so, the contributions and limitations to the “border wars” set the stage for more complex conceptualizations of sex and gender regulation, policing, and privilege.

*Theorizing Trans 3: Sex and Gender Regulation and Policing*

The “border wars” are not only focused on the language of identity and community, but another thread emerges within and alongside these debates on the topic of physical space and geographic location. Prosser (1999), Halberstam (1998; 2005), and
C. Jacob Hale (1997) argue that it is important to understand that achieving different forms of gender variance, or gender normativity for that matter, depends upon the context in which that gender is performed as well as the ability for the performer to authenticate their identity. “Passing” and authenticating one’s sex or gender depends on the codes of gender expression, embodiment, and sexuality that exist within different settings. Prosser (1999) and Halberstam (1998) explore how gender variance is policed during international travel and in public bathroom use whereas Hale (1997) explores how gender variance is expressed and regulated in a specifically queer context. All of these works utilize the concepts of context and space to understand the complexities of gender expression and gender regulation.

As mentioned, the notion of movement is used on both sides of the border war debates, to describe the instability of gender categories (Halberstam 1994; 1998) and to ground the specific experience of transsexual and transgender narratives (Prosser 1995). Prosser returns to the concept of movement to analyze the theme of transit in transsexual autobiographies. He identifies the airport as a “gendered transit zone,” a place that is both an “unterritorialized site” of movement in between nations and, yet, highly policed. The transit zone is often used in transsexual narratives to frame the physical transition since it represents a borderland in which one is compelled to move beyond rather than exist within. Prosser describes two stories of moving through security checkpoints at airports, taken from his own life as an FTM and from the autobiography of an MTF, Jan Morris. The following are scenes Prosser highlights:

JFK [Airport], several years before I [Prosser] begin hormone treatment. I pass through the security gate. Keys, change, belt; predictably, I set off the bleeper. The guard scrutinizes me for a good moment: ‘Say something’, he says. I know what he’s really looking for but am still without a ready quip: ‘Like what?’ I say.
He has his sign now: ‘Over there’, he directs me. His walkie-talkie points me decisively away from my girlfriend towards the man being patted down by the male frisker: the men’s line.” (1999: 89, emphasis in original).

I approach the security check. Dressed as I am in jeans and a sweater, I have no idea to which sex the policeman will suppose me to belong…I feel their silent appraisal down the corridor as I approach them, as they search my sling bag I listen hard for a ‘Sir’ or a ‘Ma’am’ to decide my course of conduct. Beyond the corridor, I know the line divides…An awful moment passes. Everyone seems to be looking at me. Then ‘Move along there, lady, please, don’t hold up the traffic’ … and instantly I join the female queue (1999: 95).

Scenes such as this are central to the experiences of many trans people, evidencing that in some contexts there is no middle ground for gender. In certain situations individuals are forced to occupy the position of either male/man or female/woman. Prosser uses this example to argue that transsexual autobiographies do not represent an instantaneous gender crossing, as Stone and Halberstam have interpreted, but that the entirety of the transsexual autobiography is narrating “this ‘territory between,’ to document the move between gendered locations” as they arise (1999: 98). Prosser further states that being forced to take a place as male or female is not inherently anti-postmodern, for the same person may be identified as male at a security checkpoint and then expelled from a men’s restroom. The coherency of gender identity is dependent upon context, and as a result, many people don’t experience a consistent gender reading.

Halberstam (1998) believes that the gender binary holds precisely because of the fluidity and instability of gender categories. Because there is a great degree of variation across gender embodiments and expressions, the categories of man/woman are highly policed and regulated to maintain gender difference as natural. Halberstam points to the bathroom as a place in which gender is highly policed. Looking at public restrooms for women, “various bathroom users tend to fail to measure up to expectations of femininity,
and those of us who present in some ambiguous way are routinely questioned and
challenged about their presence in the “wrong” bathroom” (1998: 20). Some women
whose gender is challenged in the bathroom “prove” that they’re in the “right” bathroom
through revealing a high voice, breasts or some other feminine feature. But, for others
without those distinguishable feminine characteristics, gender confrontations pose more
of a challenge. Halberstam asserts:

If we use the paradigm of the bathroom as a limit of gender identification, we can
measure the distance between binary gender schema and lived multiple gendered
experiences. The accusation “you’re in the wrong bathroom” really says two
different things. First, it announces that your gender seems at odd with your sex
(your apparent masculinity or androgyny is at odd with your supposed
femaleness); second, it suggests that single-gender bathrooms are only for those
who fit clearly into one category (male) of the other (female) (1998: 24).

The bathroom is a site of regulation where these two different aspects of
heteronormativity are regulated, in turn shaping the lives of all non-normatively gendered
people, transsexual and butch alike. What Halberstam doesn’t mention is the ability for
many non-trans people to authenticate their identity with legal documents such as a
driver’s license or passport. The process for obtaining documentation that matches one’s
gender identity poses financial and institutional challenges for those who desire to cross
from one sex to the other. Granted, a license matching one’s lived gender does not
guarantee that someone won’t be harassed or expelled from a bathroom or any other sex
segregated facility. However, it does provide legal evidence in support of one’s gender
identification, which provides most butches and drag kings/queens a sense of affirmation
that some trans people do not get.

The “bathroom problem” also highlights the issues with using the language of
“passing.” The notion of passing assumes that the presentation of self is an act or a
masquerade. For those who seek identity recognition and coherence, instances of passing are really moments of becoming. Halberstam explores how the concept of “becoming” then relates to someone whose gender identity is not consistent, shaped by “passing” as male or female in different contexts. For example, what of the butch who in some instances passes as male and others as female, but presents a gender that is neither in alignment with women or man? “For such a subject, identity might best be described as process with multiple sites for becoming and being” (1998: 22). It is impossible to understand the processes involved in gender presentation, reading, and identification by only mapping out the transition from one sex to the other. Halberstam emphasizes that a transgender theory needs to “think in fractal terms about gender geometries” and how locations that highly police gender regulate the ways in which people can participate in the public sphere (1998: 22). In conclusion, Halberstam, like Prosser, draws attention to these locations where people are forced to identify as one sex or the other.

If gender policing is rigorous in locations where the binary is clearly enforced, then what about locations where there are perceivably more flexible or open conceptions of sex and gender? Unlike dominant culture, queer subcultures often make space for nuanced embodiments of gender and sexuality that resist and resignify dominant binary categorizations of male/female, man/woman, and heterosexual/homosexual. Scholar of philosophy and participant in leatherdyke communities C. Jacob Hale (1997) examines the ways in which leatherdyke subcultures, structured around alternative modes of gender intelligibility, incorporated transgender subjects into their understandings of and limitations on genderplay. Hale states, “I am especially concerned to explore how leatherdyke genderplay functions as a means for gender interrogation, solidification,
resistance, destabilization, and reconfiguration” (1997: 61). From his investigation of a leatherdyke community in California, Hale found that while gender variance was encouraged and at the foundation of leatherdyke play, there were noticeable limits to the ways in which bodies were resignified and incorporated into play scenarios.

To provide a brief background, in the leatherdyke community, leatherdyke boys and their daddies are lesbian women, and sometimes gay men, who use clothing and other visual cues to signify a range of masculine roles, community experience, and sexual desire. When these performances of masculinity are enacted in the queer leather communities, they become intelligible as specific forms of “play” and not necessarily as an everyday self-identification. Adding to Gayle Rubin’s claim that there is a greater variety of ways for females to enact masculinity than males, Hale states:

When leatherdyke boys’ masculine performativities occur in conjunction with fairly unambiguous female embodiments in settings, such as play parties, where heavily gender-coded bodily zones are visible, their performativities are less bounded by cultural regulations of masculinity than young males’ are (1997: 62).

However, these performativities are not unbounded. They are still regulated by the constraints of intelligibility that exist within the leather community and their subcultural rules regarding the sex and gender expression and embodiment.

In women’s spaces, the rules of genderplay are informed by broader understandings of masculinity, manhood, and maleness. Those individuals that are not unambiguously female are more highly regulated in their expressions of masculinity or dominance. Hale notes:

While a butch with a fairly unambiguous female body may be called up short for behaving badly her behavior will not likely be attributed to her sex/gender status, embodiment, self-identifications, or history. In contrast, if an mtf or and ftm engages in the same behaviors, these behaviors are more likely to be labeled “male” and to be attributed to sex/gender history, identification, or embodiment.
Further, the person engaging in such behaviors may be banned from attending future play parties and exiled from leatherdyke communities and friendship circles, and causal attributions of objectionable behaviors to sex/gender may be cited as justificatory grounds for changing definitional policies to exclude other mtfs or ftms in the future. (1997: 63)

Creating a safe sexual space for women informs the regulation of boundaries when determining admittance to these women-only events as well as what counts as acceptable practices once inside. The boundaries are shaped by fears of reproducing male privilege, compulsory heterosexuality, and violence against women within these spaces. Nevertheless, genderplay in leatherdyke communities can be a stepping-stone for some trans men, allowing them to try on different forms of masculinity and maleness. Hale comments that through genderplay he was able to reconfigure the meanings attached to his genitals and “remap” his gendered embodiment without changing his body.

Hale’s findings on genderplay in the leatherdyke scene suggest that gender is regulated by the social and political codes that define each community and event. Masculinities and femininities are made legible through cultural codes specific to the goals that shape the leatherdyke women-only events and the leatherdyke scene in general. To some extent, these events create a space that allows for a greater diversity of gender expression. For example, a person read as a woman in everyday life might become a daddy or a boy at a leatherdyke event. Hale claims that the ability for people to be read as different genders at these events illustrates how gender identity is not a unitary and natural status. Hale extends this claim into the realm of sex, illustrating that his birth certificate is marked female, but his license male. Since he holds differing sex statuses under the law, his sex identity is also not unitary or cohesive. However, there are limitations on extending the notion of gender variance to sex. Leatherdykes were shown

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to regulate gender play and admittance on the basis of meanings attached to bodily signifiers. While they allowed for great variety of gender expression for females, limits were placed on those who showed physical signs of maleness. Hale’s identity documents may reveal legal identity inconsistencies, but sex is less contested and available for play than is gender. Overall, Hale’s findings show how gender-exclusive queer events and communities are contested territories and sites of regulation, even as some are hailed as sites of gender variance.

Prosser (1999), Hale (1997) and Halberstam (1998) effectively highlight the role that social geographies play in the production of intelligible sexes and genders and gender regulation and policing. They all illustrate how, at these sites, certain sex and gender configurations are made culturally intelligible and thus rendered valid, while others are subject to forms of regulation from social sanctions to violence. Consequently, these works complicate the reductionist perspective that being trans is either playful or serious. Be that as it may, these theories are rarely, if ever, used to frame empirical studies on trans subjects in the social science arena, which I outline in the chapter that follows.
“Coming Out” and Transsexual Transitions

In a culture of heteronormativity, the lives of gender and sexual minorities are shaped by the ways they manage their stigmatized and oppressed identities through alignment with and resistance to existing sex/gender categories. In gay and lesbian studies, the dominant framework for analyzing gay and lesbian identities for the past few decades has centered upon the notions of the closet and, in turn, “coming out” of the closet (Weeks 1981, Plummer 1975, Chauncey 1994, D’Emilio 1983). The closet provides a framework to understand the lives of gays and lesbians, specifically in a context of deliberate and aggressive heterosexual dominance in the United States (D’Emilio 1983; Berube 1990; Faderman 1991; Kennedy and Davis 1993). During the heyday of the closet era, approximately 1950 to 1980, the social and legal risks of exposure were so high that one’s homosexual identity became, in fact, the core organizing force in an individual’s life (Seidman 2004). For those in the closet, their most intimate relationships, their choice of occupation, and how they dress and act, for example, are all shaped to conceal a stigmatized identity.

After a series of social uprisings including the Stonewall Inn and Compton’s Cafeteria riots, the gay liberation movement emerged, urging gays and lesbians to leave their inauthentic lives of lies and deceit and to openly affirm their homosexuality. Coming out of the closet, however, takes social and emotional resources and an active rebellion against the repressive culture at large. Consequently, the life trajectories of many gays and lesbians center around the act of “coming out” to oneself and to others.
Within this social context, the “coming out” narrative emerged, which emphasizes notions of sexual authenticity and one’s “true self” as a homosexual. “Coming out” for gays and lesbians involves two inseparable parts: internal acceptance of homosexual desire and, more importantly, a public process of disclosure of who one is, in contradiction to one’s assumed heterosexuality. Thus, to live openly as a homosexual, one must carry out repetitive public disclosure in order to maintain a consistent and coherent sense of self (Sedgwick 1990; Seidman 2004). In the coming out narrative only repetitive public disclosure of homosexuality gives gays authenticity and a sense of being true to oneself (Seidman 2004). As a result of political and cultural changes, the closet has become less and less of a defining feature in the lives of gays and lesbians since the 1980s, and, likewise, so has the compulsion or necessity to “come out” (Seidman 2004).

The identity development trajectory in which one moves from internal acceptance to interpersonal disclosure, made popular in gay and lesbian “coming out” models, has been adopted, to a degree, by some researchers to explain identity development in trans individuals (Bolin 1988; Devor 1997, 2004; Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey 1997; Gagne and Tewksbury 1998; Rubin 2003; Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005). These models provide a framework for analyzing the process of internal and interpersonal recognition and acceptance of a sex or gender different from what was assigned at birth and the decision-making processes involved in social, emotional, and physical transitions. These models assume that an authentic sex or gender emerges through transitioning, and some hold the standpoint that this is only accomplished through the completion of sex reassignment surgeries. Although most of this research is focused on narrowly defined populations of self-identified transsexuals, newer research that is more inclusive of trans
and gender variant experiences still utilizes a developmental model that is simply modified to fit this more diverse sample. In this section, I present an overview of social science research on trans individuals that presume a developmental trajectory of identity with a particular focus on the limitations of the use of coming out models.

One of the first social science monographs on transsexual identity formation is Anne Bolin’s (1988) *In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage*, an examination of the process of “becoming” women for male-to-female transsexuals. Bolin followed sixteen male-to-female transsexuals over a period of two years conducting participant observation research in a male-to-female transsexual support group, supplemented by interviews and questionnaires with the participants. Bolin found that previous sociological studies of transsexuals, including the work of Garfinkel (1967), described transitions as a “status passage” from one sex to the other. Bolin, however, believed that such schema represented transitions as a simple status switch and not as a multifaceted process. As a result, Bolin (1988) developed a “rite of transition” model using a synthesis of symbolic interactionism and rite-of-passage principles in order to explain both ceremonial and symbolic status transformations. She states:

> Not only does a social identity transformation occur, encompassing the individual’s role, performance, but a personal identity (the individual’s self-concept) metamorphosis also occurs as a mechanism of the feedback of the individual and society as the transsexual incrementally becomes female (1988: 8).

In “becoming” women, transsexuals undergo three rites of transition that mark distinct shifts in one’s integrated physical, social, and personal self: separation, removing oneself from living as male; transition, learning to live and pass as a woman coinciding with hormonal feminization; and, incorporation, complete integration into society as woman through the surgical construction of a vagina (1988: 7).
The first rite of transition begins when the individuals accept that they are transsexual, mirroring gay and lesbian “coming out” narratives. Throughout this process, transsexuals are said to, “engage in techniques of information control to hide male phenotype, history, and past social identity” (1988: 71). Their narratives do not reflect repetitive disclosure of their transsexuality, but rather a deliberate and conscious re-writing of their history in order to avoid possible disclosure. During the next phase, the transition period, the lives of transsexuals are characterized by high degree of work in order to produce a consistent and full-time identity as a woman. Transsexuals learn how to walk, talk, and appear as “natural” women while concurrently experiencing a physical puberty through hormone replacement therapy. Bolin found that throughout this shift, transsexuals internalize critiques of their “passing” given to them by other members in society, creating a feedback loop between internal identification, physical presentation, and readings of their gender.

Even though the rites of passage incorporate the physical, personal, and social aspects of self, Bolin places additional emphasis on the role of the body. One does not fulfill the last rite, the rite of incorporation, until she surgically reconstructs her sex. The construction of a vagina allows women with a transsexual past the ability to change their sex designation on most, if not all, documentation and to experience sexual relations as females. Bolin found that these factors allow transsexuals to be fully incorporated into society and to finally see themselves wholly as women. Of course, the emphasis on the bodily reconstruction is a likely outcome of Bolin’s participant sample, which included “two postsurgical transsexuals and a number of preoperative transsexuals who acquired their second evaluation in anticipation of surgery” (1988: 184). It is no surprise that a
study of women who have undergone or are planning to undergo vaginoplasties believe that surgery is the ultimate marker of transition.

Several years later Patricia Gagne, Richard Tewksbury and Deanna McGaughey (1997) examined the process of identity development for sixty-five “masculine-to-feminine transgenderists,” defined as “persons who enact alternative gender presentations or who have internalized alternative gender identities” (1997: 481). Unlike Bolin, they did not limit their sample to transsexuals alone. Working explicitly from gay and lesbian “coming out” models, they focused their investigation of the masculine-to-feminine “transgenderists” around: early recollections of “difference”; the process of self-identification; and, the process of proclaiming their new identity to others. Gagne et al (1997) established that although they’re employing a “coming out” framework, it is assumed that transgenderists’ identity development will differ from that of gays and lesbians. They found that transgenderists often reexamine their sexuality and “come out” to themselves again after forming their new gender identity. Also, many transgenderists cannot selectively choose to come out, but are forced to disclose their identity to both the medical community in order to access hormones and surgery and to people in their daily lives as they undergo a physical change in appearance.

Gagne et al’s study showed that transgenderists came to terms with their new identities through recognizing feelings of gender difference, finding names to match these feelings, and learning that others shared their experiences. Once the transgenderists had

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3 Transgenderist, like transgender and transgenderal, emerged as a term to differentiate individuals who lived full-time as the “opposite sex,” but who did not desire to undergo genital reconstruction surgery(ies), from cross-dressers and transsexuals. In some cases, such as the Gagne et al study (1997), transgenderist is used instead as an umbrella term to describe all “alternative” gender identifications and expressions.
accepted their own identity, they weighed the fears of rejection over their desire to present their feminine self. Gagne et al (1997) reported that transsexuals faced greater challenges than cross-dressers and “gender radicals” in disclosing their status to others because it involved a permanent and publicly visible “crossing over” from one sex to the other. In the process of living in their feminine identity, the majority of participants noted that external validation came from the recognition of their female identity, not from recognition as transgenderists. Disclosure of one’s transgenderism to others was not an act of identity maintenance, although it provided a path for the subsequent integration of a feminine identity into their public lives (1997: 498). Coming out, then, does not maintain a coherent and consistent identity, but acts as a stepping-stone in the process of expressing one’s “true” gender identity. Furthermore, Gagne et al found that once their participants started passing, they often left the transgender community, reflecting their investment in a female, not a transgender identity.

Similar to Gagne et al, Aaron Devor (1997, 2004) developed a model of transsexual identity formation based upon findings from interviews with forty-five self-identified female-to-male transsexuals conducted over a four-year period. Based partially upon Cass’s (1979, 1984, 1990) model of homosexual identity formation, Devor identified fourteen different stages that characterize the process of identity development for transsexuals: abiding anxiety; identity confusion about assigned gender and sex; identity comparison about assigned gender and sex; discovery of transsexualism; identity confusion about transsexualism; identity comparison about transsexualism; tolerance of transsexual identity; delay before acceptance of transsexual identity; acceptance of transsexual identity; delay before transition; transition; acceptance of post-transition
gender and sex identities; integration; and, pride. He groups these more specific stages into three general processes including finding one’s self, going from female-to-male, and integration and pride, mirroring the rites of transition model developed by Bolin (1988).

Underlying the overall process of identity formation, Devor (2004) argues, are the acts of “witnessing” and “mirroring.” Witnesses are non-transsexuals who recognize and validate transsexuals as their current gender whereas other transsexuals serve as a mirror, confirm transsexuals as fellow community members. Devor claims that it important to transsexual self-understanding and acceptance to experience reinforcing acts of both witnessing and mirroring, to be seen by others as they see themselves to be. Similar to Bolin’s feedback loop in which the body, self-identity, and society are integrated in identity development, instances of witnessing and mirroring provide transsexuals with information about whether their bodies and appearances are accurate reflections of self. Positive feedback from others offers a sense of belonging as a transsexual and as their chosen gender.

Devor, like Bolin, also prioritizes the body in transsexual narratives. He maintains the analytical distinction of sex and gender, for example, distinguishing transsexuals as those who experience “sex dysphoria” and transgender people as those who do not. Devor (2004) suggests that the body is what fundamentally secures one’s gender as a man or a woman. He comments:

No matter how effective persons’ performances of their genders may be, the most reliable option open to them is to unequivocally substantiate their claim to being a particular gender by also possessing the sex characteristics socially designated as appropriate. In order for persons to socially legitimate their gender identity claims, they must ultimately have bodies which match their gender claims in socially expected ways (2004: 45).
In spite of this claim, Devor’s participants did not fully embody “appropriate” sex characteristics. He (1997) found that “due to the high cost and underdevelopment of medical services for female-to-male transsexuals, no participants felt that they had yet completely passed out of the transition stage in all aspects of their lives as males” (1997: 602). In other words, the integration of transsexual men into society is much more complicated than, as illustrated by Bolin’s (1988) research, transsexual women for transsexual men in Devor’s study live “post-transition” as males without penises. For those without bottom surgery, transsexual men’s bodies will almost always carry their pasts on the surface, which was not presumably the case for the women in Bolin’s study.

Another difference from Bolin’s (1988) model, is Devor’s typology of the more specific developmental stages as well as his assertion that these stages are experienced in a variety of orders and some not experienced at all. Furthermore, Devor found that some individuals spoke openly about their transsexual status and participated in social advocacy efforts as “out” transsexuals. This stands in the face of Bolin’s insistence that transsexuals must reject their transsexual identity and hide their transsexual past in order to achieve self-fulfillment in their chosen gender. Nonetheless, individuals who “came out” for activism purposes did so selectively, “in situations where relevant” (2004: 65). In these cases, disclosure provided a sense of community and shared experience, but did not function to maintain a consistent public identity.

Like Devor, Henry Rubin (2003) studied the lives of female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs), identifying a path of identity development, what he termed as a “transsexual trajectory.” Rubin’s findings are based on fieldwork he conducted at institutions in Boston, New York, and San Francisco that provide support for FTMs as well as twenty-
two in-depth interviews with transsexual men. The underlying assumption in Rubin’s study is that the lives of female-to-males are shaped by their desire to be recognized as they see themselves to be, as already authentic males. Rubin rejects a “coming out” model because while gays and lesbians seek a sense of visibility, FTMs aim for invisibility of their transsexual status as they transition. Nonetheless, he still employs a similar developmental model to frame the experiences of FTMs. Adopting the concept of a trajectory from sociologist Barbara Ponse (1978), Rubin argues that FTMs undertake a physical transition so that they can experience consistent recognition as their “true” selves. The five stages in Rubin’s “transsexual trajectory” that reflect the physical and social shift from female to male are: recognizing feelings of difference; assigning feelings to an identity; accepting one’s identity; seeking community; and, “making transition choices” (2003: 115).

The participants in Rubin’s study commented on their pre-transition bodies as “betraying” their core sense of self. Puberty was a common trigger of this feeling due to the onset of menses and breast growth, which generated a dissonance between feelings of maleness and the feminization of their bodies. Seeking to express their maleness, many found acceptance in lesbian communities as “butch” women. However, their consistent desire to repair the “link between their bodies and their gender identity” eventually moved them towards identification with transsexuals and a disidentification with lesbians and other women. Both Rubin (2003) and Devor (1997) found that where gender expression brought FTMs into lesbian communities, their identified sex as male drove them out. Rubin believes that this movement in and then out of lesbian communities is
one of the ways in which the body is central to transsexual and not butch lesbian identities.

The last step in Rubin’s trajectory, “making transition choices,” is a departure from previous models of transsexual identity formation. Rubin finds that due to a number of factors, FTMs made different decisions regarding the alteration of their bodies even though they all identified as internally male. Some FTMs chose not to modify their bodies at all for political, financial, and medical reasons. Others claimed that the decision to transition wasn’t as high a priority as being able to bear children or preserve a marriage. Nonetheless, those who sought a physical transition were forced to find a balance between their desire to embody a normative conception of maleness and the possibilities available to do so. Genital surgeries for transsexual men are not equitable in cost, appearance, and function to those available to transsexual women, limiting the number of female-to-males that undertake that part of the process. Rubin argues that:

Incomplete transitions, due to medical conditions, lack of funds, or poor surgical options, may also make it difficult for an FTM to make legitimate claims to male status. Semi-private settings, bathrooms, and bedrooms, can be the site of threats to FTMs who have not had phalloplasty. Without a male body, these men speak of a daily insecurity that makes them more on-guard about their masculinity (2003: 166-7).

As a result, transsexual men seek validity as males by emphasizing other symbols of maleness, often performing hegemonic masculine behaviors to prove their “manhood” (2003:167). However, other transsexual men found ways of refashioning normative notions of maleness and masculinity through practices such as renaming their genitalia and reconstructing their idea of maleness to be inclusive of their bodies. Rubin’s findings reveal that, for FTMs, the path to maleness does not necessarily end in genital transformation, but in an overall symbolic reconstruction of their bodies.
In Rubin’s search for what defines the lives of female to male transsexuals, it is important to note that he thinks that subjectivity is characterized by intra- and intersubjective recognition. Rubin presumes that in order to be socially integrated, FTMs must not only recognize themselves as authentic males, but others must express this recognition as well. As such, body modification becomes an integral part of achieving this dual recognition. Rubin asserts:

FTM body modification is a situated, contextual project of authenticity based on the principles and demands of recognition in modern society. Without body modification, most FTMs are subject to misrecognition both by others and by themselves (2003: 15).

Rubin claims that prior to a physical transition, FTMs experience misrecognition, failing to be seen by others as males. These failures keep FTMs from intersubjective recognition and incorporation into society. The body becomes the vehicle from which FTMs can integrate their authentic selves into society.

In line with previous research on transsexuals, Douglas Schrock, Lori Reid, and Emily Boyd (2005; Schrock and Boyd 2006; Schrock and Reid 2006) examined how transsexual women experienced the interplay of bodily and social transformations as they moved from one sex to the other. The authors interviewed nine, white, middle-class, male-to-female transsexuals who were between 31 and 47 years of age who they met during fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork at a support group for crossdressers, transsexuals, and significant others. Schrock et al. combined the concepts of bodywork and Rubin’s (2003) theory of female-to-male trans-embodiment to study how transsexuals comport themselves into their desired gender. Schrock et al. presume that their findings will differ from Rubin’s (2003) on the basis that trans-embodiment is more work intensive for male-to-female than female-to-male transsexuals “largely because
gender norms surrounding appearance, demeanor, and the body are more stringent for women” (Schrock et al. 2005: 321). In other words, they assume that male-to-female transsexuals take a more highly active role in creating an outwardly feminine appearance.

Published in a series of reports (Schrock et al. 2005; Schrock and Boyd 2006; Schrock and Reid 2006), Schrock et al. found that transsexuals reconditioned their own subjectivity through a reflexive process that involved “repetitive retraining, redecorating, and remaking the physical body, which shaped their feelings, role-taking, and self-monitoring” (2005: 315). They performed intentional and repetitive bodywork such as wearing women’s clothes, speaking at a higher pitch, and showing more emotion. Reactions from others informed them to adjust their presentations or provided validation of their femininity. “Interviewees’ continual editing of how their bodies may be signifying gender thus involved perspective taking aimed at guessing how others evaluated their gendered performances” (Schrock and Boyd, 2006: 6). Over time, this work became habitual and instilled in the transsexuals’ practical consciousness, giving them a greater sense of being authentic women (Schrock et al 2005; Schrock and Boyd 2006). Schrock et al. also found that the transsexuals constructed histories to reflect their feminine identity. These self-narratives “bestowed a sense of coherency and were constructed, it appeared, to boost the chance their selves would seem credible from others’ perspectives” (2006: 3). In clinical settings, they often emphasized stories of gender non-conformity and de-eroticized cross-dressing and past sexual encounters to project a self-narrative of transsexuality, not transvestitism or homosexuality. These practices of “reflexive storytelling” and “reflexive bodywork” shaped the coming out
strategies of the transsexual women as they moved from concealing their private acts of cross-dressing to presenting full-time as female.

Schrock and Boyd use the notion of “coming out” to describe both the verbal disclosure of one’s transsexuality as well as the instance when transsexuals revealed themselves as women to those who only knew them as men. They found that female-to-male transsexuals worked to control information about their identity and their “body projects,” the process of transitioning. The interviewees believed that gradually “leaking” information about their identity would prepare others for full disclosure. In turn, it gave them more confidence to pursue female embodiment and disclose their intent to become women to others. Tactics of disclosure were not central to, but part of the overall body project including concealing then revealing one’s transsexuality followed by living openly as a woman. It is the reflexive bodywork in the passage from male to female that shapes their decisions to disclose to others and to live full time as women.

Overall, themes that emerge from the research on transsexual identity development are: that embodiment is central to gender crossing; that transsexuals enact deliberate and strategic “bodywork” to avoid social stigma; that transsexuals reject previous identities (i.e. male, female, lesbian); and, that the process of crossing genders differs for female-to-male and male-to-female transsexuals. A marked shift is the movement from “the body” to “bodywork,” which emphasizes the ongoing and active way that bodies are produced in and through culture. Nevertheless, the studies are limited by the narrowly defined demographics in their samples as well as the reliance on a developmental framework. First, each of the studies is gender-specific, looking only at trans male or trans female spectrum individuals. The samples are predominantly limited
to individuals who are pursuing a medical sex reassignment and legal sex reclassification, with some exceptions. As a result, this research fails to provide an adequate examination of the similarities and differences across assigned sex and gender identity. More noticeably, it excludes a vast number of trans people who move away from their assigned sex/gender, but choose not to embody, express, or identify themselves as normatively male or female.

Furthermore, these studies fail to account for identity maintenance that many transsexuals encounter post-transition, such as hiding their status and reconstructing a life history. Part of this limitation is the assumption that there is such a thing as a “completed” transition. Many trans people do not or cannot undergo a full sex reassignment, especially in the case of female-to-male transsexuals (Rachlin 2002; Rubin 2003; San Francisco Department of Public Health 1999). Therefore, it is impossible for most trans people to hide their trans status in intimate relationships or during medical examinations. Furthermore, to change the sex marker on all identity documents, even after a medical sex reassignment, can be a challenging and expensive process. Even as there are increasingly fewer identity documents that cannot be changed, the legislation, jurisprudence, and policies in the United States regarding sex reclassification are inconsistent and contradictory, making it harder for trans people to navigate the identity reclassification process. In essence, most, if not all, trans people must continuously negotiate the potential disclosure of their status even if they are “post-transition.”

Most significantly, because of the reliance on a developmental trajectory model, these studies frame sex and gender identity as something that exists prior to and unaffected by culture. The assumption that an identity is awaiting to emerge through a
physical and social transition neglects the role that institutions, social interactions, and
spaces play in the production and maintenance of sex classifications, embodiments, and
expressions of self. A simple example of this is the fact that individuals must be
classified as either male or female on identity documentation; there is no alternative
category. Also, there are many facilities and institutions in the United States that are sex-
segregated, forcing individuals to align themselves with one gender or the other in order
to occupy that space such as bathrooms and locker rooms. Those who fall outside the
boundaries of normative embodiments or expressions of sex and gender are penalized
through social sanctions, harassment, and violence. Their ability to participate in social
groups, organizations, events, and institutions is also restricted and in some cases
completely denied. These institutions and social spaces organize the daily lives of
individuals, inevitably impacting the ways in which people understand and experience
their identities. Ultimately, a developmental model fails because society is treated as a
mirror of gender, not as an active producer of it.

Stories of Gender Variance

The increasing visibility of trans and gender variant identities led sociologists to
study the social processes of identification among a variety of individuals who leave their
assigned gender status. Of the many recent works that identify the threads of
commonality and difference across trans identifications, there are three large-scale
sociological studies conducted by Richard Ekins and Dave King (2006), Lori Girshick
(2008) as well as, Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin (2011) that I will review. These
works attempt to offer a more complex understanding of non-normative gender
identification above and beyond the dominant transsexual trajectory model of crossing from one gender to the other.

In *The Transgender Phenomenon*, Richard Ekins and Dave King (2006) define the sociological process of “transgendering” - the social process of moving across genders, living in between genders, or living “beyond gender.” Framing their approach as contemporary symbolic interactionism, they take from Plummer’s (1995) telling of sexual stories to tell gender stories that reveal everyday practices and taken-for-granted assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality. Ekins and King map out a number of transgendering “stories” based on two decades of fieldwork, qualitative analysis, life history work, archival research and communications with several thousand “cross-dressers” and “sex changers” around the world. Their primary assumption is that, “from the sociological point of view, it is this binary gender divide which provides the principal social structural determinant within which all gender relations are played out” (2006: 223). From this framing, the foundation of the process of transgendering is the binary gender divide from which the crossing of identity boundaries gives way to four major modes of transgendering: permanently crossing the divide (migrating), temporarily crossing the divide (oscillating), seeking to eliminate the divide in order to be genderless (negating), and seeking to go beyond the divide in order to become a new/third gender (transcending).

In each of these modes, Ekins and King assume gender to be an accomplishment (Garfinkel 1967, Kessler and McKenna 1978) that is produced. Thus, they identify main sub-processes enacted in transgendering that produce the desired gender outcome: erasing, substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining. These five major sub-
processes occur in all four of the modes of transgendering, but a dominant sub-process characterizes and comes to define each mode. In migrating stories where individuals seek to permanently move from one gender to the other, the dominant sub-process is substitution, the replacement of features related to one’s birth sex with those associated with the opposite sex. In oscillating stories, the dominant sub-process is not an actual substitution of gendered features, but the virtual substitution accomplished through implying. Implying allows individuals to temporarily shape their bodies, giving the appearance of a differently sexed body, in order to move back and forth across genders. In stories of negation where individuals seek to remove gendered aspects of their bodies and appearances, the dominant sub-process is erasing, the elimination of one’s gendered features forgoing a replacement of them with differently gendered features. In the last mode of transcending, the dominant sub-process is redefining. Individuals who seek to subvert and/or “move beyond” the binary gender divide give their body parts and behaviors new meanings. Concealing is not a dominant sub-process in any of the four modes of transgendering as it is a more subtle form of identity maintenance. Concealing is the managing of details that may conflict with the intended gender display such as hiding personal histories and certain bodily features. Overall, each of the five sub-processes are employed in the different modes of transgendering in order to produce a body and appearance that coincides with the identity of the trans individual and how they want to be read by others.

Ekins and King claim that when they first started their investigation the primary modes available to trans people were either migrating or oscillating, with the assumption that migration equaled assimilation and oscillating equaled temporary acts of “passing.”
However, they have noted a shift in their findings over time, as they encountered more individuals who identified themselves as neither men nor women. Their findings indicate a shift away from priorities of assimilation and passing to a blurring of migrating and transcending. However, this finding is complicated by research that suggests that many trans people shift from experiences indicative of transcending to ones of migrating once they have transitioned (Wilson 2002; Wickman 2001). Overall, the findings of Ekins and King illustrate how the process of transgendering is characterized by more dimensions than a simple unidirectional trajectory. Their shift away from a developmental model of identity to one of telling gender stories also locates trans identities in particular social and historical contexts. Trans identities are seen as ongoing accomplishments always in process rather than as fixed and essential selves in the process of emergence.

For her book *Transgender Voices: Beyond Men and Women*, Lori B. Girshik (2008) interviewed 150 people across a range of transgender identifications, and using a grounded theory approach, she pieced together themes of commonality and difference amongst the experiences of these individuals. Girshick’s findings mirror many of the themes seen in the works of Bolin (1988), Devor (1997, 2004), Rubin (2003), and Schrock et al. (2005; Schrock and Boyd 2006; Schrock and Reid 2006): experiencing feelings of difference from childhood through adolescence; hiding acts of cross-dressing; the desire to embody one’s preferred gender configuration; seeking support in a community; disclosing a transgender identity to a community, family, and work; and, seeking internal and external acceptance. Where Girshik’s work stands apart from earlier research are her findings on gender policing. She identified the various ways in which trans people are socially and institutionally regulated on the basis of their gender identity.
and expression in bathrooms, feminist politics, accessing medical care, and legal
documentation. Girshik emphasizes:

One’s legal status as a male or a female matters. It matters for marriage, divorce,
adoPTION, child custody, inheritance, immigration status, employment; for access
to services such as shelters, clinics and centers, health benefits’ and for identity
papers and personal records (name, driver’s license, passport, birth certificate,
school transcript, work history). For trans individuals, even those who are not
transitioning (e.g., genderqueers of male cross-dressers), being stopped by police
or showing a driver’s license to cash a check can be stressful (2008: 146).

Girshick’s findings, similar to Viviane Namaste’s (2000) work, which I describe in the
next section, are much more nuanced in that she assumes that it is not just the crossing of
sexes that impedes the social functioning of transgender individuals, but also the gender
binary as itself. Girshick accounts for many of the challenges faced in these spheres as
consequences of the medico-legal gatekeeping of identity for trans people. She argues
that the fact that transgender people need medical proof of transitioning in order to have
their gender identity validated hinders their ability to function in society. Gender
policing has both direct consequences of harassment, rejection, and violence as well as
longstanding indirect effects of internalized shame, fear, and depression. It is Girshick’s
inclusion of a variety of trans identifications and expressions beyond single-gender
accounts of transsexuality that brings gender policing to the forefront of trans struggles.

*The Lives of Transgender People* by Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin (2011) is
lauded to be the pre-eminent research study on the lives of transgender people to date,
based on 3,474 surveys, 301 email interviews, 109 telephone interviews, and 9 face-to-
face interviews with “not just MTF and FTM individuals and cross-dressers, but also
genderqueers, androgynes…and other transgender individuals who describe their genders
in nonbinary ways” (2011: viii). The book covers the variety of ways in which trans and
gender variant people come to understand and define their identities as well as experiences they have with acceptance and discrimination through quantitative data analysis and life history narratives. What is significant in this book is that Beemyn and Rankin criticize previous identity development models for their gender exclusivity and for the fact that not all trans people shared the experiences identified on these trajectories, or experienced them in a different order than what was presented. Nevertheless, they retain the central focus of identity development, replacing the language of “stages” or “steps” with “milestones” that are said to represent common themes or events experienced by transgender people within different identity groups: FTMs, MTFs, Cross-Dressers, and Genderqueers.

Beemyn and Rankin’s theoretical remodeling falls short of capturing trans identities in the same ways that previous identity trajectory models did. First, the ways in which the conceptual paradigm of milestones differs from developmental models is unclear. They state, “our milestone schema is not a stage or step model—even though there is a seemingly ‘natural’ progression through the milestones from confusion, guilt, and shame to self-acceptance and a sense of wholeness” (2011: 115). More importantly, a developmental framework presumes that the participants’ “sense of gender difference” (2011: 40) reflects a fixed core identity that is waiting to emerge through a physical and/or social transition. To reiterate a previous point, developmental models treat society as a mirror of gender, not as an active producer of it. In addition, the grouping of individuals into the groups of FTMs, MTFs, Cross-Dressers, and Genderqueers creates an artificial distinction between those who are “binary” or “nonbinary” identified, and naturalizes a two-sex model of bodily classification: male or female. Beemyn and
Rankin’s research sample is more inclusive and expansive than previous studies, but their underlying conceptions of sex, gender, and identity produce essentialized notions of transgenderism.

Ekins and King (2006) and Girshick (2008) were relatively successful in moving the sociological analysis of trans identities away from linear identity development models found in previous research. This was accomplished not only through the inclusion of a variety of trans identities and experiences, but also through the utilization of theoretical perspectives that frame identity as an ongoing accomplishment imbued with social significance. Their findings provide a greater understanding of the forces that shape the lives of trans people irrespective of self-identification and embodiment by highlighting the relationship that trans people have to the binary gender system as well as the ways in which sex/gender policing is enforced. Beemyn and Rankin’s (2011) significant contribution is the wealth of data collected on the lives of trans people, especially in the areas of patterned and systematic encounters with discrimination and marginalization. However, their insights into trans identity management are rather limited due to their reliance on a theoretical framework that, albeit different, still resembles previous models of identity development.

Transgender and Transsexual People and Institutions

Empirical research that centralizes identity development fails to account for the role of institutions in the production of sex classifications, gender identities, and gender expressions. Recent scholarship in the social sciences provides an examination of the ways in which transgender and transsexual people are shaped by, excluded from, or
inadequately incorporated into institutions. In this section, I review the well-received works of sociologist Viviane Namaste (2000) and anthropologist David Valentine (2007) to assess the role of institutions in defining trans identities and the ways in which trans people’s lives are shaped by their contingent access to, and exclusion from, institutions.

In her book *Invisible Lives: The Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People*, Namaste (2000) presents an analysis of the ways in which queer theory and social institutions fail to recognize the needs and concerns of transsexual and transgender individuals. She claims that queer theory and social science research focuses solely on the “production of transsexuality” and fails to see how it produces the “erasure of transsexuality and transgenderism” (2000: 51, emphasis in original). “Erasure” is characterized by three main components: the reduction of transsexuals and transgender people to the figural and metaphorical dimensions of discourse; the exclusion of transsexuals and transgender people from institutions; and, the act of invalidating transsexual and transgender subjectivity. These three components reinforce institutional practices that fail to account for the particular needs of transsexual and transgender individuals. Namaste suggests that erasure defines the lives of transsexual and transgender people. She substantiates her claim with analyses that span across a range of “erasures” within social theory, cultural representations and institutional research. I will review the sections of *Invisible Lives* most relevant to this research project, including Namaste’s (2000) critiques of queer theory, focused on the work of Judith Butler; gender violence and gay and lesbian activism; and, institutional administration of sex and gender identity in social service providers.
Namaste is highly critical of Butler’s (1990; 1993) use of drag and the trans figure in her theoretical articulations. Namaste believes that, in using drag as an example of gender performativity, Butler ignores the context in which drag occurs. Namaste emphasizes that the type of drag Butler refers to is executed in gay bars by drag queens, a form of performativity “created and defined by gay male culture” (2000: 10). She argues that while Butler uses drag to examine heteronormativity, she doesn’t explore the history of gender and gender performance in gay male communities, specifically the position that drag queens and trans people have in relation to gay men’s culture. For example, Namaste notes, “Consider the paradox that some drag queens live: while many gay male bars have drag queens on stage, some of them deny entry to women” (2000:10). Namaste argues that drag queens, transsexual women, and non-transsexual women are relegated to the periphery of gay male establishments. The sequestering of drag queens to the stage positions their gender as a spectacle and confines that expression to the purely performative. Namaste contends:

While Butler reads drag as a means of exposing the contingent nature of gender and identity, I suggest that we point to the essential paradox of drag within gay male communities: at the precise moment that it underlines the constructed nature of the gendered performances, drag is contained as a performance in itself. Gay male identity, in contrast, establishes itself as something prior to the performance. (2000:13)

Namaste’s stance is that drag kings and drag queens in gay bars are not part of an environment where gender is critically analyzed but of one that reaffirms the “natural” expression and identities of gays and lesbians in relationship to the “performative” genders of drag performers. In this sense, drag queens are affirmed as objects, not as subjects.
Namaste is similarly critical of Butler’s analysis of Venus Xtravaganza from the film *Paris is Burning*, in her work *Bodies That Matter* (1993). Butler denounces Venus for her desire to escape her race, class, and gender reality for an idealized version of white, middle-class womanhood. Butler believes that it is from Venus’s failure to signify white womanhood that she meets the material fate of her existence as a woman of color and is murdered. In other words, performing “realness” at a ball is queer, but in the streets it is not. Namaste asserts that Butler’s interpretation of the death of Venus is a distortion of transgender realities. Venus is not a victim of violence on account of being a woman of color, but specifically because she is a transsexual sex worker as well as a woman of color.

Furthermore, performing realness in ballroom culture provides trans and gender variant people with the skills necessary to navigate the world outside of the balls:

> Ultimately, ballroom community members understand that they are seen through a racist and homophobic lens propagated and internalized by various sectors of society. Therefore, members seek greater agency in shaping how they are viewed by altering and performing their bodies in ways that disguise their gender and sexual nonconformity” (Bailey 2011: 380).

The “unmarking” of oneself as queer in particular contexts, whether deliberate or not, is a specifically queer survival strategy given the very real dangers of violence, not an uncritical or unqueer miming of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy (Bailey 2011). Namaste argues that Butler, and queer theory in general, cannot conceptualize the specificity of violence and discrimination against transsexuals by reducing them to metaphors.

Furthermore, violence against transgender and transsexual individuals goes unrecognized through institutional and political efforts to reduce incidences “gaybashing”
—violence against gays and lesbians. Namaste found that political and activist responses to gaybashings focused on increasing police surveillance and protection in “gay ghettos,” predominantly populated by gay men and some lesbians. As a result, violence directed towards transsexual and transgender individuals occurring either inside or outside of these zones was not attended to. Noticeably, while much attention has been drawn to the topic of gaybashing, the function of gender in these instances is largely ignored.

Namaste accounts for the gendered patterns of violence in public space in two ways. First, she states that since public space is considered the domain of men and masculinity, regulation of public space takes on different forms for gays and lesbians. Lesbians are often assaulted in “ordinary” public spaces whereas gay men are assaulted in locations populated by gays (2000: 142). Second, assaults against gays and lesbians are highly related to their gender presentation. Namaste states:

The connotations of the pejorative names used against individuals who are assaulted—names like “sissy,” “faggot,” “dyke,” “man-hater,” “queer,” and “pervert”—suggest that an attack is justified not in reaction to one’s sexual identity, but to one’s gender presentation (2000: 140).

Namaste argues that representing violence against transgender and transsexual people as acts of homophobia “renders invisible” the experiences, issues, and needs of transgender and transsexual individuals. Instead, Namaste encourages the use of the term “genderbashing” to specify violent acts committed on the basis of gender expression, which would draw attention to violence against transgender people.

The last type of erasure that Namaste outlines is institutional erasure, which occurs in different forms; the most pronounced of which is seen in the interactions that trans people face when trying to obtain identity documents that match their lived sex.
Because identity documents demonstrate legal citizenship and civil status, they are required when negotiating most institutions such as health care, employment, education, and banks. Namaste found that many transsexual and transgender individuals in Quebec struggled with the inconsistent administrative procedures involved in processing new identity documentation. Namaste illustrates how the definition of female-to-male “sex change” surgery is applied inconsistently and was even changed on a legislative level without the consultation of transsexuals or medical providers. Moreover, transsexuals were not well informed about what surgeries were needed and as to what process they needed to follow to obtain the correct identification documents. Namaste found that the challenges involved in obtaining accurate identity documentation have left many with legal documents that do not match their gender, making transsexual and transgender individuals unable to hide their status and vulnerable to accusations of fraud (Namaste 2000; Spade 2008).

Relegating sex status to only male or female and restricting the ability to change that status has consequences for transsexual and transgender people. Namaste claims that “transsexuals respond to this situation by refusing to produce such papers: a response that illustrates the systemic exclusion of transsexuals from the institutional world” (Namaste 2000: 261). Some transsexuals do not display their identity cards when negotiating institutions, choosing to pay for expenses out of pocket, and others do not use certain services at all. As a result, Namaste claims that these undocumented individuals do not exist on an institutional level; they have been erased. This erasure is additionally perpetuated within healthcare systems through research protocols that limit sex categorization to only male and female. When transsexuals are categorized as either their
sex assigned at birth or their post-operative sex, they become statistically equivalent to
nontranssexual men or women. Namaste asserts that by ignoring the specificity of
transsexual and transgender experiences, these individuals are invisible to administrative
systems and forced to function outside of mainstream institutional practices. Following, I
will point out the contradictions in Namaste’s work, and then discuss how her claims are
limited by the assumptions she makes about trans people as well as the sample she
analyzes in her study.

First, it is important to note that the work of Namaste is a valuable critique of the
institutionalization of sex and gender identity categories. Institutions perpetuate the
marginalization of many trans individuals by forcing them to identify as either male or
female and making the process of changing one’s identity documentation difficult and
fraught with inconsistencies. However, the term “erasure” doesn’t appropriately address
the issues that trans people face. On one hand, Namaste critiques queer theory for the
way that it uses the transgender subject to problematize sex and gender categories. On
the other hand, Namaste argues that institutions do not recognize the experiences of
transgender and transsexual individuals by limiting sex categories to “male” or “female.”
She assumes that many of the interactions transsexuals have, such as using identity cards
that do not match their presentation, are unique to the transsexual experience. But, she is
unable to provide evidence that these experiences are characteristic of only transsexuals
and not of gender non-conforming individuals, in general.

Namaste’s work also suggests the need to carve out a cultural space specifically
for transsexual and transgender individuals in order for them to be recognized by
institutions. As such, trans people would then need to disclose their trans status in order
for institutions to recognize them and to meet their needs. For those trans people who want to keep their trans status private and live as men or women, they may choose to remove themselves from transsexual related research studies and services. In addition, Namaste does not recognize that, in some cases, the inconsistencies of identity documents and lived gender does not produce erasure, but produces the very effect of transgenderism or transsexuality that a person desires. From an example previously mentioned, Jacob Hale (1997) notes that his sex is listed differently across identity documents, and to him this is representative of his trans identity, not a negation of it. The inconsistencies of the classification system do not erase Hale, but rather produce him as a visibly trans subject. Lastly, Namaste’s arguments appear to address the concerns of a small population of mostly MTF sex workers who are predominantly women of color. While it is important to recognize the challenges individuals in this demographic face, Namaste’s work is limited by only using this small subset of the trans community when trying to make larger generalizations about trans people as a whole. Their agency for negotiating institutional barriers is likely very low, making it appear as if administrative power has a totalizing effect on all trans people.

David Valentine (2007) similarly examined the ways in which marginalized trans populations are effected by transgender theory and politics. Valentine conducted ethnographic research while serving as a safer-sex outreach worker for a clinic in New York City that provided health education and medical services to transgender people. His book *Imagining Transgender* (2007) is an exploration of the origins, meanings, and consequences of the emergence of the term “transgender” and its subsequent institutionalization. In it, Valentine argues that “transgender” and “transgender studies,”
while impacted by feminism, has emerged and become institutionalized primarily out of sexology and gay and lesbian scholarship and activism. But, more importantly, he illustrates how those who are wrapped up in the debates over the meaning of transgender and the goals of the transgender movement are primarily privileged, middle- to upper-class, educated, white trans people.

LGBT activism frames gender and sexuality in terms of analytically separate, individual, and internal identities, subsequently ignoring experiences that cannot be so neatly packaged as distinct identities. The institutionalization of transgender, then, becomes a new category in which only certain expressions and understandings of self are recognized as intelligible. Valentine claims that “transgender” is partially “an effect of the historical development of privatized homosexual identity,” in which gay becomes equivalent to white, middle class, private, and male and anything that challenges or lies outside of that characterization is incorporated into transgender (2007: 64, emphasis in original). This was apparent to Valentine during his outreach work in communities of color upon which he reflects, “I was struck by the observation that a large number of the people I met and talked to did not know the term “transgender” or were resistant to its use to describe them” (2007: 21). Instead of summarizing the numerous ways that Valentine illustrates the limitations of “transgender,” I will focus only on his analysis of drag due to its central role in the development of transgender theories.

Valentine draws a critical eye to the way in which drag is implied in the construction of “transgender community” in contrast to “gay community.” Where Valentine’s co-workers identified drag ball participants as being part of the “transgender community,” the targeted demographic of outreach services, very few of them actually
identified themselves as transgender. To explore the implications of this, Valentine compared three different drag events: a drag ball at the Clubhouse which is frequented primarily by young people of color; an annual debutante ball held by crossdressers; and, lastly a philanthropic ball of mostly white and well-off gay male drag performers. Unlike Namaste (2000) who only studied one subset of the trans population, Valentine (2007) compares these three groups differing in regards to self-identification, race, and class. As a result, he demonstrates the nuanced ways that transgender politics, and gender itself, are racialized and classed.

At the Clubhouse, Valentine observed that “two of the categories for the ball could be interpreted as ‘transgender,’” yet he found that, “everyone at the ball—fem queens, butch queens, butches, women, butch queens in drags—refer to themselves and each other as ‘gay’” (2007: 79). He notes that to an outside observer it’s not always easy to tell who is competing in which category and what their performance may or may not indicate about their sexual identity. While this event is recognized as “drag,” some of the participants express their gender the same inside and outside of the parameters of the ball. He claims, “The point to note here is how ‘transgender’ comes to be a way for external agents to try and sort out what appears to be a confusing conflation of gendered and sexual identities for the purposes of social service outreach and documentation” (2007: 81). In fact, the performance divisions and the difference between individuals in each category are highly policed and symbolic of hierarchies regarding gender, race, and class.

The significance of “drag” for participants at primarily white events is rather different. At the crossdressers ball, the participants emphasized the “work” involved in dressing up as well as rejecting any erotic aspect of the practice. They do not consider
themselves transsexuals and only use transgender to describe their understanding that they are part of a “transgender community,” but do not use the term to describe themselves or others at the event. Similarly, at the philanthropic gay drag benefit, “drag is tied to performance and fun; that is, dressing in drag has few if any implications for the gender identities of the men who are in drag, nor is it understood as an erotic activity—or, at least, this is the claim Imperial Court members make” (2007: 92). For both the crossdressers and the gay male drag performers, their “drag” is a part-time affair compared to the queens and butches at the Clubhouse, many of who live and work in the gender they present at the ball. For those individuals who participate in events at the Clubhouse, “drag” is not purely understood in the theatrical sense.

The ability for people to embody different and complicated subject positions at the Clubhouse relates to Halberstam’s (1998) discussion of the “transgender butch.” The “transgender butch” for Halberstam is a subject position for female-bodied people who don’t see themselves as either FTMs or as women. Valentine points out, though, that Halberstam’s discussion of this in-between space of fluidity is limited to female-bodied people. He argues that currently there is no analogous possibility of a “transgender femme” identity for gay men outside of a context of drag. However, within the world of drag, especially for the queens and butches at the Clubhouse, there are possibilities for embodying and expressing complicated identities. The second limitation of the figure of the “transgender butch” is that, “the complexities of this position are disabled in the institutional contexts where the differences between homosexual and transgender identification (and, of course, sexuality and gender) are stabilized” (2007: 100-101). A number of individuals that Valentine talked to resisted identification with a “transgender
community” specifically because of its inclusivity. They felt that including people such as cross-dressers or drag queens would “dilute the specific political and social goals of transexuals, focused on a surgical transition” (2007: 101). In other words, the institutional reality of transgender is that it doesn’t reflect the inclusivity it is assumed to represent.

Valentine’s (2007) findings stand as an important response to the claims made by Namaste (2000) that institutions have failed to create a space where transgender and transsexual individuals can be recognized, resulting in a failure to meet their specific needs. Of course, Namaste and Valentine are examining cities in different countries with different funding and social service apparatuses. Even so, Valentine’s work reveals, to some extent, societal changes that have occurred throughout the United States and Canada in the decade since Namaste’s publication. He argues that through the institutionalization of “transgender,” experiences are ordered to fit a narrow conception of a white, middle-class, educated, American transgender identity, erasing the complexities and possibilities of gender and sexual personhood. The creation of a space of transgender intelligibility has rendered complex expressions impossible, and the specificity of marginalized groups have been erased to make room for the goals of white, privileged trans people.

It is important to acknowledge that Namaste (2000) offers a valuable critique against the queer privileging of gender “transgressors” over transsexuals. Her research supports arguments made by Prosser (1995; 1998) that trans theorizing and research should emphasize the specificity of transsexual experiences. Ignored by theory, institutions, and research, transsexuals are forced out of social services and their needs
and concerns go unrecognized. Unfortunately, as transgender becomes institutionalized, it is done so in very specific instances of social service outreach often connected to gay and lesbian health centers. In many ways, Valentine’s work mirrors the findings from Hale’s (1997) leatherdyke study in that subcultures have their own cultural codes that make certain expressions and identifications legible that may be otherwise invisible in dominant culture. While it certainly speaks to hierarchies within LGBT communities, Valentine’s work does not address the fact that “transgender” is not institutionalized beyond these subcultural establishments.

**Critiques of Previous Research**

The primary limitation in research on trans identities is the use of gay and lesbian identity models to frame trans identity development and management, especially through the use of a “coming out” model. For many trans people, living a life of authenticity is often not to live openly as trans, but to live consistently and securely as one’s determined or preferred gender. While coming to terms with one’s trans identity may provide a positive sense of self, coming out to others may not. For many cases, but not all, a successful transition or coherent identity involves the absence of such disclosure (Devor 1997; Rubin 2003). On the other hand, there are many instances in which trans people are forced to disclose their status, especially to employers and colleagues, family, and intimate partners, if they choose to transition to the opposite sex while maintaining these relationships. Disclosing one’s trans identity or transsexual past to others may provoke feelings of shame, distancing, and isolation that are assumed to exist only when one is inside the closet. An accidental outing can lead to shame and fear of a spoiled identity,
especially if the trans person does not want their status known. It can also lead to arrest, violence, the loss of a job, housing, the legal right to marry, the right to inheritance, and the custody of children (Broadus 2006; Currah 2006; Flynn 2006).

Trans identities still require a self-recognition of discordance like gays and lesbians, but they often do not involve following through with repetitive public disclosure to maintain a consistent sense of self. For many trans people, their lives are marked not by repetitive public disclosure, but by personal acts of disclosure, forced or voluntary. Personal acts of disclosure are, however, sporadic and distinctly not connected to the experience of authenticity, as is the case for gays and lesbians. They are similar to other intimate acts of disclosure such as having an illness, being in prison, or revealing something from the past. But these acts are not a “coming out.” Furthermore, the experience of “coming out” for gays and lesbians was also an affirmation of belonging to a larger, collective, political community. For gays and lesbians, there is a heightened culture of visibility and an institutionalized grounded collective identity that is not in place for trans people.

Treating trans people as another group of sexual minorities to be incorporated, under the label transgender, into lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) research and politics also enforces a division between the analytical categories of “gender” and “sexuality.” On one hand, transgender people are sectioned off both institutionally and culturally as an entity distinctly different from gays and lesbians, as depicted in the “border wars” and the findings of both Namaste (2000) and Valentine (2007). As a result, the points of similarity and overlap between transgender people and gays and lesbians become invisible. Further, populations in need of transgender related services and outreach might
be ignored if they identify as gay or lesbian instead of as transgender (Valentine 2007). Also, as Valentine (2007) points out, the distinction between homosexuality and transgenderism positions gays and lesbians as gender normative and trans people as gender deviant. On the other hand, the incorporation of “T” into LGBT has also resulted in a failure to recognize the specific needs of transsexual and transgender individuals, since in some instances they are assumed to have the same social and political goals as gays and lesbians (Namaste 2000).

One significant area of distinction to be noted is that gays and lesbians in the United States have a fairly marginal connection to the medical and psychiatric world at this point in time. They are still appealing to normalizing medical discourses, but they are not required to interact with physicians or therapists in order to come out or live fully as homosexuals. At the heart of the trans experience is the protracted relationship of the body and psyche to the medical community. Trans people have a variety of relationships with the medical world; some have extensive and intricate relationships that are central to their lives while others have little to none at all. Even though not all trans people have this relationship on an individual level, the discursive and material connection between trans people and the medical world is a distinctive and central component to trans identities, setting them apart from gay and lesbian identity frameworks.

Trans identities are located within a larger psychiatric discourse of pathology and illness. Creating a coherent sense of self for trans people requires disclosure to oneself and, for many, a relationship with the medical community in which the body is inspected, judged, and altered as part of a consensual process by which the shift to embody authenticity takes place. While homosexuality is still viewed by many as pathological,
espousing that label is not necessary to accomplish a gay or lesbian identity, as it is for many trans people. Cultivating a coherent identity as gender variant or transsexual is not just about neutralizing ideas and discourse. For trans people who wish to access hormones or undergo surgical procedures, most must submit to the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder. To embody one’s preferred gender, trans people are required to disclose their identity to medical professionals, insurance agencies, their employer, and legal institutions, as differently gendered. Some trans people are also required to prove their commitment to this identity by performing a real-life test, living as their preferred gender for a specified amount of time, in order to be validated by professionals (Girshick 2008). Only through medical legitimation can trans people change legal sex/gender markers on forms of identification such as birth certificates, passports, and driver’s licenses. In other words, trans people who desire to live as the opposite sex/gender are required to have a successful relationship with the medical community in order to live and function in society. With that said, the medical community is not a homogenous entity. A number of trans health providers do not reproduce the same gender norms as the mainstream medical establishment.

Medical and legal designations of sex and gender reach beyond the pathologization of those who wish to change their gender through hormones and surgery. Deeply embedded in United States culture is the institutionalization of binary sex/gender categories. From sex designations at birth, identity documents incorporate sex as part of one’s civic status. Identity documents only have the categories of either male or female forcing people to be marked as one, even if they live as differently gendered in their everyday life. Therefore, even though there are an increasing number of individuals who
identify as neither men nor women, they are still forced, in many circumstances, to lay
claim to identification as either men (males) or women (females). Furthermore, one’s
sex/gender is often validated on the basis of performing a normatively gendered self.
Trans people, then, are forced to comply with the cis normative binary sex/gender system
in order to participate fully in a number of institutions, organizations, and social spaces.

In the following section, I will outline a new framework for analyzing trans
identity management. The goal of developing this framework is to bridge the gap
between the institutional marginalization of trans people and the ways in which trans
people understand and negotiate their identities in day-to-day interactions. I aim to build
upon the discussions of identity, performativity, and embodiment in trans theorizing by
exploring the relationships between institutions, social structures, and trans lives. In
particular, I examine the ways that the cis normative sex/gender binary system shapes the
ways that trans people navigate the social world.
Chapter Three
Border Crossing: A Framework for Conceptualizing Trans Identity Management

Presentation of self and identity management are central concerns for many trans people in order to garner validation and legitimacy as their lived gender(s) as well as to avoid discrimination, harassment, and violence. Drawing from geography and cultural studies, I modify the concept of border crossing to examine trans identity management in a cis normative binary sex/gender system. In this chapter, I begin by defining the notion of borders, the role they play in trans theorizing, and then delineate a typology of borders that play a formative role in shaping the lives of trans people, which is the focus of this research project. In this typology of gender borders I develop a set of terminology that is used throughout this manuscript, which characterizes the degree of regulation at borders (highly to moderately restricted), the main signifiers or markers of status (sex classification and embodiment/presentation), and the function of individuals policing the border (border regulators and border enforcers).

Defining Borders and Border Crossing

The primary function of borders is to divide two or more social orders, distinguishing one set of social selves from another. The notion of borders is used in geography, for example, to physically delineate different political territories in a global world (Newman and Paasi 1998; Hakli and Kaplan 2002). In the case of warring territories, the border divides opposing and often hostile social orders. These types of borders are highly restricted, characterized by monitored crossings, physical barriers like walls or fences, and extreme consequences for threats to security. An example of a
highly restricted border would be the border between Palestine and Israel where a wall was erected to reinforce the divide between the two nations. These physical political borders often involve an us/them or insider/outsider dichotomy in order to reinforce and naturalize cultural differences such as race or religion. A highly restricted border serves to create the perception of an internal safe space surrounded by, or in opposition to, dangerous foreigners (Anzaldua 1987; Tickner 1995; Salter 2003). The ability for individuals to move back and forth across a highly restricted border is challenging and sometimes impossible. Any individuals who try to border cross illegally are perceived as a threat to the social order and suffer severe consequences of imprisonment, torture, or even death. At highly restricted borders, insider/outside dichotomies become increasingly solidified and, in many instances, symbolic and material inequalities are exacerbated, especially if one territory cuts off access to necessary resources from the other territory (Newman and Paasi 1998; Marx 2005; Pellerin 2005). With that said, not all borders are defined by opposition, hostility, or such extreme notions of “us” and “them.”

Many borders are “friendly” borders, such as the lines that divide states, counties, and cities in the United States. Numerous individuals cross back and forth across these borders on a daily basis to exchange commerce, visit friends and relatives, access healthcare or social services, or go to work. These types of borders are moderately restricted, allowing for relatively open access for exchange, communication, and movement. While territories on either sides of a moderately restricted border may have different rules and norms, there is generally a sense of cooperation across jurisdictions. Generally speaking, the differences between social orders on either side of a moderately
restricted border are not as great as those across highly restricted borders. There are fewer distinctions between “us” and “them,” if at all. This may be due to the fact that some groups divided by moderately restricted borders are governed by or held accountable to an overarching set of rules and regulations. For example, federal laws, institutions, and organizations regulate individuals on either side of state lines. As a result, individuals on either side of the border are usually not perceived as a threat to the stability or security of the territory. Crossing back and forth across these borders is seen as insignificant or even beneficial to the social order, not as something that could compromise it. In some cases, individuals who are perceived to be a threat have their right to move across regional borders temporarily or permanently revoked, such as those on trial for or convicted of criminal activities. Those whose movement is so highly restricted are usually individuals determined to be a threat to both territories.

Nonetheless, physical boundaries are not the only types of borders in our social world. There are many instances of cultural borders used to separate and categorize groups of people based on social distinctions (Barth 1969; Anzaldua 1987; Wilson and Donnan 1998). Cultural borders divide the roles, norms, values, expectations and behaviors across a variety of social groups. Some cultural borders rest across dominant social identities such as race (white/non-white), class (rich/poor), gender (male/female), and disability (abled/disabled). Other cultural borders exist within more secondary social relationships such as between professors and students, therapists and clients, employees and customers, and guards and inmates. A person’s social position or relationship to the border structures everyday interactions in the social world. Specifically, power relations underlay each of these relationships where one group often, but not always, has
dominance over the other. In order to maintain these power dynamics, the differing roles, norms, and behaviors characteristic of each social group come to serve as what I am calling *markers of belonging*. Markers of belonging are signifiers of group membership ranging from physical attributes to dialect to codified classifications of identity. Over time, markers of belonging are naturalized by group members and seen as natural, rather than constructed, differences. As such, cultural borders reaffirm social hierarchies, and unequal power relations. Like physical borders, cultural borders also exist across differing degrees of restriction.

Akin to physical borders, certain cultural borders are more emphatically regulated than others. These highly restricted borders exist between groups that are defined by opposition and a relatively high power differential. The boundary between guards and inmates, for example, is a highly restricted border. Like geographical borders, the boundaries between guards and inmates are demarcated by physical barriers such as fences, walls, and bars. Different from geographical borders, however, they are reinforced through mandated uniforms and strict rules governing what is “acceptable” behavior for both inmates and guards. Border crossing is highly regulated and quite often a unidirectional process. Inmates may side with guards and play the role of informants, but there is no process for them to acquire an official position as a guard while they hold the status of inmate. On the other hand, guards more easily cross over to inmate status through being charged with a criminal offense. The highly restricted border functions to maintain the us/them dichotomy, on the premise that unwarranted crossings present an extreme threat to those on either side, especially to those in the dominant position.
In contrast, other cultural borders are lesser or moderately restricted, such as the borders between employees, customers, and owners of a cooperative grocery store (co-ops). Co-ops function through memberships where individuals purchase a share of the business or work a number of hours in order to obtain discounted products. As a result, many of the members occupy the statuses of owner, employee, and customer at the same time. Similar to geographical borders, the differences between each status is minimized at less restricted borders. There may be little to no difference in appearance or behavior between individuals in each of the groups. Furthermore, there is very little fear that individuals on either side pose a threat to the social order and organizational hierarchy. The behaviors of those in groups divided by lesser or moderately restricted cultural borders are usually guided by larger, overarching principles. For example, it is expected at co-ops that individuals participating in the business, on any side, hold similar belief systems and values such as community agriculture and fair labor practices. As a result, individuals may cross back and forth with relative ease, some offering to guide customers or help out at the register while shopping.

In many situations, cultural and physical borders are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. In crossing national borders, for example, individuals must present documents that identify citizenship and sex classifications, among other characteristics, which act as markers of belonging, of geographical and cultural status. Likewise, people on different sides of cultural borders are given differentiated access to physical locations. To return to the example of the inmate/guard border, inmates are restricted to the walls of the prison complex and their cells where the guards are able to move about freely outside of the prison. In each of these examples, markers of belonging play a large role in
defining which people have access to which spaces. As such, markers of social status or
group membership become important in a world of borders.

In many cases, only physical markers of belonging such as skin tone, dress, or
appearance are used to signify group membership. There are many cases, however,
where group identity differences are not that apparent, so in order to maintain distinctions
between two social orders identity cards or documents are used as official markers of
membership. The work on Japan-residing Koreans done by Matsunaga (2007) and
Fukuoka and Kim (1997) illustrates this type of social border. Many Japan-residing
Koreans are not readily apparent in Japan for they often hide their “Koreanness” through
name, dress, and language to avoid discrimination (Matsunaga 2007). However, they are
distinguished from Japanese citizens by the mandate of having to carry an Alien
Registration Certificate at all times (Fukuoka and Kim 1997). Consequently, Japan-
residing Koreans often experience racial discrimination in instances where their identity
cannot be hidden, such as when seeking out marriage or employment (Fukuoka 1993).

While one might assume that the identity checkpoint for citizenship only exists at
geographical borders, the research on Japan-residing Koreans demonstrates the ways in
which borders of nationality are institutionalized in government and private sponsored
practices and programs such as marriage and employment. From this perspective, it is
evident that borders are structured within the organization of cultures, especially through
population management systems (Spade 2011) such as identity documentation, social
services, the prison industrial complex, and health care.

What happens if someone encounters an identity checkpoint and cannot produce
the correct markers of belonging? What if they signify membership to both “us” and
“them” or to another group entirely? Individuals encounter a situation of border crossing at any instance when one’s identity is open to inspection, questioning, and determination either by in-group members or by a legal authority. Border crossings may include, but do not necessarily require, physical movement from one social order to the next. However, all border crossings are characterized by a set of practices employed to accommodate a set of expectations and norms. At a border crossing, one must successfully negotiate their body, presentation, and identity in order to affirm and legitimate their group membership as well as to deter harassment, scrutiny, or even harm. Individuals may mute or hide expressions of self when border crossing in order to present themselves as non-threatening. Over time, these acts of self-policing become internalized and part of the individual’s sense of self and identity.

Because borders are enacted to create and regulate differences, they are not a fine line of distinction, but a permeable zone that shifts and changes over time (Hannerz 1997; Marx 2005; Eyal 2006). In critical race studies the “border zone” (Eyal 2006) or “borderlands” (Anzaldua 1987) is the place where hybrid identities are found, where those bodies, identities, and cultures that cannot be neatly placed onto one side or the other exist. Anzaldua observes:

When you live on the border/ people walk through you, the wind steals your voice/ you’re a donkey, oxen, scapegoat,/ forerunner of a new race,/ half and half—both women and man, neither—/ a new gender (1987: 216).

Those inhabiting the border zone must negotiate shifting and multiple subject positions, and depending on the regulatory regime of the border, negotiate the threat of sanctions against “pollution” and the constant contestation of one’s “homeland” (Anzaldua 1987;
Sibley 1995; Eyal 2006). Those in the borderlands become the embodiment of the border; their bodies are often the sites of territorial conflicts. Anzaldúa writes:

In the borderlands/ you are the battleground/ where enemies are kin to each other;/ you are at home, a stranger,/ the border disputes have been settled/ the volley of shots have shattered the truce/ you are wounded, lost in action/ dead, fighting back (1987: 216).

Because borders are not fixed, but rather keep shifting and reshaping, individuals situated in the borderlands find themselves in a constant state of border crossing. Accordingly, borders are a key site for the examining the creation, regulation, and negotiation of bodies and identities.

The borders central to this study involve real power dynamics, distinctions between “us” and “them,” and significant consequences for failed attempts at crossing. They are cultural borders, reinforced by physical separation and institutional segregation. The borders examined involve greater and lesser degrees of regulation and enforcement, defined by both formal and informal norms, codes, and laws. Border crossers, especially those inhabiting the “borderlands,” must employ a variety of strategies to present themselves as non-threatening members of a particular group. For the individual, border crossing may involve conforming to social scripts, compliance with examination, risk assessment by regulators and enforcers, and surveillance of the individual before and after the moment of crossing (Salter 2005). Thus the type and degree of regulation at the border as well as how consistently the border crossing is experienced influences the way that one classifies, embodies, and negotiates their identity.
Trans/gender Borders

The concept of borders underlies a great number of works in trans studies. The boundary between the categories of man and woman have been described as a border that transsexuals cross in order to inhabit their preferred gender or that transgender individuals move back and forth across throughout their lifetime (Ekins and King 2006). This area is also described as a “border zone” or “borderlands” through which transsexuals pass and within which transgender people exist (Prosser 1995, 1998, 1999). The notion of a border also frames the discussion of what it means to be “trans” within the debates over the similarities and differences between butches and transsexual men (Halberstam 1994, 1998; Prosser 1995, 1998, 1999; Rubin 1992). What previous uses of the “border” notion demonstrates is that the United States is highly organized according to the cis normative binary sex/gender system and individuals find themselves constantly confronted with situations where they are compelled to adhere to

The expectation that individuals are either male or female, cissexual, and normatively gendered is one that is deeply enforced through social and institutional rewards for those who meet these expectations, and consequences for those who do not (Lombardi, Wilchins, Priesing and Malouf 2001; Namaste 1996, 2000). Even in locations and social interactions where the boundaries around sex/gender identity and expression are more open and relaxed, there are still rules and norms defining which expressions and identities are legible and validated and which are subject to policing, control, violence and invisibility (Hale 1997; Bailey 2011). The cis normative sex/gender binary is maintained through systems of regulation operating all of the time, in virtually every location. It can be said, then, that a gender border is always in place, everywhere.
In discussions of identity boundaries in trans studies, what rises to the surface is that there are certain sites or social interactions where the border becomes more concretized. At these sites individuals are forced to align themselves with one sex/gender or the other; there is no alternative position. Examples from previous studies include, but are not limited to, bathrooms (Browne 2004; Chess, Kafer, Quizar, and Richardson 2008; Girshick 2008; Halberstam 1998), identity document inspections (Girshick 2008; Prosser 1999), employment and the workplace (Girshick 2008), participation in athletic competitions (Cohen and Semerjian 2008; Sykes 2006), and women’s-only events and organizations (Girshick 2008; Hale 1997; Wilchins 1997). Individuals who fall outside the realm of the intelligible at these sites experience harassment, violence, social rejection, the loss of employment, withholding of institutional participation, as well as many other consequences. At these sites or interactions, the demands for identity intelligibility and coherency may become internalized by the individual, creating a sense of self that is deeply shaped by cis normative binary sex/gender system.

If trans/gender borders are potentially ever-present, then border-crossings play a critical role in shaping the lives of trans people. Border crossings are moments of identity negotiation that ultimately occur at any identity “checkpoints,” formal or otherwise where a person is asked to verify which sex/gender they are. This instance is both about identity authentication as well as access to areas, services, or groups restricted by sex or gender identity. A trans person border crosses when the perceived or actual disclosure of their gender status, history, and body must be negotiated in a social interaction, whether interpersonal or official. The trans person must successfully negotiate their body, appearance, and identity in order to deter harassment, scrutiny, or
harm and, for some, to affirm and legitimize the coherency of their identity. Furthermore, it is important to note that gender borders are highly racialized, presenting different challenges to individuals depending on their racial identification and embodiment. Paradoxically, it is the case that gender border crossings are specific situations or moments of liminality and, yet, also always occurring.

Gender borders construct the identities of not just trans, but cis individuals as well. Since gender borders are perceived to be a natural part of our social world, however, those individuals with a sex/gender identity or expression that is deemed to be “unnatural” or deviant will likely have a greater awareness of the negotiation of their social and bodily selves when confronted with gender borders. Furthermore, trans people experience unique challenges in their ability to present and embody a normatively sexed/gendered self. Many trans people do not or cannot meet the conventional requirements of only one or the other sex/gender. They find that their bodies, in height, voice, or shape, for example, prevent them from being read as normatively sexed or gendered. Although hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and sex reassignment surgery (SRS) ameliorate many of these issues, a relatively small number of trans people complete SRS (San Francisco Department of Public Health 1999; Rachlin 2002). For those who are consistently read as their sex/gender, many do not have identity documents to match or that are consistent across organizations and institutions. Further, some trans people choose to maintain an androgynous appearance or embodiment. Those who inhabit bodies or present gender expressions that do not readily fit into the cis normative sex/gender binary system are confronted with greater risks at gender borders than those who do. Of course, border crossings are also shaped by other characterizations of
“threatening others” in addition to sex/gender such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability. Each of these factors, while differing in saliency depending on each context, contribute to defining what is “normative.”

A Typology of Gender Borders

To address the different ways in which gender is regulated, I separate the types gender borders into three main categories: sex classification borders, normative embodiment borders, and lived sex/gender borders. The types of markers of belonging that are salient in a given interaction including documented identity, presentation of self and the body, and a combined set of these cues within the social context, respectively, characterize these borders. In this section I introduce the terms border regulators and border enforcers, which characterize the different types of authority that individuals policing each border have and assert. Each border category characterizes a different type of border where varying degrees of sex/gender regulation and policing occur, ranging from lesser to moderately to highly restricted borders. Although I have analytically separated these categories, there will be instances in which there is overlap and even conflict. At any point, a social encounter may shift from a lived sex/gender border to a normative embodiment border or even be characteristic of both at the same time. These categories are to be used as flexible analytical guidelines, useful for understanding the different and complex ways that sex and gender are experienced and regulated.

Sex Classification Borders. Existing jurisprudence, legislation, and policies in the United States require that individuals be classified into categories of either male or female and regulate how those classifications can be changed (Greenberg 2006; Spade
It is generally, but not always, assumed that sex markers on any identity document represent the “truth” of one’s sex and it is also assumed that these markers are consistent across all forms of documentation (Spade 2008, 2011). These assumptions stand as a challenge to trans people who frequently have differing and contradictory sex markers across identity documents and other information recording their personal history.

Sex classification borders enforce a strict male or female identification through the inspection and comparison of identity documents, and other personal records when possible. Because they require identity documentation and those deemed to be presenting falsified documentation might face criminal penalties, most of these borders are considered highly restricted. However, there are some instances where more informal types of identity classification are used, such as student identity cards, or slight deviations from identity documents are commonplace. These borders, although informed by rigid sex classifications, operate in a more moderately restricted fashion. In general, unless an individual is attempting to access a sex-segregated institution or facility, problems that arise regarding one’s sex classification are incidental to other identity concerns or a result of transphobic border regulators.

*Border regulators* are the dominant gatekeepers at sex classification borders. They work in a supervisory role as administrators, inspectors, and agents that utilize their authority and power to determine the validity of identity documentation. The role of the border regulator(s) is to decide whether an individual is who they claim to be. Border regulators differ greatly in the extent of their authority, ranging anywhere from a federal judge to a store clerk and beyond. The goal of border regulators is to inspect, compare, and process identity documents looking for false or fraudulent claims, signals to
them of individuals who pose a threat to the social order. Also, some border regulators may use their authority to harass and detain gender variant individuals for not presenting as normatively gendered.

Passport inspections at airport security checkpoints are a quintessential example of a sex classification border crossing. At international borders the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE) agents act as border regulators to formally inspect the passports, visas, luggage, and travel documents of border crossers as well as their general appearance and presentation (Torpey 2000; Lyon 2005; USICE 2006). Presenting oneself as a gender that is not associated with the sex listed on one’s documents may cause suspicion amongst customs agents (Thaemlitz 2006). Those who do not comply with mandated requirements, or those seen as misrepresenting themselves at any of these points, may be denied entry, detained, arrested, or deported, depending on the threat they pose to national security. To reiterate, individuals who present themselves outside of normative gender categories may also experience these outcomes as a result of transphobic border regulators.

Sex classification borders are not limited to movement across physical borders. Other instances where one’s sex classification may be questioned is when making store purchases with a credit card or check, during patient intake at health care facilities, and during the employment process, to name a few. At a number of sex classification borders the personal and professional history of a trans person may be revealed. For instance, individuals seeking health services are commonly asked to complete patient history forms or transfer over past medical records even if they are just being seen for flu. Similarly, employment or housing applications require references from previous employers,
associates, or landlords. In these situations, an individual’s history, on top of their current identity documentation, becomes part of the identity inspection and determination process.

*Normative Embodiment Borders.* There are a number of facilities in the United States that are segregated by sex. These sex-segregated spaces, such as bathrooms, sleeping quarters in some domestic violence shelters, and locker rooms, are a reflection of as well as serve to maintain cultural views regarding privacy, sexuality, and genitals. Normative embodiment borders are characterized by a single-sexed space or grouping sectioned off by physical barriers, which are frequently, if not always, part of a set or pair: one for male, one for female, and sometimes an additional space for those who require assistance. These borders require proof of status for entry, but this proof is social, a combination of presentation of self, appearance, and demeanor. One must present a normatively sexed and gendered self in order to not be seen as a threat to the other occupants. Visible characteristics of one’s identity including race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality, size, and disability of the individual also plays a role in whether the border crosser is seen as a threat to the other occupants of the space. At this type of border, a legal document or identity card may be required to cross if one’s membership status is contested or if entry into these spaces is granted administratively, such as in the case of occupying rooms in health facilities or college dormitories.

*Border enforcers,* not border regulators, maintain normative embodiment borders. Border enforcers are often other participants in the border crossing or occupants inside or around the space one is crossing into. In a store, for example, they may be other occupants inside of a dressing room or customers situated near its entrance. In some
instances these individuals may be official personnel, but what makes them different from border regulators is that they monitor sex/gender primarily on appearance and under the primary purpose of preserving the safety of those assumed to belong in the sex-segregated facility. In the case that such personnel ask a border crosser for identification to enter the sex-segregated space, then they are additionally taking on the role of the border regulator, but not until that point and only if they are in a position of authority. These border enforcers maintain the border expressly through social reprimands.

Normative embodiment borders range from lesser to highly restricted depending on the situation, such as whether border enforcers are present or not, whether border enforcers have authority over that given space, or whether the space is highly sexualized, to name some differences in circumstances.

Segregated bathroom facilities are a prime example of normative embodiment borders. The sectioning off of bathrooms as a sex specific private space in public locations is founded on the presumption of heterosexuality. Men and women are segregated from each other so that they may expose their bodies and genitalia, but not for the purposes of sexual pleasure (Cooper and Oldenziel 1999). The private, nonsexual space of the bathroom creates the appearance of a haven for women to evade the sexualized masculine public sphere. Consequently, disruption of this space by men, those presumed to be men, or those considered a sexual threat to women, is perceived as dangerous. Those occupying bathrooms who are ambiguously gendered are commonly criticized or questioned by other patrons as intruders (Devor 1989). In some instances, this questioning may lead to security or police involvement (Devor 1989; Nguyen 2002; New York Times 2006) when the border crosser is perceived to be a threat. Those who
challenge or transgress these gender roles may invoke anger, disgust, resentment, and fear in individuals, and are consequently rejected or expelled from participation or occupying that physical space. Other than bathrooms, some other examples of normative embodiment borders are locker rooms, healthcare facilities, and homeless or domestic violence shelters.

Institutionalized sex-segregated facilities like those mentioned above are not the only sex/gender-specific restricted sites. There are a great number of social and political organizations, events, and clubs that are sex/gender-specific. A number of these sites and organizations are founded on the belief that men and women are different and have fundamentally different needs and goals. While these borders may have different conceptions of what constitutes maleness and femaleness, they nevertheless restrict inclusion to those deemed normatively sexed and gendered by their standards. For example, women’s-only sexual events, like leatherdyke play parties, are held in order to create spaces where women’s sexuality is embraced and protected. Expressions of masculinity, such as presenting as a daddy or boy, are welcomed, but embodied maleness is restricted (Hale 1997; Boyd 1997). Such events are known to regulate entry on the basis of sex chromosomes and genital configuration (Boyd 1997). Those perceived to embody maleness are considered a threat to the safe sexual space of the event and are denied entry or social reprimanded. It is important to note, however, that a border crosser rejected from a women’s-only space is not necessarily considered a man. At these borders, the complexities of sex and gender are often highly visible, but also points of regulation and control. Overall, these borders are based on the protection of normatively
sexed and gendered people, however that is conceived in each context, and the exclusion of those who are seen as a threat to the safety of those with insider status.

*Lived Gender Borders.* Sex/gender monitoring and policing is not limited to the aforementioned types of borders. In virtually all day-to-day interactions, it is expected that people are normatively gendered cis men and women. This expectation is reinforced in a great number of ways from sex classification on identity documents and sex/gender segregated facilities to the use of masculine and feminine pronouns in our language.

Every interaction we experience is gendered in some way. Furthermore, there is very limited space for a third or other additional sex/gender categories. In order to maintain the cis normative gender binary as natural and normal, people are regulated in regards to the way they embody and express their gender. Therefore, in addition to the preceding border categories, people’s sex/gender identities and expressions can be called into question in any interaction, at what I call lived gender borders. Everyone is, in essence, a gatekeeper at lived gender borders, monitoring one another’s behaviors and presentations. People enact sanctions against violators ranging from subtle looks and remarks to overt acts of violence and harassment. The sanctions against sex/gender variance at all of the borders are not only directed outwardly at others, but internally as well. Individuals restrict their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to fit the normative codes of sex and gender. As a result, lived gender borders, like the other borders, are a part of people’s identities and sense of self.

For this manuscript, I chose to present my analysis of only the first two border types: sex classification and normative embodiment. As the lived gender border reveals the everyday moments of “doing gender” and gender regulation, the sex classification
and normative embodiment borders are most connected to institutional systems and as a result, they more clearly fit within the model of borders. I intend to return to the data collected under the “lived gender border” in the future, which I describe in the section *Ideas for Future Research.*

In order to negotiate any of these gender borders, trans people will enact strategies of bodily comportment, presentation of self, and personal history management. These strategies may be planned out ahead of time if individuals expect that their identity may be called into question, such as at airports or entering age barred venues. However, in some instances, encounters with borders might be unexpected. In these cases, the interactions are more reflective of spontaneous and situational thoughts, feelings, and actions. Certain expressions of self may be hidden or muted during these interactions. This self-regulation may also become a patterned part of their daily lives in order to avoid the policing of others. These acts of border crossing, of identity negotiation and management, reveal the ways in which the cis normative binary gender system organizes the social landscape. For some trans people, these borders greatly shape their daily lives and activities and, yet, for others they may be understood to be negligible experiences.
Chapter Four
Research Methodology

The theoretical underpinning of border crossing drove the methods used for collecting and analyzing data in this project in several ways. First and foremost, I conceptualize trans identities as ongoing, dynamic accomplishments that are contextual and variant across social situations. This perspective allows me to shift the research focus away from identity development to identity management. As previously mentioned, much research in the social sciences has framed transgenderism as a developmental trajectory driven solely, or at least primarily, by an internal conception of self. This research reifies the assumption of a linear and uniform transition, and also positions the trans narrative of self as stable and unaffected by the social world. Although this perspective has been strongly critiqued by numerous trans and gender variant scholars (Aizura 2011; Halberstam 1998; Hale 1997; Stone 1990), it remains a dominant model in social science investigations most recently appearing in Genny Beemyn and Susan Rankin’s (2011) book *The Lives of Transgender People* under the rubric of “milestones”. In developing a process of data collection and analysis, my intent was to create an empirical study that operationalized concepts from trans theorizing.

In order to capture the dynamic process of identity management and to yield rich and detailed data centered on the experiences of the trans subject, I utilized a qualitative methodology. Qualitative methods, specifically in-depth, semi-structured interviews, are the most appropriate technique for producing narratives characterized by depth, coherence, and subjective meaning (Elliott 2005; Lofland et al. 2006; Mishler 1986; Weiss 1994). Quantitative methods are often preferred for their ability to produce
standardized and quantifiable data, such as survey-based research. However, quantitative methods are limited by the tendency to be, as Weiss states, “fragmentary, made up of bits and pieces of attitudes and observations and appraisals” (1994: 2). Moreover, quantitative methods often assume a fixed sexed or gendered subject. Even if a question about sex and gender identity is open-ended, the assumption is that there is a stable sex and gender to be known and quantified.

In contrast, qualitative interviews produce narrative accounts of people’s everyday practices as well as the meanings they attach to these experiences (Arksey and Knight 1999; Elliott 2005). Elliott describes the reasoning behind choosing interviewing over other methods:

A narrative will not capture a simple record of the past in the way that we hope that a video camera might. However, if the research focus is more on the meanings attached to individuals’ experiences and/or on the way that those experiences are communicated to others then narratives provide an ideal medium for researching and understanding individuals’ lives in social context. (2005: 26)

As Elliott suggests, narratives provide insight into the decision-making and meaning-making processes that occur in dynamic social interactions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to focus on the research questions and to avoid the suppression of stories that often occurs in structured interviews (Mishler 1986). Semi-structured interviews also offer respondents a chance to elaborate on seemingly fixed choice questions such as “What is the sex you were assigned at birth?,” allowing participants to engage in the construction and resignification of taken-for-granted concepts such as identity classifications.
Collecting Data

Research participants were recruited using online and on-the-ground postings that specifically targeted English-speaking trans adults residing in or available to be interviewed in the Northeast region of the United States. The sample was limited to this region to ensure in-person interviews as I was situated in Albany, New York at the time. Advertisements were emailed to over forty GLBT community centers and organizations across the United States, posted across approximately ten online trans and gender variant online list-serves and bulletin boards, and printed in the program of the 2009 Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. In order to appeal to a wide range of trans individuals the advertisements for the project included the terms genderqueer, transgender, and transsexual in large print. The call read:

Genderqueer, Transgender, and Transsexual Identity Management Study. Study seeks to learn more about the experiences trans people have managing and negotiating their identities on a day-to-day basis such as during grocery shopping, bathroom use, and using identity cards….I am looking for people who: 1) Identify as or could be described as “trans” including the identities: transgender, transsexual, genderqueer, men/women with transsexual pasts, third gendered, and more. Drag Kings/Queens, impersonators, and people who do gender as a performance or part-time will not be included. 2) Are 18 years of age or older. 3) Speak fluent English. 4) Are willing to share their experiences. Participation consists of one in-person interview (1-2 hours) in a location of your choice. All participants will receive $15 for helping with this important research.

Advertisements were passed out by hand at: the 2009 Philadelphia Trans Health Conference; a lecture on trans health by Larry Nuttbrock given at the University at Albany, State University of New York; and, at a trans “meet and greet” held at the Capital District Gay and Lesbian Community Center, in Albany, New York, currently known as The Capital Pride Center. At each of these events, I spoke to individuals one-on-one about my study, handed out advertisements, and encouraged people to contact me
to set up an interview. Meeting potential participants in person created the opportunity for people to ask questions, to get to know me, and to offer feedback on my research project and advertisements.

In this study, I employed a combination of purposive and snowball sampling procedures. In addition to direct recruitment through advertisements at various sites, participants were recruited through my community-based social networks and the social networks of other participants. All research participants were asked if they are willing to pass along a request for participation in this research to anyone they know who meet the qualifications. These non-random sampling procedures are appropriate for this research for at least two reasons. First, this research is not meant to provide generalizable information on the lives of trans individuals. Instead, this research seeks to characterize emergent patterns in the process of trans identity management. Second, combining purposive and snowball sampling procedures maximized my ability to access trans people who meet the project’s parameters. Most of the study participants responded to the online call for participants disseminated across trans community listservs and electronic bulletin boards and less than one third were obtained through snowball sampling. While snowball sampling is the primary method of purposeful sampling when targeting non-normative gender and sexual communities (see Mustanski 2001; Shapiro 2004), the online call and purposive sampling attracted a greater diversity of respondents with regards to age, race, disability, education, and nationality.

After posting the call, I waited for people to contact me and began interviewing individuals in my immediate social network to start the process of snowball sampling. At the time of data collection I was connected to a wide range of trans individuals through
my attendance and participation in regional and national conferences and gatherings including, but not limited to, the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference (PA), the Translating Identity Conference (VT), the Northeast LGBT Conference (NY), the International Foundation for Gender Education Conference (US), and the Northeast Regional FTM Campout (MA). In 2009, I created a video blog on Youtube in order to participate in online-based conversations regarding trans identities, communities, and politics. After months of interviewing, my sample was particularly lacking experiences of trans women of color and trans women who had undergone genital surgery, so it was through Youtube that I sent personal interview requests to acquaintances who represented these demographics, each of whom agreed to participate. My impression is that it is through my participation in these various trans communities and events that I had greater access to trans individuals who I might not have been able to reach through friendship networks, professional connections, and snowball sampling alone.

When individuals responded to the advertisement, usually via email, I thanked them for contacting me, asked them if they would provide me with some demographic information including age, sex assigned at birth, gender identification, transition status, race, and ethnicity, and then told them I would be in contact about possibly setting up a date and time for the interview. I was contacted by seventy-four individuals and conducted interviews with only forty of them. I did not interview everyone who contacted me for two main reasons: the logistics of in-person interviewing and to achieve a reasonably diverse sample. Logistically, interviews were scheduled according to availability of the participant and proximity to my location in Albany, New York. In order to conduct in-person interviews, I limited my scope to those individuals able to be
interviewed at a location within a 300-mile radius of Albany. Interviews were conducted in spaces chosen by the participant including my apartment, my work office, their homes, public parks and libraries, and a rented conference room. I often scheduled back-to-back interviews in a particular region to avoid the cost of staying overnight, although that wasn’t always a possibility.

**Sampling Design**

In designing my study, I intended to include equal numbers of individuals sexed male and female at birth and to have equal representation of individuals across categories that I referred to as “post-transition,” “in transition,” and “alternatively gendered.” Roughly speaking, *post-transition* individuals would be characterized as those individuals who report a completed medical and social transition, which included, to the extent determined by the individual, sex reclassification on documents and gender confirming healthcare. The second grouping, *in transition*, was intended to characterize those individuals who saw themselves as being in the process of crossing from one gender to the other. I imagined that individuals “in transition” would see themselves as not fully embodying or being correctly classified as their gender, but on a path to do so. The last grouping was intended to characterize those individuals who live as both or neither of the two genders, the *alternatively gendered*. They might consider themselves trans, genderqueer, bigendered, agendered, transgender, third gendered, or some other identity that sets them apart from the binary gender categories and would have not pursued sex reclassification. Although my intent behind achieving a sample that reflected a range of experiences shaped by embodied and documented systems of classification, my own
system of classification was highly flawed and I learned early on that these labels of “post-transition” “in transition” and “alternatively gendered” were not useful.

First, I started to encounter individuals at trans events who identified as both genderqueer and transsexual, asserting that these identifications and experiences were not mutually exclusive. One of my interviewees, in fact, describes herself as “a male-to-female transsexual genderqueer.” Also, to claim that individuals who did not alter their bodies through hormones or surgery are “alternatively gendered” implies that those who do alter their bodies are not, which reproduces the assumption that there are “gender defenders” and “gender transgressors.” Second, to distinguish between “in transition” and “post-transition” is to assume a trajectory of experiences, that individuals who are on hormones, but have not pursued surgical means of body alteration desire to do so, or eventually will if they have the means. This is absolutely not the case for a number of trans people (see demographics section below). Over one-third of my sample explicitly stated that they did not wish to pursue genital surgery.

Last, I discovered through the interview process that the boundaries around what was considered a “transition” are blurry and often externally imposed. A transition could include social, legal, or medical alterations and changes to one’s sex/gender, or not. It might simply be a psychic shift that changes the way one understands their sexed and gendered relationship to the social world. What stood out in my interviews, however, were the noticeable ways people marked themselves as “post transition,” if they did so at all. Raj, a South Asian trans man said, “I feel post transition...[which] means everything in my life is not about being trans anymore. I don’t read about it all the time….I don’t have to talk about it all the time.” Similarly, Damien, an African American male of trans
experience said that even without bottom surgery he considered himself fully transitioned because he lived his everyday life as a man. For these two individuals, being post-transition was not marked, although surely influenced by, changes in their bodies or their identity documents. It was defined by how large of a role their trans status played in their day-to-day lives. Likewise, when asked about her plans to change the name and gender on her identity documentation, Ginger, a white and Native American trans woman, who identifies as both female and a “tranny,” said, “It’s not the SRS. It’s not the presenting 24/7. It’s when my birth certificate gets corrected….That’s when the transition is over….That’s the last, final piece of everything….That’s the last big battle” It is of significance that Damien, Raj, and Ginger did not emphasize that the end of a transition marked the erasure or complete invisibility of their trans status, but the extent to which they felt their everyday lives were defined by being trans.

On account of this relatively immediate troubling of my three demographic categories of “in transition,” “post transition,” and “alternatively gendered,” I reflected on my intent for creating these groups in the first place. My objective was to achieve variation in my sample with regards to hormonal and surgical status, self-identification, and changes to identity documentation and records. Instead of placing participants into artificial groupings, I decided to simply be conscientious of including individuals in my study that represented diversity across the aforementioned variables. Since the percentage of trans people who undergo genital surgery is very small, I will be oversampling this demographic in the study for the purposes of representation. In order to ensure a wide assortment of participants, I also selected interviewees that represented diversity across age, sex assigned at birth, race, and ethnicity. Without explicitly
sampling for such variables, my participants also represented diversity across education, occupation, residence, disability, nationality, religion, sexuality, and veteran’s status.

**Demographics**

Overall, forty interviews were conducted with a wide range of trans individuals. Because of the small sample size (n = 40) and risks associated with a breach in participant confidentiality, I decided to not include a chart that would specify the exact demographics of each participant. Only the demographics of each participant that are relevant to the situation being analyzed are included in the results chapters of this manuscript. The demographic characteristics of the overall sample including some of the noteworthy trends are described below.

*Assigned Sex and Gender Identity.* As intended, I was able to ascertain a sample that was relatively proportionate in terms of sex assigned at birth with variation across sex and gender identity. Slightly more than half of participants were sexed male at birth (n = 20) than those sexed female at birth (n = 19). There were two individuals in my study with medical conditions that would classify them as intersex. Both were sexed female at birth, but one of them was reclassified as male at three months of age. This early sex reclassification shaped her adult transition from male to female in unique ways. Due to this distinctive experience with classification, I code this individual as intersex (n = 1) for their sex assigned at birth. This way the coding reflects the fact that sex is a product of classification processes, rather than something clearly ascertained by physical characteristics. In terms of self-identified sex and gender, the participants fell into five main categories: Woman/Female-Only (n=11); Man/Male-Only (n=9); Woman/Female
and Trans (n=7); Man/Male and Trans (n=7); and, Genderqueer (n=4). In addition to these dominant categories, one person identified as a male-to-female transsexual genderqueer and another identified as bigender. The sample is evenly represented by individuals who identify with a binary and non-trans classification (n=20) and those who identify with some type of trans or non-binary classification (n=20). Furthermore, the individuals who identify with the language of genderqueer or bigender are proportionate in terms of sex identified at birth (Female, n=3; Male, n=3).

**Hormone and Surgical Status.** The general distribution of hormone use and surgical status at the time of the interview was as follows: 30% no hormones, no surgery; 42% hormones, no surgery; 28% hormones and surgery (15% genital surgery). The group of “hormones and surgery,” especially those who had undergone genital surgery, was oversampled for the purposes of having a more even distribution across these three categories. To be more specific, 70% of the participants (n=28) were on hormone replacement therapy at the time of the interview ranging from a period of six months to twenty-one years. The use of hormones was fairly even across sex assigned at birth (Male, n=14; Female, n=13; Intersex, n=1), as was the absence of hormone use (Male, n=6; Female n=6). There was a strong relationship between hormone use and surgical status, for all of the individuals who had undergone gender-related surgeries were also on hormone replacement therapy at the time of the interview. The breakdown of genital surgery and chest surgery across sex assigned at birth is as follows: Vaginoplasty (Male, n=2; Intersex, n=1); Orchietectomy Only (Male, n=1); Metoidaplasty (Female, n=2); Chest surgery (Female, n=8; Male, n=1; Intersex, n=1). Some individuals also consider hysterectomy and oophorectomies as “bottom surgery.” However, none of the
individuals in my study who underwent only a hysterectomy and oophorectomy defined this as a gender-related surgery. Of the remaining 29 who did not undergo any gender-related surgeries at the time of the interview, eight identified explicitly as “non-op” or having no current interest in surgery, one individual was weeks away from undergoing SRS, and twelve expressed an explicit desire for surgery. The rest reported mixed feelings about surgery, having some interest, but also expressing fear of surgery in general, the lack of insurance coverage, or displeasure with the potential results.

The most noticeable demographic trends across hormone and surgical status groupings were in regards to race and residence. The group of individuals in the “hormones and surgery” group were less likely to be White (40%) and more likely to reside in a big city (45%) than those in the overall sample (60% White, 15% big city). In comparison, individuals in the “hormones, no surgery” group were more likely to be White (69%) than those in the overall sample (60% White) and less likely to live in a big city (6%). For the “no hormones and no surgery” group, the racial demographics were proportionate to the overall sample, but there were no individuals in this group who resided in a big city. These patterns are likely an insignificant outcome of the sampling process and size. However, I chose to report these trends in the event that they are relevant to future research studies.

Documented Identity. As intended, I was able to ascertain a sample that varied in changes to the sex marker on identity documentation. Although 70% of the sample had undergone body alterations through hormones and/or surgery at the time of the interview, only half made any changes to the sex marker on their primary identity documents. Of the 20 individuals who made changes to their identity documents half (n=10) reclassified
the sex on their driver’s license only. At the time of the interview, two individuals in this category had submitted paperwork for the sex marker change on their passport, but were unsure whether or not the change would be granted because they had not met the requirements. In addition to this number, three individuals also changed their sex marker with the Social Security Administration. Only 18% of the individuals in the sample reclassified the sex on their birth certificate (n=7), four of whom also reclassified the sex on their passport. From this group, those who did not change the sex marker on their passport had met the requirements for doing so, but did not see it as an immediate priority. All of these individuals were on hormones and had undergone some type of gender-related surgery, five of whom had undergone genital reconstruction surgeries. The other two, a transman and a male of trans experience, were able to change their birth certificates after chest surgery with a surgeon’s letter stating that they had undergone sex reassignment surgery and were now male. One trans female in the study was post-operative for an orchiectomy that, with a carefully constructed surgeon’s letter, might have constituted a sex reassignment. However, such a letter would not have mattered because this individual was born in a state that did not allow sex reclassifications on birth certificates irrespective of surgical status. Furthermore, this individual had recently married her wife, using her male birth certificate, and decided to not change the sex marker on any of her federal records lest it nullify her marriage.

Age, Race, Sexuality, and Relationship Status. The average age of participants was 36 years old, with a range of 20 to 70 years of age. Age variation differed by sex

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The requirement for changing the sex marker on a United States passport has changed since these interviews were conducted. Sex reassignment surgery is no longer required. For full details on the new requirements see http://travel.state.gov/passport/get/first/first_5100.html
classification. Participants sexed male at birth had a larger age range (21-70 years) and a higher mean (40 years) than those sexed female at birth (range: 20-53 years; mean: 31 years). The largest self-reported racial and ethnic group in the sample was White, Caucasian, or European (n=24, 60%), followed by Black or African American (n=4, 10%), White and Native American/American Indian (n=4, 10%), Hispanic or Latino Only (n=3, 7.5%); and, White and Hispanic or Latino (n=2, 5%). One person each reported the following racial and ethnic identities: Arabic; Black, Native American, and White; and, South Asian. The most common terms that individuals used to identify their sexuality was straight or heterosexual (n=8), bisexual (n=7), queer (n=7), and pansexual or polysexual (n=5). Quite a few rejected identity labels altogether (n=5), two identified as asexual, two more identified as gay, and the rest described their sexuality in terms of an “attraction to women” (n=3) or an “attraction to men” (n=1). The sample had relatively equal proportions of those in a relationship and those who identified as single. Almost half of the participants identified their relationship status as single (n=19), three of which were in the process of a divorce. It is not clear how many of these individuals were actively dating, but four of them explicitly stated that they were not seeking a relationship. Half of the participants reported a formal coupling as married (n=5), in a domestic partnership (n=1), engaged (n=3), in a life partnership (n=3), or in a relationship (n=8). In addition, one individual identified their relationship status as being a member of a polyamorous family.

*Educational Attainment and Occupation.* All of the individuals in my sample had completed high school, three of whom did not continue on to higher education. From those that did, approximately one third enrolled in college but did not hold a degree
another third held an Associates (n=2) or Bachelors (n=10) degree, and the last third held advanced degrees (Master’s, n=9; Ph.D., n=3). Just over half of the participants had semi-skilled to professional occupations in the fields of education (n=2), arts and entertainment (n=3), health and human services (n=5), civil service (n=2), security (n=2), technology and engineering (n=7), and program management (n=2). A small group of individuals worked in reportedly lower-paying, semi-skilled occupations (retail, n=4; custodial, n=1). Approximately 30% of the sample did not have full-time employment, and of this group two received Veteran’s benefits, another two received disability benefits, and six individuals defined their occupational status as a full-time student.

*Residence, Religion, Other.* One of the noteworthy aspects of my sample is the variability in terms of residence. Much of the research on trans identities, especially that which is qualitative, oversamples or is explicitly limited by individuals who reside in or have immediate access to large cities (i.e. Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey 1997; Namaste 2000; Schrock, Reid, and Boyd 2005; Valentine 2007). In my sample, only six of the participants claimed residence in a large city, whereas the rest were spread out across the suburbs (n=7), in small towns and/or rural locations (n=10), and in small to medium sized cities (n=17). Two individuals were currently residing in the United States, but only temporarily since they were not United States citizens. Approximately one-third of the sample reported no spiritual identification or religious affiliation (n=9) or identified as atheist (n=3), and another third identified as agnostic or religious/spiritual but undefined (n=12). For those who identified with a religion or spiritual practice, the largest groupings were of Buddhists (n=5) and Catholics (n=4), with the following
reported by one person each: Baptist, Jehovah’s Witness, Pentacostal, Protestant, Satanist, and Unitarian Universalist. In addition, during the interview process I discovered other notable characteristics of my sample, which I had not intentionally sampled for or considered asking of all participants. Four participants were military veterans and two identified as disabled and were receiving disability benefits as their primary source of income. It is possible that more individuals in the sample were veterans and/or disabled, but I did not ask direct questions about these characteristics.

These demographics are presented to give an overview of the diversity of experiences, embodiments, and identities of individuals in this study. I was able to achieve the intended goal of variation across hormonal and surgical status, self-identification, and changes to identity documentation and records. In addition, the sample also represented diversity with regards to age, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, occupation, sexuality, disability, veteran’s status, and nationality. While there are certainly similarities between the demographics of my study and those of large-scale quantitative studies, I make no claims to the representativeness of my sample.

The Interview Process

I developed an interview protocol for this research modeled on what is often called a “theory-driven model of interviewing” (Pawson 1996). In a theory-driven model of interviewing, “the researcher’s theory is the subject matter of the interview and the subject is to confirm or falsify, and above all, to refine that theory” (Pawson 1996: 299, emphasis in original). In my border-crossing framework, I theorize that trans people’s lives are shaped by their experiences at identity checkpoints, or what I call gender
borders, in a cis normative binary sex/gender system. My expectation is that, at these checkpoints, trans people are compelled to present their identity in alignment with norms of inclusion, safety, and authenticity in order to effectively “border cross.” For this theory to be the subject matter of the interview, questions covered four major areas where identity management occurs across different degrees of saliency (see appendix): the use of identity documentation, the use of sex-segregated facilities, participation in gender-focused events or organizations, and in everyday life.

During the interview, I asked participants to give a play-by-play account of their interactions with other social actors in order to elicit “thick description” (see Geertz 1973) of how they prepared, the decisions they made, and how they felt about the outcome of each event or situation. Interviews followed a loose, but repetitive, script, which allowed the participants the ability to emphasize what parts of the management process was important to their lives. This method also allowed participants to make associations I did not anticipate in advance and it allows me to probe a participant’s responses to gain more nuanced and detailed information about their experiences border-crossing. By repeating the same types of questions and phrases across different scenarios, I played a more “explicit role in teaching the overall conceptual structure of investigation to the subject” (Pawson 1996: 305). Pawson describes the overall effect of this style of interview structuring:

The battery of questions posed and explanatory cues offered should be understood as putting the subject in a position which allows them to think (still in silence, incidentally) – ‘yes, I understand the general theoretical tack you are exploring, this makes your concepts clear to me, and applying them to me gives the following answer’.... The subject's task is to agree, disagree and to categorize themselves in relation to the attitudinal patterns as constructed in such questions but also to refine their conceptual basis. It is at this point that mutual knowledge is really achieved. The subject is saying in effect ‘this is how you have depicted
the potential structure of my thinking, but in my experience it happened like this…” (Pawson 1999: 305-6)

It was clear in the interviews that participants understood and were actively engaging with the line of questioning. For example, one participant said to me, “I’ve got you figured out…If I say something you’re going to ask for an example.” Also, it was common for participants to say things like, “One might assume that this is the case, but…,” which illustrates their engagement with and refinement of the conceptual basis of the project.

The initial questions in each interview covered demographic areas of nationality, age, assigned sex, race and ethnicity, educational attainment, the occupations and educational attainment of parents or guardians, residence, and religion. Within this set I also asked questions about occupation, sexuality, relationship status, and whether the status of those relationships or jobs have changed since identifying as trans. These questions were used to gain basic information and to build rapport with the interviewee. Next, I asked participants questions about their sex/gender self-identification, embodiment, and appearance. I asked them how they would describe their identity, what changes they have made to their appearance or body so that it would align with their identity, how their appearance or embodiment has changed over time, and what influenced these changes. I also asked them how they present themselves on a daily basis and in which situations or contexts does that presentation differ. The participants were then asked to describe their experiences with gender in daily activities, what types of policing they’ve experience, where do they feel safe and what places they avoid. These questions allowed participants to describe their identity in complex and nuanced ways. Furthermore, their responses to these questions provided me with data that informed what
probes would be useful later on during the interview. Following this, I asked participants which documents or records they changed their sex or name on, if any, and what this process was like for them.

The bulk of the interview questions followed, explicitly centered on the logics and strategies trans people used when border crossing and their responses to policing or gatekeeping. For the sex classification borders, I asked specific questions about passport use when traveling and driver’s license use followed by open questions about what situations they’ve encountered where they’ve had to manage their documented identity. These questions aim to find out the ways they manage identity documentation and information disclosure. For the normative embodiment border crossings I started with questions about their use of bathrooms and then onto other sex-segregated facilities that might apply to them given what was revealed in the demographic section. For example, if they were students I asked about dormitory rooms. After questions about these specific scenarios, the participants were asked more open questions about what other types of sex-segregated facilities they’ve used and what their experiences were like. I also asked individuals about their involvement in men’s or women’s-only clubs, organizations, and events. Participants were prompted with examples, but most reported no involvement. As the interviews progressed, questions became less specific allowing the participant to discuss experiences they thought were formative or important in their lives.

It was my intent that by the time we got to this last section, I would have gained a great amount of rapport with the participant and they would be more open about their experiences. It is my perception that not only was this the case, but also that the repetitive nature of the questions created a shared structure of communication between
the participants and myself, allowing us to feel mutually understood. Also, because the interviewees quickly picked up on the interview structure, they were able to anticipate future questions or probes and began filling in the details without prompts, and it appeared that they were able to dig deeper into their experiences as the interviews progressed.

Participants were compensated $15 per interview. Interviews were digitally audio-recorded and transcribed. The length of the interviews ranged from 75 to 236 minutes, with a mean of 130 minutes and median of 117 minutes. The median is slightly lower than the mean due to outlier interviews of 204 minutes and 237 minutes in length. During transcription, all names (including those of any third parties) were changed to pseudonyms reflective of the age, gender, racial, and ethnic identity of the participant and each interview was coded with a number. A master list of the interviewees’ names and codes was kept in a document on a password-protected computer that only I could access. Any other identifying information such as place of work or healthcare provider was replaced with a generic description or erased altogether. This was done to preserve the confidentiality of interviewees by reducing the chance that a particular interviewee could be identified.

Data Analysis

Utilizing a theory-driven method of interviewing provided the opportunity for subjects to engage with, contest, and refine the border-crossing framework in their responses. Likewise, I employed a theory-driven methodology to the process of coding and analyzing the data. I conducted my analysis loosely on the direction of what Gokkuhl
and Cronholm (2003) call a “multi-grounded theory” (MGT) approach, which they base off of Glaser and Strauss’s (1965) concept of grounded theory (GT). MGT is a “dialectical synthesis between inductivism (GT) and deductivism” (2003: 179) where coding categories are based on the theoretical framework of the research and then expanded and refined in the analytical process.

The transcripts were analyzed for themes and patterns of identity management within the identified border categories: sex classification borders, normative embodiment borders, lived gender borders, and what had originally been defined as political association borders – women’s- or men’s-only groups, organizations, or events. During the analysis, I collapsed the concept of political association borders into normative embodiment borders because many of the experiences that individuals had with women’s only groups were characterized by segregated facilities or venues. The remaining experiences overlapped with experiences at lived gender borders, an analysis of which I chose not to include in this manuscript. After identifying emergent themes and patterns within the data, I analyzed these themes in relation to gender identity and expression, embodiment, and documented identity alongside other variables that were salient for the interviewee. These variables often included race and ethnicity, nationality, and class. When possible transcription of the interviews and preliminary data analyses occurred alongside the preparation and conduction of other interviews (Glaser and Straus 1967). This reflexive approach allowed me to take note of salient issues and themes that emerged in previous interviews so that I could explore these areas in subsequent interviews. However, the changes made to the interview structure and interview guide ended up being more organizational than substantive.
For the purposes of this manuscript, I present an analysis of the two dominant gender borders: sex classification borders and normative embodiment borders. Participants experienced regulation and subsequently enacted identity management strategies across a variety of scenarios in everyday life outside of these two borders. Nevertheless, the particular border crossing situations I chose to include most clearly demonstrate the connections between institutions, facilities, systems of classification, and trans subjectivities. In other words, they most clearly exemplify experiences of “border crossing.” The results are presented in the following two chapters.
Chapter Five
Administrative Mis/Recognition: Identity Management at Sex Classification Borders

From sex designations at birth, identity documents incorporate sex as part of one’s civic status (Namaste 2000). One must produce valid identity documentation to be employed, to vote, to cash a check, to check out library books, to enter age-barred venues or purchase age-barred products, or to use a public benefits card. This handful of examples illustrates the broad range of ways in which identity documents serve as points of access or roadblocks to participation in the social sphere. An important question to ask then is what counts as “valid” identification? It is often assumed that everyone has a clear “legal gender” (Spade 2008) derived from the sex designated at birth or constructed through a straightforward reclassification process. These assumptions, however, do not reflect the reality of the inconsistencies and complexities that characterize the sex reclassification process nor the myriad of ways in which trans people embody and identify their sex.

Most trans people live with identity documentation that does not match their current sex or that is inconsistent across identity documents and records. In a recent survey sampling over six thousand trans people in the United States, for those who had transitioned, only 21% had been able to change the sex marker on all of their identity documents and records and 33% had updated none of their identity documents and records (Grant et al 2011). In my study, the percentage of those who changed the sex marker on their primary identity documents was lower, at only 18%. Additionally, some of these individuals noted that there were still records, such as school transcripts or certificates, that they did not plan on changing their sex marker or name on. Others
commented that even many years after changing their primary identity documents they still discovered identity cards and records that they hadn’t updated their information on including frequent shopper cards and mailing lists. Trans people’s access to institutions, organizations and social spaces is shaped, in part, by the common experience of having inconsistent, outdated, or inaccurate identity documents (Girshick 2008; Namaste 2000). Even for those who are able to reclassify their sex, it is not guaranteed that their new identity will be validated across agencies, institutions, and organizations. As a result, trans people are often denied access to social and material resources, support systems, and entry to various facilities.

Scholars such as Spade (2011) and Namaste (2000) attribute many social problems across trans populations in North America such as high rates of unemployment, lack of access to healthcare, and discrimination in sex-segregated facilities, to the inability for many trans people to acquire identity documentation that matches their gender and/or that is consistent across documents, agencies, institutions, and organizations. These assertions are supported by data in the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, where Grant et al found that, “rates of reported hiring discrimination, and discrimination in housing, including campus housing, are much higher for those who do not have an updated driver’s license” (2011: 139). The root of the problem is two-fold: that most forms of documented identity present only male and female as options for sex, with the assumption that sex is an immutable and innate part of our identities (sex classification); and, that the process of sex reclassification within agencies, institutions, and organizations is variable, unpredictable, and fraught with obstacles that reproduce hierarchies of inequality (sex reclassification). From a
bureaucratic perspective, these two issues may look the same, the regulation of gender “others.” However, the negotiation of that “otherness” will differ depending on how trans individuals understand and seek to embody or present their identity. Moreover, it is important to keep in mind that gender expressions and embodiments are highly shaped by other classification regimes including race, ethnicity, ability, and nationality and, as such, other markers of difference or sameness become intertwined with any threat trans people pose as gender “others.”

The focus of this chapter is on the ways in which trans people manage their identities at sex classification borders. At sex classification borders, identity verification occurs through the inspection and comparison of identity documents, and other personal records, against a person’s visible comportment. Border regulators are the dominant gatekeepers at sex classification borders. They are administrators, inspectors, and agents that utilize their authority and power to determine the validity of identity documentation, and the intelligibility of one’s gender performativity. The role of the border regulator(s) is to decide whether an individual is who they claim to be. Sex classification borders vary in the degree to which they are regulated, or rather, the types of documentation that is necessary and the consequences of failure to meet these requirements.

In Part I, I provide an analysis of the ways in which trans people account for their identities across a range of identity checkpoints: from highly restricted security checkpoints at airports to moderately restricted borders such as interactions with students and teachers in a classroom. In Part II, I examine the process of sex reclassification and the ways in which cissexist policies and practices limit the ability for trans people to acquire identity documents that are consistent with their identities. I also look at the
ways that trans and intersex people’s experiences are shaped by the logics that underpin the sex classification and reclassification processes. In this Chapter, I introduce three new terms, which will be defined in the sections that follow: *administrative recognition*, *strategic normativity*, and *strategic hybridity*. The first two are original concepts that are coined in this manuscript and the third I have appropriated from research on ethnic identities. In this Chapter, I will be establishing its utility in the field of trans studies.

**PART I: Navigating Identity Checkpoints – Sex Classification Borders**

A significant part of the trans experience is constructing an identity that aligns with one’s sex/gender identity and expression, rather than with the gender assigned at birth. In fact, the predominant focus of research on trans lives has been on the process of facilitating a change in intra- and inter-subjectivity through the transformation of the physical body, as seen in the literature on identity development reviewed in Chapter 2. As Rubin states, “Bodies matter for subjects who are routinely misrecognized by others and whose bodies cause them great emotional and physical discomfort” (2003: 11). Like other scholars, Rubin emphasizes the necessity for trans people to achieve recognition – of being validated and affirmed as one’s “authentic” self:

> Authenticity is a leading principle behind an FTM’s life. FTM lives are a search for recognition of the innermost self. What FTMs realize is that their innermost selves are authentically male. Once they make this realization, they modify their bodies to express this authentic identity…FTM body modification is a situated, contextual project of authenticity based on the principles and demands of recognition in modern society. Without body modification, most FTMs are subject to misrecognition both by others and by themselves. As [Charles] Taylor suggests, misrecognition- the refusal of recognition by others – is a form of oppression. (2003: 15)
For Rubin, recognition can only be achieved vis-à-vis the process of bodily transformation. However, this isn’t necessarily the case for all trans people. As Cromwell (1999) and Hale (1997) have found, bodies can be recoded and re-signified in certain contexts, so that intersubjective recognition can take place without bodily alterations. With that said, what is more important is that the concept of recognition does not start and stop at the body. I contend that trans people seek not only intra- and inter-subjective forms of recognition, but what I am calling administrative recognition as well.

Many trans people, but certainly not all, will seek to change the name and sex on their identity documents and records. Without these changes, trans people who live as one sex, but are documented as another, are susceptible to encounters marked by administrative misrecognition – the rejection of one’s identity documentation or the ascription of an inaccurate identity on an institutional level. Administrative recognition – the verification of one’s documented identity – is absolutely necessary for individuals to gain access into institutions and to move through parts of the social sphere that require “valid” identification for entry or passage. In other words, one successfully border crosses at sex classification borders upon receiving administrative recognition. The key difference here between intersubjective recognition and administrative recognition is the presence of border regulators – administrators, inspectors, agents, or even computerized systems – that serve as gatekeepers, restricting access to institutions, spaces, events, and organizations. The consequences of administrative misrecognition go well beyond identity invalidation, and can result exclusion from vital support services and institutions, detainment or incarceration, or a refusal of benefits, to name a few examples.

Accordingly, administrative recognition plays a vital role in the ability for trans people to
be treated as legitimate social actors on par with their cis counterparts. What administrative recognition does not necessarily imply, or result in, is an outcome of intra- or intersubjective recognition. Nevertheless, this section seeks to answer the questions: in what ways do trans people prepare for and respond to administrative mis/recognition? What effect does the real or perceived threat of misrecognition have on trans lives? How does trans identity management differ based on the degree of regulation at each sex classification border?

In order to answer these questions, I examine a range of sex classification borders from highly restricted borders of airport security checkpoints to moderately restricted borders of identity verification at a campus health center and in a university classroom setting. In each of these scenarios, I present the ways in which trans subjects give accounts of their identities to border regulators, and in some cases alter their comportments, with the goal of achieving administrative recognition and successfully border crossing.

**Highly Restricted Borders: Airport Screenings During International Travel.** Of the forty people I interviewed, two individuals experienced elevated levels of harassment by airport security personnel while traveling internationally. In this section I will examine the experiences of these two individuals, Sal and Betsy, to illustrate the ways in which gender non-conformity and inconsistencies between gender presentation and identity documentation are used as a means for regulating and reinforcing international borders. Since 9/11 and alongside growing anti-immigration sentiments, the securitization of borders and restrictions placed on movement across international borders has increased drastically, resulting in increased racial profiling of Arab Americans and Latinos
Border enforcement policies that may never have been intended to target trans individuals are deeply entrenched in the maintenance of normatively gendered (and raced) bodies, behaviors, and identities (Beauchamp 2009; Thaemlitz 2006). Not surprisingly, Sal and Betsy are both in racial and ethnic categories that are explicitly targeted by United States border agents as possible threats to the security of the nation: Sal is an Arab American and Betsy is Hispanic, marked respectively as a potential terrorist and an illegal immigrant. In conjunction with racial and ethnic profiling at these borders, the liminality of trans people’s sex classification poses a challenge to notions of gender difference and national difference. Consequently, trans people, especially those in targeted populations, may be treated as a threat to national security, and must work to reassert their gendered, racialized, and nationalized identities in order to successfully border cross.

I’ll focus first on the case of Sal, a working class, college-educated, Arab American trans man in his early twenties. Using a gender-neutral name, Sal aligns himself with male pronouns and identifies as a “trans male.” “I wouldn’t ever say that I’m completely male or want to be completely male...because I do kind of transcend what it means to be male,” said Sal when describing his identity. Despite the fact that he had not undergone any surgeries or taken any hormones, Sal is more often than not read as male. An important aspect of Sal’s identity negotiations is that his travel documents are not consistent in terms of his sex marker and appearance. Specifically, all documents are marked “female” and the pictures on his green card and visa appear to be in his words “completely female,” taken when he had long hair. Sal’s current presentation of self and how he appears in his recently updated passport picture reflect a more masculine
appearance. It is these inconsistencies between appearance and documentation, and across forms of documentation, that have resulted in numerous problems for Sal when he has traveled back and forth between the United States and Lebanon.

Although he didn’t think he looked masculine enough to be given much trouble while en route from Lebanon to the United States, he said that in Lebanon the security had scrutinized his documents asking, “Who is this?” In order to manage inquiries about his change in appearance he referenced his style as influenced by American fashion: “I would…explain, I just cut my hair….It’s no big deal. It’s just the fashion thing right now.” At one point he traveled when his hair was a bit longer and curly and he still had one earring in, claiming that he could have been identified as just a girl with short hair:

In Lebanon, it’s not very normal for guys to have earrings so I would just think, there’s at least one earring, they’re going to think I’m just a girl with short hair and I’ll be fine with it. And if they ask anything, I’m just being a tomboy for the summer and, you know, no big deal.

Despite these efforts he encountered administrative misrecognition. He was held for questioning during several trips and pulled aside while security agents careful scrutinized his identity documents. This even occurred in instances when he carried more recent, masculine appearing identification. On two of six recent flights he was forced to show his chest binder to security, which he claimed at the time was a back brace used for medical purposes:

Last year [someone in security] made me stand up for about a half an hour and he brought one of these little magnifying glasses and he kept looking through the picture on my ID and scrutinizing like every inch of my face…And I just kept telling him, there is a fingerprint and you have machines over there, use your [head] and stop [humiliating] me in front of all these people.
The security guard responded by laughing and asking loudly whether the passport belonged to his mother. Sal’s non-normative gender presentation, one that did not match up with his identity documents, presented guards with an excuse to harass him.

Conversely, his experiences of arriving in the United States were marked by seemingly greater ease. While he had been challenged by security in Lebanon and Germany to prove that his identity documents were indeed his, the American security guard openly sanctioned his gender transition:

The [TSA agent] was like, “You look really different with the long hair.” I was like, “Yeah, I was born female but I’m, I’m transitioning now.” And she was like, “Oh, that’s great. How’s your family taking it? Are they OK with it?” She was just really friendly about it. [She] told me, “I’m really glad you cut your hair and you’re expressing yourself better now.” It was such a big change…this whole culture of diversity kind of thing.

It may seem that Sal’s experience traveling into the United States is liberatory in comparison to the policing he experienced in Germany and Lebanon. However, Sal mentioned that when he got off the plane in the United States he was “ready for a fight” because of how he had been treated at his layover in Germany. If that was the case and he was, “ready for a fight,” then why did he change his identity narrative? Or was this different account of his identity a “fight” within the context of a different border regime with different appeals to insider and outsider status? In the process of crossing into the United States from a stay in Lebanon, it appears that Sal and the TSA agent communicate perceptions of gender and nation predicated on the United States’ “culture of diversity” where the United States is positioned as a source of trans inclusion and gender freedom. As a result, Sal was granted administrative recognition; he passed through security and arrived at his destination without being detained or denied access to his flight, through participating in co-constructed characterizations of national, ethnic, and gender difference.
regarding “this whole culture of diversity.” The role that race, ethnicity, and nation plays in the process of gaining administrative recognition at airport security checkpoints I will return to in the next example.

Sal was not the only individual who encountered harassment and additional scrutiny from border regulators at airports. Security agents also stopped Betsy, a Hispanic trans woman in her early thirties, on a few occasions while travelling internationally. As part of her current profession Betsy travels several times a month to destinations all over the world. Betsy, too, had identity documents that did not match her presentation of self. At the time of the interview, she had been on hormones for about three years and lived full-time as a woman, but had not yet changed the sex from male to female on any of her identity documents. Betsy was in the process of marrying another trans woman who was legally classified as female, but not a United States citizen, and Betsy thought that it would jeopardize her fiancé’s immigration proceedings if she were to reclassify her sex as female. Betsy commented, “Until …the immigration situation is cleared…I’m stuck with the wrong name, the wrong birth certificate, the wrong gender marker on my driver’s license, the wrong name on my passport,” and so on.

When asked about her experiences traveling with documentation that did not match her identity, one scenario stood out in Betsy’s mind, what she called the event that “was the motivation to get a new one [passport].” At the time of this trip, Betsy had been on hormones for about two years, during which time the fat on her face had redistributed, her hair was down to the middle of her back, and she no longer had any facial hair. However, the passport she carried with her as eight years old. Since she had not changed the sex on her passport, nor updated the photo, she decided to present herself
androgynously by wearing a loose fitting shirt and taking her earrings out. When Betsy entered the security checkpoint at customs security agents pulled her out of line, searched her luggage, made duplicate copies of the data on her laptop, and took mug shots of her. The question as to why Betsy was being searched and later interrogated was confirmed when they asked her multiple times whether the person in the passport photo was her brother. She told them, “This is a very old passport. I’m sorry for the confusion. I’ll get a new photograph” to which the security officer replied:

*What you do is your business*, but you really can’t come back into the U.S. with this same document again…as long as you update your photograph and make a reasonable effort to fit in, or at least be congruent with your documentation package, then you’ll have no problems here and abroad*” (emphasis added).

During the three-hour period she was held for interrogation Betsy was required to give the name of four contacts, some of whom were called, and she was asked information about her personal history in order to verify that she was truly the person who appeared on her passport. Betsy had encountered administrative misrecognition; security thought her identity documentation was fraudulent because of the inconsistencies between her markers of membership – her current appearance and the information on her passport did not appear to match.

Aside from questions that were unambiguously used to verify her identity, Betsy was also asked questions to determine whether she was a threat to the security of nation. She was asked: Do you love America? Are you a good citizen? And, do you believe you’re a Patriot? “I said honestly I was born and raised here, my parents are immigrants but I speak English. I have no accent. My skin’s a little dark, but that’s all,” said Betsy. When I asked Betsy whether or not she brought up the fact that she was transitioning, she said explicitly, “I didn’t bring it up…I thought it might invite more aggressive behavior.”
That said, Betsy’s gender was openly acknowledged through the comments made about her “business” and “[fitting] in” as well as when a supervisor mentioned that he had “seen this before.” It is clear in this interchange that Betsy’s administrative misrecognition – the perception that she was using her brother’s passport – marked her as a potential threat to the United States, providing motivation for border regulators to call into question the strength of her citizenship. Betsy and the security officer communicate perceptions of gender, ethnicity, and nation, though in this case through a disavowal of “diversity.” Unlike Sal’s entrance into the United States, Betsy remains quiet about her transition, instead emphasizing her English language proficiency and downplaying her tan skin tone.

At first glance, it may seem that Sal and Betsy are trapped within systems of classification that render their identities unintelligible and to some extent impossible. However, even as trans identities exist within the interplay of intersubjective, intrasubjective, and administrative mis/recognition, Sal and Betsy enact agency by drawing on normative notions of sex, gender identity, transgenderism, ethnicity, and nation in order to attain the objective of successfully border crossing. This temporary utilization of contextually specific, normative discourses of identity, I call strategic normativity. Strategic normativity derives from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1990) concept of strategic essentialism, whereby members of groups, who are highly differentiated internally, engage in tactics to temporarily essentialize their identities in order to be perceived as a cohesive group in order to achieve collective goals. I contend that, like the differentiation of narratives within groups, narratives of self are multiple and varied within an individual. Therefore, like a group, an individual will temporarily fix or
situate his/her/hirself within a recognizable identity towards the goal of achieving recognition. It is important to note that I use normativity rather than essentialism to emphasize that norms are constructed and rely on varying and multiple standards of authenticity, which may or may not be grounded in essentialist notions of identity. Furthermore, strategic essentialism is the conscious appropriation and utilization of oppressive stereotypes defined by the dominant group. In the case of trans people, this would be analogous to a strategic deployment of the hegemonic trans narrative, which sometimes is the case, but not always. Trans people also present identity narratives that deviate from this storyline and emphasize or conceal aspects of oneself to fit each particular context.

Comparing Sal and Betsy’s use of strategic normativity, Sal chose to seek administrative recognition through articulating differing accounts of his trans identity that aligned with context specific norms. He was presenting in “American fashion” at one border and a person transitioning at another. Betsy, on the other hand, engaged in strategic normativity through explicitly not talking about her gender, even when the border regulators alluded to her trans status. This silence is a deliberate attempt for Betsy to construct herself as an intelligible, non-threatening, and valid subject through minimizing her gender and racial difference and emphasizing nationalistic markers of sameness. Furthermore, the non-disclosure did not necessarily mark Betsy as cisgender, but it did situate her trans status in the private sphere, yet another marker of sexual normativity. Betsy’s implementation of strategic normativity did not begin and end in the border crossing negotiation, but seeped into her preparations for future travel. After the incident, she claimed, “I ran home with my tail tucked between my legs and burst into
tears for a day and a half.” She decided to immediately change the photo on her passport, although the male sex marker remained. For the new photo, Betsy made the decision to wear earrings, glasses, and a “large non-descript floral print top” so that she would be unmistakably seen as a woman. In future trips, especially to locations with a “propensity for hate crimes...where people are executed for being transsexual,” Betsy would dress “very conservative...[wearing] reasonable shoes, no outrageous heels” in order to appear as a “non-descript American woman.” Betsy found that, in general, when traveling as a “non-descript American woman” even with “male” documentation, she passed through the majority of identity checkpoints unremarkably. A consistent implementation of strategic normativity resulted in more consistent experiences of administrative recognition.

Administrative misrecognition at these borders, as shown, can result in interrogation, searches, harassment, and even detainment or deportation in extreme instances. At these highly restricted sex classification borders, border regulators act as national gatekeepers enforcing the cis normative sex/gender binary as a signifier of valid citizenship. This institutional-level enforcement of the cis normative sex/gender binary exists across more moderately restricted borders as well, which I examine in the sections on employee benefits registration, health center registration and teacher-student interactions that follow.

*Moderately Restricted Borders: Employee Benefits Registration, Health Center Registration and Teacher-Student Interactions.* Maxine, a white trans woman in her early fifties, was like most trans women I interviewed in that she had not undergone sex reassignment surgery, but had changed the sex marker on her driver’s license from male
to female. Describing herself as someone who “passes easily,” she was read as female by almost everyone she came into contact with. She even recalled a few instances where individuals who knew her when she lived as a man were unable to recognize her in this new gender comportment. Maxine worked as a security guard on a college campus where she experienced administrative pressures to fit within a cis normative sex/gender binary framework, which I describe below.

When Maxine’s employer changed insurance providers she discovered that she could not achieve administrative recognition and still secure benefits for herself and her wife. When entering data into the computer software for her employment benefits, Maxine checked off female under the category sex for both her and her wife. Attempting to check her relationship status as married she states, “The computer system wouldn’t compute. One [spouse] had to be a male, one had to be a female. So, the thing was rejecting all my information.” In order to process her information she decided to designate her wife as male. “I’m the primary [beneficiary] here and I’m not going to be, you know, just forced to designate myself [as male]. And I didn’t think it would matter,” she commented. Maxine could have chosen to identify her relationship as a domestic partnership to accurately ascribe administrative recognition of her sex and the sex of her spouse, but it would have increased her yearly costs in addition to changing her insurance and tax statuses. “I was almost willing…to put us down as domestic partners,” she said. But, this was not the legal designation of her relationship; she was married. To resolve the issue, she denoted her wife as male. In spite of this adjustment she realized it was only a temporary solution. Eventually Maxine’s wife complained that she was listed as male and so, begrudgingly, Maxine decided to change her benefits information, again,
and listed her wife as “female” and herself as “male.” She pronounced, “They really had me between a rock and a hard place…they forced me to use the male designator when in fact everything else is the other way.” She described this instance as distressing, bothersome, and upsetting “because it’s so contrary” to how she views herself and how she operates in the social world. Maxine did not clarify why she didn’t, for example, file a complaint with her employer or the software company. However, she did mention numerous times during our interview that keeping her job was a high priority and it’s feasible that she did not pursue a complaint in order to maintain job security. It could have just as easily not occurred to her as a possibility.

Maxine experienced administrative misrecognition and was constrained to a male classification on her records despite the fact that in all other cases she “checks the female box” and in some select instances, such as at the doctor’s office, she will also write in “transgender.” Maxine is not trying to hide her trans status or history as a man; she is working towards maintaining inter- and intra- subjective recognition as a person who is both transgender and female, which for her requires consistent validation and acceptance as female, irrespective of her genital configuration. Maxine’s story illustrates how institutional adherence to sex classifications, in this case connected to constructs of marriage as a heterosexual institution, contribute to the misrecognition of people who fall outside of the cis normative binary sex/gender system. As illustrated in this story, Maxine experiences administrative misrecognition, literally as “does not compute.” In order for her to achieve administrative recognition for herself, she would be forced to forfeit some of the benefits she receives as a married person, or to perpetuate the misrecognition of her wife’s identity.
Next I present the cases of full-time students Jack and Chyann, who directly challenged the actions of the border regulators by demanding administrative recognition. Like a number of undergraduate students at large universities, Jack, a white trans male in his early twenties, commonly utilized the services of the university health center whenever he got sick. In our interview Jack claimed that one of the last times he went to the health center he “freaked out” at some of the staff because they kept calling him by his birth name, Jackie:

“It was awkward for me with everyone in the waiting room having a person call me [by my birth name]…[On campus] a lot of people know me and I don’t really know them…so I’ll be having a conversation…then it’s like, “Alright Jackie?” And they’re just like, “Who?”…it felt like…unwelcomed exposure (emphasis added).

The administrative misrecognition that resulted in the public exposure of Jack’s birth name created the possibility of his gender identity being called into question or even rejected by others, or intersubjective misrecognition. Jack said that he felt “pissed off” for having to manage his identity in a situation where he didn’t want to discuss it with a casual acquaintance. As Jack laments, these experiences of “exposure” often result in inquiries from others about his identity and requests for him to explain himself, to confess and account for the discontinuities between his documented identity and presentation of self. In response, Jack “freaked out” and “yelled at” the staff at the information desk on his way out of the health center. “I just waved my hands in the air and expressed some fury and just walked out…I said…You need some kind of preferred name system where you just put an asterisk next to my preferred name and use it and then you can see the asterisk and know it’s my preferred name.” At his next visit to the health
center, the mistake was not repeated, yet no one informed Jack as to how the correction was adopted into the protocol for information management.

Where Jack’s experience departs from those of Sal and Maxine, for example, is in the outcome of his challenge to the health record system. Sal and Maxine each responded to their experiences of administrative misrecognition with claims that their documented identity was accurate or verifiable and that the data verification process was faulty. However, neither of their disputes resulted in a change to administrative recognition process, whereas Jack’s did. It is possible that the record system at the health center constitutes a more porous or flexible gender border than at airport security or at employee benefits registration, that there isn’t a rigorous demand for maintaining distinctions between students and non-students at a health center that is situated on campus. On the other hand, Jack’s experience can also exemplify the arbitrary way in which cis normative sex/gender binary standards are enforced and arbitrated at sex classification borders.

Furthermore, Jack’s reaction was not one of strategic normativity, but instead a straightforward demand for administrative recognition. I think part of this is due to the fact that Jack is consistently read\(^5\) by others as a cis male, what Julia Serano (2007) calls “conditional cisgender privilege,” in that the benefits one accrues by being perceived as cisgender may be revoked upon the disclosure of their trans status. In his daily life, most people, whether or not they know that Jack is trans, use the correct name and pronouns when addressing him. In other words, Jack is usually aligned with the cis normative

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\(^5\) I use the term “read” throughout this manuscript as opposed to “passing,” which both implies that the person in question is not already a man or a woman and reinforces the notion that cisgender genders are natural while transgender genders are artificial.
sex/gender binary and ergo, receives consistent inter-subjective recognition. As a result, he may not need to enact strategic normativity because he already embodied many signifier of normativity within this context. Accordingly, moments of administrative misrecognition in Jack’s life are foreseeably more episodic than continuous and more apt to appear at sex classification borders where his trans status is made visible. Not surprisingly, that is not the case for all trans individuals, especially those who are non-normatively gendered in their appearance, which I explore in the second case.

Another full-time student, Chyann or “Chy”, a 21-year-old biracial male-to-female transsexual genderqueer, spoke of her experiences of consistent intersubjective misrecognition – having her identity frequently rejected or discounted by others on account of her gender fluidity. After a negative reaction to estrogen in the past, Chy had put hormone therapy aside and had not undergone any gender related surgeries by the time of our interview. Viewing her gender expression as something malleable, some days Chy would wear breast forms, a skirt and wig and other days she would appear, in her words, “tomboyish.” “People second-guess my trans identity because I express my gender very ambiguously. One day I’ll be a very girly girl and then other days I’ll be in a men’s shirt, tie, and jeans.” Chy remarked that her shifting appearance is not a reflection of internal confusion or a phase, but a representation of the many sides of her personality. On account of this, Chy asked others to use female pronouns and call her by her chosen name irrespective of how she appeared on any given day.

Chy’s frequent encounters with inter-subjective misrecognition led her to be more proactive with managing her identity than Jack. As is the case at the majority of higher educational institutions, the university that Chy was attending did not have a preferred
name and pronoun system. Class rosters, directory listings, transcripts, identity cards, and student accounts all list students’ legal names and genders. In the case of Chy, these do not match her current identity. If Chy were to change the name and/or sex marker on these documents she would have to present the institution with paperwork documenting a legal change, which she did not have. At time of the interview, she still had permanent residency with her family of origin and was, in part, postponing surgical and legal sex reclassification until she lived on her own and was financially independent.

Since Chy’s gender identity and name did not match the records available to faculty, she contacted her professors before the start of each term to inform them of how she wanted to be addressed and treated in class:

I always send all of my professors an e-mail letting them know….in your class registration it’s going say Dennis. While that is my name at birth I prefer to be called Chyann [or] Chy....I am a transsexual individual, meaning I am a male to female transsexual....I just go down…[the list of] gendered situations in class and how they are to be handled….I prefer the use of female pronouns…if you’re going to separate by gender I prefer to be separated with the girls…

In order to avoid the “awkward situation” of being called the wrong name, Chy feels compelled to not only contact each of her professors, but also to provide them with an explanation for the inconsistencies between her documented and personal identity. Chy could have left out the information that she identifies as a transsexual, or even claimed that the registration data was incorrect, but she did not. She also didn’t share with her professors that she’s a “tomboy.” Instead, she enacted agency by drawing on normative notions of gender identity, specifically of transgenderism, saying “I'm a male-to-female

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6 In 2009, the University of Vermont implemented a “preferred name system” whereby students could opt to be identified by a name and pronoun that differed from their legal documentation. For more information refer to the following website: http://www.uvm.edu/registrar/?Page=policiesandprocedures/p_preferredname.html&SM=p_menu.html
“transsexual,” and “I prefer to be with the girls,” in order to attain the objective of achieving administrative recognition and being included in classroom activities as a woman.

Unlike Sal’s and Maxine’s experiences, however, Chyann’s use of strategic normativity does not result in inclusion, mobility, or access. Even with her conscientious preparation, Chy, like Jack, encountered invalidating and embarrassing experiences of administrative misrecognition. At the university, Chy was enrolled in a program where, for the year, a group of students lived in the same residence hall and took a set of courses together that were intertwined by a common theme. In the program, there were small class sizes and it was expected that students would form a closer bond with each other and with the professors. It was in this intimate setting that Chy had a problem with one of the professors:

My professor…[would say], “Well, I want to hear more from the girls in the class” or “…I haven’t been hearing from the girls” and I had been talking and maybe two guys had been talking….saying “I have not heard from the girls” when you have a girl talking is offensive.

In this situation, Chy and some of her classmates corrected the professor who rebuffed accusations that she wasn’t treating Chyann as a girl, stating that it was just a “slip of the tongue.” Even after numerous corrections, Chy found that she was consistently referred to as male by this professor. Towards the end of the semester, Chy confronted her professor:

“You know, it’s the second semester now and I’m starting to feel offended.” I said, “if this continues, I’m going to have to go to [administration]…I understand that you have other students, but you deal with us basically on a face-to-face basis….I expected a little but more consideration from a professor that I spent a lot of time with during the year.”
Reflecting on the impact this had on her life both inside and out of the classroom, she recalled coming back to her room at the end of every class and crying to her friends. In comparison to the health center, the gender border within a classroom setting may be less flexible, maintaining the stratification between male and female students, those normatively and non-normatively gendered, and between the professor and students. It is possible that the requisite for clear gender difference, and inequality, within the classroom made it more challenging for Chy, who also failed to perform femaleness to normative standards, to find identity validation. It is more likely the case that Chy’s non-normative embodiment and appearance created greater barriers towards achieving recognition.

Strategic normativity does not guarantee results of inclusion or identity recognition for trans people. Nevertheless the ways in which Jack and Chy navigate the use and responses to these strategies highlight the role that the body plays within the realm of documented identity. Both Jack and Chy are more often than not perceived as cisgender men, although only Jack benefits from this gender attribution. Outside of the sporadic incidences of identity misrecognition, Jack’s normative gender appearance affords him the ability to disclose his trans status at will. While he is by no means “stealth” he chooses to share the trans aspects of his experience with others as educational or political tools or to develop a level of intimacy with a new friend or acquaintance. On the other hand, Chyann perceives her disclosure as a male-to-female transsexual as paramount to being acknowledged and identified as female. Her confession of her trans status, so to speak, must be repetitively made in order to produce identity recognition.

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7 Stealth characterizes a trans person who acts in accordance with keeping all aspects of their trans identity and differently gendered past private.
an account of herself that makes sense to others given the discordance between her embodiment and her identity. *This is a paradox of trans identity management, for some, disclosure leads to misrecognition, while for others it makes recognition a possibility.*

*Administrative Misrecognition as Intrasubjective Recognition.* It would be a simplification to think that intrasubjective recognition is dependent upon administrative recognition, or in other words, that administrative misrecognition is inherently invalidating. This is the case for some individuals, but not all, especially those who conceptualize their sex and gender experiences as complex, fluid, or beyond the binary. In fact, administrative misrecognition can be perceived as a validating experience for someone with a non-normative identity, which the following example illustrates.

One time, when he was shopping at a sporting goods store, Ace a white, working class “trandrogynous” person tried to use her credit card to purchase some items\(^8\). Upon seeing Ace’s “feminine” name, the clerk would not allow her to use that credit card to make the purchase. “She apparently thought I stole a credit card because the name is feminine and my presentation apparently was not,” said Ace. “I gave her the card… and she looked at the back to see if it was signed and she didn’t even… give me the opportunity to like sign something to [show] that it would look the same. She just refused.” The cashier demanded that Ace use a different form of payment to which Ace replied, “Does the card not work?” The cashier said that clearly the card did not belong to Ace and she refused the run the card, match the signatures, or ask for additional identity documents. This experience of administrative misrecognition resulted in clear

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\(^8\) Ace has a mixed-use pronoun preference, which is why “he” and “she,” for example, will be used in the same sentence to refer to Ace.
restrictions on the way in which Ace could pay for the items. However, Ace’s reaction to the encounter was characterized by mixed feelings:

At the time I was just kind of like…she apparently still doesn’t believe that I’m a girl enough that she’s not going to run my card [which was] sort of flattering because, I’m like, whoa, even with my voice… I’m passing as a [guy]. And then there’s just a little [embarrassment], because I was like, “No…this is really me.”

While Ace’s reaction was not common among the individuals I interviewed, it does exemplify the fact that intrasubjective, intersubjective, and administrative recognition play different roles in the lives of trans people and scholars must be cautious of assuming that recognition is always appreciated as validation of one’s identified sex or gender.

Conclusion

The stories in this section depict the ways in which administrative recognition is necessary for a successful border crossing at sex classification borders. Unlike everyday instances of intersubjective misrecognition, administrative misrecognition has far greater consequences than identity invalidation alone. Depending on the degree to which the border is restricted, a failure to border cross can result in exclusion from vital support services and institutions, detainment or incarceration, or a denial of benefits, to name a few examples. Demands for administrative recognition include consistency across identity documentation, and also appeals to normativity in the body, appearance, and across other signifiers specific to each context. Accordingly, individuals whose identity documents are not aligned, or who are perceived as carrying fraudulent documents, appeal to context specific standards of normativity, enacting what I call strategic normativity, with the goal of achieving administrative recognition. Strategic normativity may or may not include the disclosure of one’s trans status, as the possibility of being
read as cisgender is shaped by each border and the individuals involved in the crossing. Trans people are not the only individuals who are susceptible to administrative misrecognition or accusations of identity fraud at sex classification borders. Borders that require documented proof of one’s membership or belonging are sites where all types of bodies and identities are produced, regulated, and negotiated, especially those that are deemed to be unruly, unfit, or threatening. What makes trans people particularly vulnerable to administrative misrecognition at these sites, however, are the policies and protocols that regulate who can change their name and sex marker on identity documents and under what conditions. As participants in this section illustrate, a consistent implementation of strategic normativity results in more consistent experiences of administrative recognition across institutions shaped by a cis normative binary sex/gender system.

**PART II: Verifying Authenticity – Cissexism and the Sex Reclassification Processes**

If inconsistent and incorrect identity documentation is at the crux of administrative recognition, then the process through which individuals reclassify their sex should be similarly examined. Systems of sex reclassification are representative of institutionalized forms of what Serano (2007) calls *cissexual* gender entitlement or *cissexism*. Cissexual (or cis) gender entitlement is characterized twofold: by the attitude held by cis people that their genders are natural, innate and true whereas trans people’s genders are fake and unnatural; and, the belief that cis people have the final say in regards to what gender a trans person “really” is. Cissexism is defined by the actions or __________

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9 Cissexual, cisgender, or cis refers to people who identify with the sex and/or gender designated to them at birth; non-trans.
behaviors that perpetuate these attitudes and beliefs. Serano claims, “This goes beyond a sense of self-ownership regarding their own gender, and broaches territory in which they [cis people] consider themselves to be the ultimate arbiters of which people are allowed to call themselves men and women” (2007: 166). In this section, I outline the ways in which cissexism is institutionalized whereby trans people are positioned as unqualified to authenticate their own gender(s). *I argue that sex authentication, a necessity for achieving administrative recognition, rests upon policies, protocols, and practices of individual agents within the various parts of the sex reclassification and identity change processes.*

To start, trans identities are located within a larger psychiatric discourse of pathology and illness. Creating a coherent sense of self for trans people requires self-recognition of a trans identification and, for many, a relationship with the medical community in which the body is inspected, judged, and altered as part of a consensual process through which the shift to dis/embody signifiers of sex takes place. For trans people who wish to access hormones or undergo surgical procedures through legally sanctioned means, most must submit to the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder (Spade 2008; Stryker 2008). To seek out gender reconstructive medical technologies, trans people are often required to disclose their identity to medical professionals, insurance agencies, their employer, and legal institutions, and many are also required to prove their commitment to this identity by performing a real-life experience (RLE),

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10 There are a number of clinics and/or clinicians that will record alternative diagnoses such as “endocrine disorder,” but it is unknown how common of a practice this is.
incorporating their gender into public life for a period ranging from a few months to two years\textsuperscript{11}.

The requirements for transitions vary across medical practitioners with greater and lesser degrees of flexibility in what standards must be met, if at all, in order to access hormonal treatment and surgery. However, the standards are generally more rigid for those seeking coverage through private or state-sponsored health insurance programs. Thus, flexibility in choice over embodiment and gender expression is more accessible to those paying out of pocket for their healthcare expenses. Furthermore, many private and state sponsored programs, such as Medicaid, limit or exclude transition-related coverage resulting in disproportionate impacts on low-income trans communities and communities of color (Gehi and Arkles 2007). The financial, social, and personal challenges and decisions involved in obtaining accurate identity documentation have left many trans people with legal documents that do not match their gender, making non-disclosure impossible and leaving them vulnerable to accusations of fraud (Grant et al 2011; Namaste 2000; Spade 2008, 2011). In many cases, this process extends into more extraneous forms of identification including student identity cards, frequent shopper cards, library cards, and so on, as these peripheral bureaucracies rely on birth certificates, passports, and driver’s licenses as primary forms of identification or “breeder documents” (Salter 2003) that confer one’s legal identity.

\textsuperscript{11} Refer to the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association's Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorders, 6\textsuperscript{th} Version:http://www.wpath.org/documents2/socv6.pdf
Sex authentication from a medical professional is required for trans people to proceed with sex reclassification on forms of identification including birth certificates, passports, and driver’s licenses (Namaste 2000; Spade 2008, 2011). As noted, the requirements differ depending on the identity document that needs changing and the particular jurisdiction, organization, or institution, ranging from a letter from a therapist to a notarized letter from a surgeon. Of the various forms of identity documentation, birth certificates, and up until recently passports, have the most rigid policies for sex reclassification. With the exceptions of legislation in Vermont and California, sex reassignment surgery is required, which only a small percentage of trans people undergo. Studies show that an overwhelming majority of trans people do not undergo genital surgery(ies) out of choice, medical contraindication, or inability to afford or access transition-related medical care (Gehi and Arkles 2007; Rachlin 2002; Rubin 2003; San Francisco Department of Public Health 1999; Spade 2011). Due to unequal access to healthcare and differential treatment by medical practitioners the percentages of post-op trans people and trans people on hormone therapy are much lower in poor and low-income trans populations and amongst trans people of color than in the overall population (Gehi and Arkles 2007; Spade 2011). Rates of “bottom surgery” are lower among trans males compared to trans females, possibly due to the undesirability and misinformation regarding surgical options, expenses, and a growing culture of acceptance of “original plumbing” 12,13. Thus, a minute percentage of trans people meet the requirements for sex

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12 For more information on the misconceptions and misinformation about bottom surgery for trans men see Hung Jury, ed. Trystan Cotten.
reclassification on birth certificates. All the same, it is not possible under any circumstances for a person to reclassify the sex on their birth certificate in Idaho, Tennessee, Utah, and Ohio (Currah forthcoming; Spade 2008).

As expected, a small percentage of the individuals in my study reclassified the sex on their birth certificate (18%). All seven of these individuals were on hormones and had undergone some type of gender-related surgery, five of which had undergone genital reconstruction surgeries. Of those who had genital reconstruction surgery, four provided evidence of this surgery in order to reclassify the sex on their birth certificate. The fifth person, however, changed his birth certificate well before he pursued “bottom surgery” by claiming a type of intersex identity and the subsequent rights to changing his birth certificate, which I examine later in this chapter. The last two individuals, a transman and a male “of trans experience,” changed their birth certificates after chest surgery by submitting a surgeon’s letter stating that they had undergone sex reassignment surgery and were now male. For the remaining thirty three individuals I interviewed, a few rejected the idea of changing identity documents and perceived the inconsistencies as a reflection of their genderqueer or gender fluid identity, but many prioritized changing their name and gender on the documents they used most frequently such as driver’s licenses and student or work identity cards. A number of participants put off any formal changes to their name or sex marker on identity documents because they were unable to incur the cost.

A few individuals were amidst the process of changing their identity documents when interviewed. James, a multi-racial African American trans man in his early forties

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13 For more information about the trend, see Original Plumbing: Trans Male Quarterly and complementary website: http://www.originalplumbing.com
summarizes the process of changing identity documents emphasizing the costs of time and money:

I had to file and pay money to get a court date, then go before the judge, then the judge issued a court order about me changing my name, that it would become effective a certain date after having published it in the newspaper. Then I had to pay to publish it in the newspaper, once, before my name changed, that I was going to change my name and then again after my name changed on a certain date, that it had changed…then I had to file and pay monies to the State Treasurer….then I had to pay another fee for Vital Statics to change my birth certificate. Then I had to pay more money to get certified copies of the legal document of my name, the court order of my name change, to submit those to the places that needed to have them. And then I had to pay the first time for my driver’s license to change my name and I had to change a second time to change my gender marker….Then I have to pay again to have my birth certificate changed, yet again, for my gender to be changed. And then I have to pay, of course, for my passport to be changed….It's probably been more than a year in the process of changing my documents….It's costly. It's expensive and it's long.

James’ comment suggests that changing the name and gender marker across the fields of one’s documented identity can be an arduous and seemingly endless process for many trans people. In what follows, I illustrate how James’ experiences with changing the identifying information on his driver’s license support Spade’s position that successful reclassification can come down to the actions of an individual agent, irrespective of what policies are in place.

When James went to the Department of Motor Vehicles in New Jersey to change the gender on his driver’s license the first agent he encountered was not aware of a recent amendment that allowed license’s to be changed with a physician’s letter. James remarked, “This guy was an idiot; he didn't know the law. He didn't know that the new amendment had happened.” The agent reacted to James’ request with a very loud utterance of “Gender change?!....Can you prove it?,” startling James. James showed the agent a letter from his physician stating he had “undergone GRS…and [is] living as
male” and that his documents need to change in order to match his current gender, but the agent refused to process the change claiming that it wasn’t possible. Eventually, a supervisor came over to the counter and pulled James aside for a private conversation where she informed him that he needed to fill out an additional form, which they did not have at that particular DMV site, but that she would have faxed over. “I was lucky to have someone who was knowledgeable about…[her] job…and who took the time to actually get me the document that I needed to have filled out so that I could get my stuff taken care of.” Had James been unaware of the recent amendment allowing gender changes and had the supervisor not stepped into the conversation, it’s likely that he would have left the DMV thinking he was stuck with an inaccurate license. A similar scenario occurred when James went to the Social Security Office. Unknowingly, James brought with him a copy of his official name change and not an original with a stamped seal. When he presented this document to the clerk, she accused James of having false documents, asked him if he made them up, and refused to change the name on his social security card. A nearby clerk overheard the conversation and stepped in to explain to James what documents he needed and diffused the escalating debate over James’ “false documents.”

In each of these situations, James was unable to produce the necessary paperwork in order to authenticate the changes to his name and sex marker. James’ self-identification and appearance as male was not perceived as enough. At the DMV and again at the Social Security Office secondary agents clarified what paperwork was required, but James’ initial encounters with clerks resulted in accusations of fraud and refusal of his identity change requests. The agents or clerks themselves acted in manner
that can be described as cissexist by withholding information from James, maligning him as a fraud, and holding themselves as the arbiters of James’ “true” sex. It is not to say, however, that the clerk’s reactions were conscientious or deliberate efforts to keep James from changing the sex on his identity documents. Instead, it is the perception that changing one’s sex is impossible that exemplifies cissexism.

*Gender Performativity and Sex Authentication.* Since James had met the administrative requirements for sex reclassification, he prepared for these situations by bringing the appropriate paperwork. He did not consider the possibility that his request would be denied or that he would face agents who engaged in cissexist practices. I found that James’ attitude towards administrative sex reclassifications was rare. Most individuals in my study expected to encounter challenges when processing their name and/or sex marker changes. It is my impression that these expectations were informed by the patterned and systematic gatekeeping that my participants came up against in their daily lives. While some cis people might also expect to face roadblocks in the process of changing information on identity documents, it is likely that those individuals are similarly part of populations deemed to be fraudulent or illegal. One individual who anticipated opposition to her document change, Maxine, made it very clear that she was prepared to authenticate her sex by presenting a normatively gendered self to agents on top of providing the necessary documentation. The following is her story.

Maxine, a white trans woman, was living full-time as a woman and had been on hormones for just under a year at the time of the interview. Maxine described living most of her life as a man feeling “born into the wrong tribe,” unaware of what options were available. She recalls:
I never felt that I was really on the right side of the fence. But back then, since I’m an older person, there was virtually no possibility of anything like that changing…I think I did a pretty good job of making do of the gender that I was assigned…[but] I always felt like I was a pretender. I always felt like the chameleon.

Like many others I interviewed, Maxine discovered information about trans people and transitioning on the Internet. The more she identified with other trans people’s experiences, her confidence grew and she decided to transition in her early fifties.

Maxine spoke candidly of the ways in which she altered her appearance and surroundings in order to convey her gender identity to others:

What does one do as far as the activities they engage in now verses before? I do stay away from more male oriented activities….I do have less interest, but again, I don’t want it tagging me, identifying me, classifying me. This bookcase here as an example. That used to be entirely military books. The only military books now are on the bottom on the right and a little bit on the shelf above it. So I purposely diversified my bookcase and that was at the house when I moved out….That was important for me to change, to reduce the signatory effect of things.

Maxine also changed the seat covers on her car to ones that were “more effeminate.”

From her perspective, these signifiers of gender in her home and car participated in the overall perception of her gender. She related these deliberate changes to a type of marketing:

I feel [your surroundings] should reflect [your] gender. Others are going to say, “Oh, well, no. You should still be yourself.” Yeah, that’s true but I mean it still comes down to “marketing” and some things I think require a conscious change…. I’m marketing an image. It’s a true image.

Any “male” items, she thought would send “contrary messages” to others, and Maxine wanted her gender identity as female to be unambiguous.

Maxine was also acutely aware that any ambiguity in her gendered appearance might negate her female identity simply because she was sexed male at birth. Likewise, a normative appearance may serve as additional “proof” of her female identity even if
incongruent with documentation. Although she dressed “femininely” in her daily life, Maxine made conscious and deliberate decisions regarding her presentation of self when processing her name and gender change on her passport and driver’s license. In preparation for her trip to the post office to change her passport, she states:

I made sure I was clearly feminine in nature. The last thing I want to do is to go androgynous or anything like that….I made sure I had my hair done before I went…I had [on] jewelry, [and was] wearing a dress…all the visual cues possible…. I don’t want any hesitation and consequently there was no hesitation.

At the post office and, similarly, at the Department of Motor Vehicles, the clerks were congenial to Maxine. They did not accuse her of fraud, nor did they ask her to “prove it [her gender]” as in the case of James. However, she noted, like James’ experience, that the clerk did not know what protocol she was supposed to follow in order to process the reclassification. Maxine claims, “I provided information showing my name change and I showed my driver’s license, which has my proper name and my female gender on it,” and in response the clerk “seemed unclear.” At this point, the law still required a notarized surgeon’s letter confirming sex reassignment surgery, and Maxine knew this. Due to the clerk’s uncertainty, however, Maxine decided to leave the gender marker blank on her application with the impression that the clerk might erroneously change her gender to female without having met the requirements. Maxine had not received her new passport at the time of the interview, leaving the outcome of her attempt to reclassify her sex without meeting the requirements of sex reassignment surgery is unknown.

Resembling Maxine’s experience, another participant in my study, Syd, also attempted reclassify the sex on his driver’s license without providing the necessary paperwork. His experience stands in stark contrast to James’. Syd, a Caucasian trans man in his mid forties, was adopted from outside of the country and maintained his birth
citizenship until his eighteenth birthday when he decided to become a naturalized citizen of the United States. Upon changing his citizenship he was presented with the option of changing his name for free and so he changed it from a relatively feminine name to “Syd.” Syd has yet to change his gender on his birth certificate and passport because of the costs and complications of being an international adoptee:

I have three birth certificates, none of which have my [current] name on them…my citizenship papers are my proof that I changed my name. And I have my adoption papers, which is proof of the other name….A lot of places want a birth certificate and I just don’t have one. I don’t have a true birth certificate, except for one that says female child of parents unknown.

Syd had a surplus of “breeder documents,” and was unsure how to go about reclassifying his sex on each of them, so he lived for several years with his entire documents still marked female until an opportunity presented itself.

Syd had been on testosterone for a few years when his driver’s license was due for a renewal. At this point Syd was consistently read as male. His voice had lowered and he had grown a significant amount of facial hair. When processing his license renewal, the clerk asked Syd to review the information about him to confirm its accuracy. He said, “Well, you know, I think you got a mistake here,” pointing to the “F” and she looked at it and said, “Oh I’m sorry” and promptly changed it to an “M.” “I was like ‘Oh is this going to work?’ And it worked. It worked like a charm. The beard helped. The beard and the uniform helped.” A security officer, Syd had arrived at the DMV in his work uniform, adding an additional signifier of masculinity to his already hegemonic white and male appearance.

In comparison to James, both Maxine and Syd engage in strategic normativity. Maxine actively prepares herself for the encounter with the clerks by constructing an
outwardly feminine appearance. On the other hand, Syd doesn’t engage in preparation prior to the encounter with the DMV agent, but instead decides in the moment to maintain the invisibility of his trans status and rely on his white privilege and the already present signifiers of hegemonic maleness, masculinity, and authority in his uniformed appearance. The actions of Maxine and Syd are informed by the expectation that the policies and attitudes of the agents are cissexist. Each assumed that they would need additional proof to authenticate their sex, which they provided through the downplaying or invisibility of their trans status. James did not expect to encounter cissexist agents and assumed that the paperwork of his transition would be proof enough to authenticate his sex. As illustrated in these examples, strategic normativity is a conscientious way that trans people respond to a cis normative sex/gender binary system.

*Why (not) change documents?* Jack’s attitude regarding his identity documents is shaped by many factors including his ability to be read as male, whether or not he can afford to change his documents, and the ways in which he politicizes his identity. With that said, the most notable factor in Jack’s deliberations over which documents to change is the extent which each inaccurate identity card restricts his access to or completely excludes from institutions. As a college student, Jack was most concerned with changing his name on his student ID card because, as he said, “I have to flash it everywhere I go.” The policy at his University was that students could change the name on their ID card only after a legal name change. Due to his low income, Jack decided to put off changing his legal name, as well as changing his name and gender on his passport, birth certificate, and social security card. “I don't really have the money to invest in that right now and I'm not really too broken up about it,” he declared. Although Jack expressed a pressing
need to change his ID card, his experiences using the card with his “ultra feminine name” and a picture of him before he started taking hormones yielded mixed reactions.

In one instance on campus, Jack had to call security to let him in an academic building after hours. “I've definitely handed my [ID card] to an officer…to let me into a building and he wrote down everything on it and he was like, ‘Here's your card sir,’ all the while I have an ultra feminine name right on the thing with the picture of me from my freshman year.” Jack was surprised to receive identity recognition from the campus security officer. It is likely that Jack’s male appearance and whiteness contributed to the officer’s treatment of Jack as a non-threatening insider, rather than as a threatening outsider. In comparison, Jack found that the “lunch lady” who swiped his card everyday in the dining hall provided invalidating responses to his gender identity. After correcting her, she started using Jack’s preferred name instead of what was on his ID card, but continued to call him “she.” “And she doesn't really have an excuse either…I think I pass enough to where I wouldn't necessarily go about being like, ‘Well here she comes.’” Jack’s impression was that the feminine name and pre-testosterone picture on his ID card contributed to the lunch lady’s designation of Jack as “she” regardless of his male gender comportment. In lieu of not being able to formally change the name on his student ID card, Jack tried an alternative approach. He blacked out the last few letters of his name using a permanent marker. Unfortunately, this created a temporary solution since the glossy nature of the card made it easy for the marker to smudge right off.

Prioritizing a name change on his student ID card was shaped by the frequency with which he had to use it as well as the fact that it presented information to others that contributed to instances of administrative misrecognition. In addition, his emphasis on
changing his student ID card was shaped by the potential consequences of administrative misrecognition. Jack claims,

As far as legal documents and stuff, it used to really bother me a lot more when I was still in the situation where I was always being documented by paper like at schools and stuff…but I think now that…I have my own room and I pass and I'm about to go into the real world where not many people are going to be looking at that kind of thing, I think, it doesn’t really concern me as much.

Moreover, Jack’s experience finding employment, his social location as a white man, and having managers who affirmed his gender led to his stance that he would rather be broke than work for an employer who “had a problem” with his identity. “I've kind of taken up this attitude of not necessarily apathy, but mostly not really putting their opinion above my own because of some government issued document.” Where some individuals are more rigorously compelled to achieve consistency across identity documents for mere survival, Jack’s social location, life experiences, and the politicization of his trans identity, contribute to his decision to prioritize the changes on certain identity documents over others. In other words, his gender transgression is politically informed, but not necessarily radical when placed in the context of factors that allow Jack to experience minimal consequences as a result of administrative misrecognition.

_The Role of Intersex in Sex Re/Classification Processes_  

Trans people inhabit the borderlands of gender, and as such a number of scholars and activists have pointed to the overlap between intersex and trans politics. Social scientists David Valentine (2007) and Riki Wilchins (1997), Suzanne Kessler (1998) and Sharon Preves (2003) argue that trans and intersex oppression stems from the rigorous maintenance of the sex and gender binary. One might assume that the wide recognition
of sex variance at birth would have already led to the destruction of sex categories altogether, or at minimum informed the creation of a third “intersex” category. Instead, intersex infants – any infants that exhibit unruly sexed bodies, meaning they don’t fit into normative categories of male or female – are labeled “pseudo” male or “pseudo” females only to have this “pseudo” or difference rectified through non-consensual and coercive medical treatments (Preves 2003). In other words, intersex individuals are subsumed into the administrative and medical processes of sex production. As a result, the relationship between trans and intersex politics tends to be more theoretical than practical in its application.

The assumption that sexed bodies are immutable creates different paths to sex authentication for trans and intersex individuals. For intersex individuals, the right to claim a different sex than what was assigned at birth lies in the possibility that a physician misread their “ambiguous body,” and that there is a “truth” of sex, rooted in a body that was misclassified. For trans people, there is no contest to the “truth” of their sexed body; this is seen as unequivocally attributed at birth. Instead, the claim to reclassify one’s sex must instead come from validating a differently gendered brain or psyche and that medical technology can create a differently sexed or trans-sexed subject. The reasoning and codification the trans/intersex distinction, I call intersex logics. Intersex logics are embedded in what Michel Foucault (1978) refers to as disciplinary apparatuses, in this case the institutional practices, laws, and policies that regulate and/or enforce sex classification and reclassification. In other words, even if trans and intersex bodies, lives, and experiences overlap theoretically and politically, the administration of intersex logics shapes trans subjectivities in unique ways.
Intersex logics are codified in the manuals that medical professionals use to classify and treat trans and intersex “conditions.” One of the standards for a Gender Identity Disorder (GID) classification is that the “strong and persistent cross-gender identification” is “not concurrent with a physical intersex condition” (DSM IV TR). In other words, the DSM IV TR not only differentiates trans from intersex, but concedes that one cannot be both. Intersexuality is presented in the DSM as a problem of bodily development, whereas transsexuality is a problem of “preference” and “identification.” For the DSM V, it is proposed that GID be renamed Gender Dysphoria with subsets for “with a disorder of sex development” and “without a disorder of sex development.” While this allows for someone to be both trans and intersex, it is still the case that trans (Gender Dysphoria) and intersex (disorder of sex development) are two distinct pathologies. As a result, agency, sex (re)classification, and access to or desire for medical interventions play out in very different ways for trans and intersex individuals. Ultimately, these logics shape the ways that trans and intersex people can attain administrative recognition and participate in the social sphere.

To illustrate, Tristan, a Caucasian trans male, was in his mid-twenties when he began pursuing sex reclassification surgeries including chest surgery and a full hysterectomy, which could eventually be used as evidence for changing the sex marker on his birth certificate. Tristan was in the position of working for a company where “sex reassignment” was included in his health insurance benefits. But, in order for Tristan to have his hysterectomy and chest surgery covered as “trans” health care, he was required to undergo a physical exam in order to prove that he was not intersex. Commenting on his experience, Tristan states:
I had to go to a urologist, which is horrifying….It’s like gyno extreme because they’re like checking your kidneys and stuff, and most urologists are men and they literally have to check your genitalia. Sometimes they have to run catheters…but, this allows you access to insurance covered medical care for “trans,” so you have to go through this humiliating experience and have them write a letter saying that you are not intersex, because if you’re intersex they won’t cover it as trans health.

Tristan found the urology examination particularly terrifying not only because he wasn’t sure what it would entail, but also because he had not established a previous relationship with the doctor. One week before his deadline for surgery pre-approval, Tristan was told that he was required to have this exam and that it had to be conducted by an in-network physician. For Tristan, having gender-related surgery meant “life or death” and was not feasible without insurance coverage, so he begrudgingly and fearfully subjected himself to what was required by the insurance company. The urology examination, however, did not contribute to determining medical necessity or health status, but rather what codes and labels would be attributed to Tristan’s claims. In other words, the highly invasive exam was used to maintain the differentiation between trans and intersex and to substantiate the administration of intersex logics. It is important to keep in mind, however, that “Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1978: 95). The very locations where trans/intersex distinctions are made are also sites where strategic interventions of re-coding and re-signification occur. Trans and intersex people are subject to, and strategically use, intersex logics in the sex re/classification processes, which I will illustrate through the following cases of Christine and Patrick.
Of the forty individuals in my study, two were born with a condition that is categorized as intersex\(^{14}\), but only one had knowledge of this condition at an early age. Christine, a fifty something, middle-class woman of European and Native American ancestry was born with high-grade androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS). AIS is an inherited genetic condition, occurring in about 1 in 20,000 births, where the body’s cells are unable to respond to androgens (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Christine was born with undescended testes and “I had what you would call a penis but even in my medical records, it has the word penis in quotation marks or it says penis/clitoris because it is basically the size of a pencil eraser.” At birth she was sexed female, but at three months her sex was reclassified as male after doctors confirmed that her chromosomal makeup was XY and not XX, and upon finding the undescended testes in her pelvis. This “discovery” was made at six weeks of age as a result of the first of ultimately nine surgeries Christine endured by the time of our interview. At that point, the doctors began a litany of surgical and hormonal interventions so that Christine would be raised male with a body that more closely fit those standards, which included a mastectomy at the age of thirteen when she began to grow breasts. Because of the AIS, Christine remained relatively androgynous in her appearance as a male because her body couldn’t develop characteristics such as body hair and a low voice that people associate with maleness and masculinity. The hormonal treatments also left her with little to no libido. In her twenties, Christine decided to move to another city and pursue life as a woman, which

\(^{14}\) It is possible that other people I interviewed were also born with an intersex condition and that this information was kept from them. One individual suspected that this was the case in his past, but he could not find proof of it.
included changing her hormone regimen and receiving additional surgeries, some of them
designed to undo prior coercive “treatments” of her intersex embodiment.

The confusion surrounding Christine’s body at birth created inconsistencies in her
earliest pieces of identity documentation. Albeit changed from its original form, she was
officially registered male on her birth certificate. However, her “girl’s name” appears on
a baptismal certificate she received at one month of age. Christine remarks:

I adopted that name because I actually had a piece of paper with it and that is how
I got my driver’s license…some people I know, intersex transitioners and
transsexuals…have to go around with a driver’s license that says their natal sex
on it. And, I managed to avoid that.

Christine got her first driver’s license in a neighboring state that accepted baptismal
records in place of a birth certificate. She hypothesized that the state’s allowance of
baptismal records was to accommodate individuals born in the 19th century who
commonly had their births registered in a church and not with the state. “It was the law
and I followed the rules….I didn’t have to cheat, I just had to be a little creative,” she
commented. However, it was more than her ingenuity that resulted in a female driver’s
license.

Christine’s experience highlights the role that doctors play in the production of
sexed subjects; Christine’s body was shaped to fit the category she was assigned by
medical professionals. Beyond the material process of sexing and shaping the body, the
authenticity of one’s sex is also produced by doctors through the assignment of male or
female on initial forms of documented identity, often called “breeder documents” that
rely on the notion of a “birth sex”. It is, in this case, the birth certificate and the
baptismal records, registered within the first few months of birth, stand as separate
markers of Christine’s “true” sex. The multiple ways in which she was sexed in the first
few months of life resulted in documents authenticating her “birth sex” as male and female. As such, Christine’s intersex condition created the opportunity for her to lay claim to authenticity as either sex. While her bodily ambiguity signaled an impossibly sexed body to be “fixed” by medical professionals it also created the possibility for her to change her sex on identity documents later in life.

I turn now to the case of Patrick, a white and Native American trans male in his early fifties who had only been on hormones for a short period of time when he hired an attorney to help him change the sex marker on his birth certificate from female to male. In the state where Patrick was born and at the time that he pursued legal sex reclassification, precedent held that transsexuals could not change their birth certificates irrespective of their surgical status. However, Patrick’s attorney found a law for the state that allowed sex reclassification on birth certificates for intersex individuals as long as the person was not born with or had removed their gonads. Due to medical issues, Patrick underwent a full hysterectomy prior to transitioning, which included the removal of his ovaries. Because Patrick’s body fit the standards, and it was the only way in which he could change the sex on his birth certificate, his attorney made the case that Patrick was intersex and on this basis should be allowed to change his sex marker.

Four judges turned Patrick’s one page case file away until the fifth, a Hispanic man, accepted his case and Patrick was brought into court. “I went in my little button down and my little Dockers.” Patrick was called to stand in front of a courtroom full of people while the judge read through his case. The following is Patrick’s rendering of the scenario:

[The judge] called my name and I stood up and he says, he’s looking at my paperwork and he goes “Do you have an attorney?” And I said “No, sir I don’t.”
And he says, “Come up here before me.”…”This is well put. Did an attorney draw this up?” And I said, “Yes sir.” And he says “Okay.” And he’s looking at me and he says “Turn around and face the court.” And I’m like oh shit. So, I turn around and all these people are looking at me because they can’t figure out what’s going on, right? And I’m looking at everybody and they’re all looking at me and I’m like about to die. And then he goes “Okay, turn back around”…and he’s looking at all the people in the courtroom and he says “I think you’re going to make a fine young man.” He stamps my paperwork and…all these people are going what the hell, but nobody reacted to me. I know that was what he was looking for. It had to have been (emphasis added).

In this instance the burden of proof for Patrick to reclassify his sex was both the legal claim to intersexuality as well as the ability for Patrick to be seen unequivocally as a normatively gendered male by the people in the courtroom. It was not enough for his case to be made on the basis of medical evidence and legal precedence alone. People in the courtroom served as makeshift witnesses to the authenticity of Patrick’s maleness. Thus, the intersex logics provided a means for Patrick to make a legal claim to sex authenticity, but his claim may not have held had he not also performed maleness in an intelligible way to the courtroom.

In both cases, for Christine and Patrick, the administration of intersex logics – the grounding of intersexuality in the body as a site of “true” sex - provided a means for each of them to make a legal claim to sex authenticity that might not have otherwise been possible. I propose that this temporary and intentional use of intersex logics are the enactment of strategic hybridity. Coined by George Noble, Scott Poynting, and Paul Tabar (1999), strategic hybridity is rooted in Spivak’s (1990) concept of strategic essentialism and Bhabha’s (1990) concept of hybridity. Noble et al. found that Arabic-speaking young men in South-western Sydney presented their ethnic identities in different situations moving between strategic essentialism and what they called strategic hybridity – “the mixing, in often contradictory ways, of elements of identification drawn
from their parents’ cultural background and their participation in Australian society” (1999: 29). Like the Arabic-speaking young men, Patrick, for example, engages in strategic hybridity by situating himself in this third space (Bhaba 1994) subject-position as intersex, which is defined by elements of femaleness and maleness. While this may appear essentializing in Patrick’s case, Christine’s utilization of the inconsistencies in her documentation produced in this third space of intersexuality, reveal how the site of intersexuality both produces and simultaneously unravels male/female distinctions. Even while these moves fail to challenge the administrative codification of intersex logics, they illustrate how possibilities of sex reclassification are created through the regulation of impossible sexes.

Alternatives to Formal Name and Gender Change. In addition to these detailed cases of identity reclassification, a few individuals sought ways to achieve administrative recognition outside of the formal sex reclassification process. Of these individuals, there were two primary reasons for doing so. First, some individuals felt like the sex reclassification process was too costly or too complicated to navigate because the policies and protocols differ across jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations:

I’m still confused about specifics when it comes to legal name changes and medical kinds of stuff, partly because I think it changes all the time, or over time it has changed, and partly because it’s different for everybody, and partly because it’s different compared to what state you live in or like if your FTM or MTF or if you’re not any one thing to any one other thing, if you’re just kind of hanging on the middle…it’s so specific to people in certain situations that I think it just overwhelms me to think about all this stuff. (Ace)

Feeling incapable of figuring out the process on her own, Ace changed his name on magazine subscriptions and on other forms that did not require a formal name change process. Ace, like a few other participants, also expressed ambivalence about
reclassifying his sex due to her trandrogynous and queer identity. Neither sex category accurately reflected Ace’s identity, and, alongside feeling like he couldn’t navigate the process, she pursued changing his identity in informal ways.

Another reason why some participants did not pursue formal sex reclassification on their documentation was because they were unable or unwilling to meet the necessary requirements. Nevertheless, they wanted to achieve intersubjective and administrative recognition. In order to do so, one individual, Emma, a White military veteran, had staff in the Veterans Affairs Hospital system put her female name down under a section for aliases. Similarly, Chyann, a biracial female-to-male transsexual genderqueer, had two different business cards made up for herself, one in her birth name and the other in her current name. Chyann chose which card to hand out depending on whom she was networking with and how she was presenting at the time. Another individual, Stevie, a White bigender person carried a member card from a local trans organization that had her picture “en femme” on it alongside her legal name and her “female name” both with accompanying signatures. Stevie also filed a “Doing Business As” (DBA) form so that she could have checks, credit cards, and bank accounts that listed both her male and female name on them. These few examples highlight the alternative ways that participants in my study pursued documenting their identities outside of the formal reclassification process with the mindset that these would provide proof of their identities in the face of misrecognition.
**Conclusion**

Through policies, practices, and diagnostic classifications, trans people are positioned as unqualified to authenticate their own sex and gender identity in cases where their trans status is known. In order to gain administrative recognition and participate fully in the social world, trans people are compelled to achieve consistency across their documented identity, bodily configuration, and presentation of self. This is especially the case for trans people who occupy identities upon which they are further cast as security threats or frauds. As a result, trans people must navigate a process of sex reclassification that is shaped by cis normative binary standards and cissexist attitudes at the level of policies, protocols, and the practices of individual agents within the system. As illustrated in this section, some trans people engage in practices of strategic normativity and strategic hybridity in order to achieve sex authentication and process a formal sex reclassification. For those who embody hegemonic notions of gender, characterized by whiteness, heterosexuality, and physical ability, these attributes might render their trans status invisible or insignificant. Still, some trans people cannot or will not meet the cis normative binary standards for sex reclassification and seek alternative means to achieving administrative recognition.
“Before I transitioned...when I was a butch woman... I definitely had that experience of being chased [out of women’s] bathrooms or having people tell me I’m in the wrong bathroom many, many times,” said Raj, a South Asian trans man in his mid-thirties. In the beginning of Raj’s transition going into men’s bathrooms was a “big deal.” As he exclaimed, “I was very nervous about doing it.” To prepare for entering men’s bathrooms he frequently mused, “Will they know? Will they not know? Will they call me out for not being a guy?” Like many trans people I interviewed, Raj developed a set of strategies for using men’s bathrooms in response to his fears, and real life experiences, of being harassed, excluded, or thrown out. “I would go in and I would not look at anybody, beeline for the toilet, beeline out.”

Over time, Raj found that he could let up on adhering to this strategy and move in and out of men’s bathrooms with a greater sense of ease. “With practice...and as I’m more and more male presenting I know that people don’t see anything, so I’m comfortable.” Recently, Raj was in a bathroom stall with a broken lock and a man walked in on him while he was still seated. After the man abruptly apologized and backed out of the stall, Raj thought to himself:

He didn’t think I was anything other than a regular guy that he had walked in on. Because I was sitting he wouldn’t have seen anything anyway. I walked out and I kind of chuckled about it...Two years ago I would have freaked out had that happened. But now it’s like, they don’t know. They don’t know anything.

With an increasingly habitual of use men’s bathrooms alongside his shift in identity and embodiment from relative femaleness to maleness, Raj’s relationship to occupying men’s
spaces changed from one of nervousness and apprehension to comfort and legitimacy. However, Raj still experienced moments of heightened awareness when using bathrooms. For instance, Raj stayed connected to his family throughout his transition, but it wasn’t until he had been on testosterone and living as male for some time that he encountered the scenario of using a public men’s bathroom alongside his father:

The first time I had to go use the public restroom at the same time as my dad… was, like, really awkward. Because it’s like, [my family] must know that I use men’s bathrooms now, but I’ve never actually had to do it [in front of them]…. [My dad] just did his thing and didn’t seem to care.

Sharing a public bathroom with his father engendered discomfort or “awkwardness” due to the way in which it drew attention to his embodiment around those who knew of his transition. Although Raj was visibly a man, family members, friends, his fiancé, and some acquaintances knew his personal history of transitioning. While most of his experiences in sex-segregated bathrooms changed over time, it is likely that the heightened awareness of his trans experience may never fully disappear because of the residual discrepancies between his personal history, embodiment, and identity. Nevertheless, what has changed are his attitudes and perceptions regarding men’s rooms as well as the accessibility of these spaces.

This chapter begins with Raj’s story since his experience demonstrates common themes across trans people’s experiences at normative embodiment borders. Raj’s comments point to standard border crossing concerns: the seemingly unknown territory of the “other” gender’s space, how one’s gender is being read by others, and to what extent is a person’s trans status visible or known. These concerns form a thread that weaves through the experiences of everyone I interviewed. “How should I act in this new environment?,” “How will people react to me?,” and “Under what conditions will I be
included or excluded from this space?” were questions that interviewees commonly asked themselves when considering a shift from one gendered facility to another or when confronting a shift in personal appearance or embodiment. It was common for these concerns to be heightened when an individual began using a new set of sex-segregated facilities or when an individual was not consistently read as a cis man or woman. For some people, this period of heightened concern was just that, a passing phase that faded along with a physical shift from maleness to femaleness or vice versa. For others, the period of heightened concern was not a period at all, but rather a persistent element of daily life common to those living in a state of gender liminality.

In this chapter, I investigate the ways in which trans people manage their identities when preparing for and upon entering and occupying a variety of sex-segregated facilities. These normative embodiment borders are single-sexed spaces or groupings, usually sectioned off by physical barriers, which are frequently part of a set or pair: one for males, one for females. Sex-segregated bathrooms are only one example of the many types of normative embodiment borders including locker rooms, hospital rooms, prison wards, dormitory rooms, and so on. What differentiates gender policing at normative embodiment borders is the role that border enforcers play—individuals, whether in a formal or informal capacity, who act as gatekeepers and restrict or deny access into these spaces. The consequences of a failed border crossing extend beyond mere identity invalidation, and can result in marginalization in or exclusion from facilities that are central to people’s lives.

In particular, I examine the strategies that trans people use to garner inclusion in sex-segregated spaces and the role that other participants play in maintaining and
reconstituting the border. I am especially interested in the ways in which self-
identification, the body, and perceptions of safety inform decisions that trans people
make in these situations. I also investigate the ways in which border enforcers
communicate perceptions of inclusion/exclusion and who is threatening/nonthreatening.
The sex-segregated sites of bathrooms and locker rooms where physical appearance is at
the forefront will be a primary focus of the first section. Following this analysis is an
examination of trans identity management at other sex-segregated facilities such as
hospitals and college dormitories where border regulators, such as staff or administrators,
have access to a person’s documented identity. In the last section, I outline the common
identity management strategies for using, or avoiding, sex-segregated facilities. It is here
that I introduce the terms threatened subject, threatening subject, border ambassador,
and administrative gender differentiation which I coin in this dissertation.

PART I: Identity, Embodiment, and Inclusion in Sex-Segregated Bathrooms

Using public bathrooms is a daily experience for most people, whether in the
workplace, on a train, or while running errands. While some bathrooms are not labeled
by sex, most restrooms in the United States are labeled with words or depictions as single
gendered, for men or women only. A number of scholars argue that the organization of
bathroom space preserves unequal gender relations and reflects cultural views of privacy,
sexuality, race, and genitals (Cavanagh 2010; Cooper and Oldenziel 1999; D’Emilio and
Freedman 1988; Molotch and Noren 2010). Examining the layout of these facilities, it is
palpable that the sectioning off of bathrooms as a private space in public locations marks
the actions that take place within the bathroom as devious, secretive, and dirty. Men and
women are segregated from each other so that they may expose their bodies and genitalia, but not for the purposes of heterosexual pleasure (Cooper and Oldenziel 1999). By naturalizing sex/gender difference and heterosexual desire, public bathrooms reproduce what Judith Butler (1990) calls the heterosexual matrix (Cavanagh 2010).

For many trans people, as well as for cis people who are ambiguously gendered, using a public bathroom can be a source of anxiety, stress, and even danger as a result of gender policing that occurs in these spaces (Brown 2005; Ford 2005; Transgender Law Center 2005). In a study done in 2001 by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, trans respondents reported incidents of harassment, violence, and being chased out of bathrooms by security guards. Others reported health problems due to holding their urination in order to avoid using public accommodations (San Francisco Human Rights Commission 2001). Likewise, non-normatively gendered cis men and women report experiences of policing in sex-segregated bathrooms similar to those who identify as trans (San Francisco Human Rights Commission 2001). In spite of laws aimed to protect people based on their “gender identity,” research suggests that harassment and scrutiny of those who do not fit gender norms, trans identified or not, is a common occurrence (Nguyen 2002).

One assumption is that achieving intersubjective recognition as a man or a woman would result in inclusion and incorporation in these spaces. While being normatively gendered would certainly contribute to the likelihood that one achieves inclusion in a sex-segregated space, this is not the only factor by which normative embodiment borders are constructed and enforced. Notions of “us” versus “them” and “safe” versus “threatening” are at the crux of contemporary logics of bathroom segregation:
The gendering of public facilities is often rationalized by dominant cissexist and heterosexist safety narratives…[that] maintain that women have legitimate fears of assault, that assailants are usually men, and that gender-exclusionary space affords more protection than gender-inclusive spatial designs (Cavanagh 2010: 73).

When an individual enters into these seemingly private spaces and is perceived to be a threat to the occupants, their existence reveals the constructedness and permeability of the borders. Such individuals become the targets of violence, harassment, and eviction, under the premise of securing the border.

The most predominant axes upon which sex-segregated facilities are reinforced are gender and sexuality. Intrusion into women’s space by men, those presumed to be men, or those whose perceived sexuality is directed towards women, disrupts the occupants’ illusion of impermeable borders that ensure safety and privacy. However, as Sheila Cavanagh in her book *Queering Bathrooms* asserts, “The architecture and design of sex-segregated bathrooms accentuate perceived similarities and differences between people in the domain of gender in ways that are ‘race’ and class specific” (2010: 13). Race and class markers, among others, also serve as signifiers of safe/threatening and us/them in such spaces. This section seeks to answer the questions: Which trans individuals are perceived as safe or threatening, as insiders or outsiders, at normative embodiment borders? In what ways do trans people respond to border enforcers in bathrooms? How is gender policing different for trans and cis people in these spaces? And, how do normative embodiment borders shape, and in what ways are they shaped by, trans subjectivities?
In a general sense, all of the people I interviewed spoke of balancing their own fears of facing expulsion, harassment, or violence, with the concern of inciting fear in others when using sex-segregated spaces. These concerns were heightened and more persistent for individuals whose gender ambiguity or trans status was visible. For many, however, these fears were a transient part of their gender experiences, heightened at certain points in their transition and assuaged as their bodies and identity documents aligned with their gender identity. All the same, decision-making was highly informed by the fear of being seen as, what I am calling, a threatening subject — someone perceived as a dangerous intruder, or being a threatened subject – someone who is at risk for enduring the violence or aggression of others, often contingent on the visibility or knowledge of their gender incongruence.

With few exceptions, most trans people in my study characterized themselves as threatened subjects. They assumed or expected that the visibility of their trans status would engender aggression, harassment, or stigmatization. Every participant in the study reported, minimally, what would be characterized as microaggressions (Sue 2010), verbal or behavioral offenses that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages, in this case, to target the participants on the basis of their gender identity or expression. Beyond this, 60% of the participants in my study reported explicit and detailed incidences of harassment or assault related to their trans status. Six of these individuals were victims of physical assault that was related to, if not solely motivated by, their trans or gender variant identity. Informed, in part, by these experiences, participants described clear
conceptions of which areas were or were not safe to occupy and which individuals might pose a threat to their safety.

In the same way that trans people are perceived as threatening subjects at gender borders, the trans people I interviewed had their own perceptions of which groups of people would pose a threat to their safety. The following are a few examples. When asked about her experiences with bathroom use, Stevie, a White bigender person exclaimed, “The more upscale, the less likely it is to be a problem.” Sam, a White genderqueer person in their late twenties commented, “I don’t go out and do stuff a lot because I don’t feel safe and I don’t feel happy.” When asked what places they might avoid when out in public, Sam said that they drove ten minutes away into the suburbs to grocery shop in order to avoid local stores owned by “foreign folks.” Along the same lines, Pip, a White and Hispanic genderqueer person claimed that she avoided the “straight [heterosexual] bar scene” and any places that were populated by college students. She also avoids truck stop bathrooms because of her fear of “large hairy trucker men.” Although these first few examples are from gender non-conforming individuals, fears of safety were not relegated only to people whose trans status was visible. Anna, a White “female by transgender means” said that she avoided going to large chain stores so that she wouldn’t have to interact with “rednecks,” and Sue, a White trans female in her late forties who had undergone sex reassignment surgery and had been on hormones for several years, said she was afraid of using public bathrooms when she was “out of her element.” While these are only some examples, they illustrate the ways in which trans people, irrespective of their identity or ability to embody hegemonic notions of gender,
characterize threats to their safety along race, class, gender, and sexual lines, reinscribing their own notions of us/them and threatening/threatened subjects.

Perceptions of external threats evidently shaped which bathrooms and locations that trans people occupied or avoided, but so did trans people’s perceptions of whether or not they would be perceived as threatening subjects. When I asked Nikki, a Black trans woman in her mid-twenties, how she chose which bathroom to use, she said her decision was made primarily on what she was wearing and how others would perceive her presence. “For instance…what I’m wearing now…I’d be in the female [bathroom]…boy clothes, boy bathroom. But this is just so that it doesn’t cause anything…I don’t want to scare anybody” (emphasis added). Nikki’s concern over the possibility that other occupants will react with fear was a common strand across many trans people’s stories. “It’s always like this choice I feel that I have to make between making other people fearful and being afraid myself,” said Ace, a white transdrogynous identified person.

Ace was very aware that his ambiguously gendered appearance provoked responses of fear, disgust, and rejection from people in sex-segregated bathrooms. The possibility of being perceived as a threatening subject weighed as heavily on his decision-making as did her perception of being threatened by others:

I hate this look that women get like when they’re in the women’s room and I come, and they do the double take on the door and then they do the pull your kids closer to you thing. That’s the worse of anything. I hate when women pull their kids closer, like they literally feel threatened that their children are going to be in danger by my presence, and that’s the most horrible feeling, and it makes me feel sad for men who are looked at that way on a regular basis. I hate when I go into a women’s room and my presence causes someone to feel fear. That’s a horrible, horrible thing and that makes me not want to go in women’s rooms.

What is evident in Ace’s and Nikki’s remarks is the way they underscore the possibility of causing fear in others and how that makes them feel. They are still concerned with the
outcome of the policing, such as someone calling the police or asking them to leave the
bathroom, but focus as well on their emotional response to being perceived as threats.
These comments too reflect the impact that sex differentiation has on notions of selfhood
and entitlement to space. The internalization that one is a danger to others serves,
indirectly, to confirm their outsider status in a space that is segregated under the
assumption that it preserves occupants’ safety.

Introduced in the last chapter, Patrick, a white and Native American trans male in
his early fifties had worked as a truck driver for many years of his life and transitioned
while in this line of work. Patrick shared how he lived with fears of violence in truck
stop parking lots and bathrooms:

Sometimes walking across the truck stop parking lots at night…some of them are
scary….I was always worried…because traditionally truckers usually have a lot
of money on them so there’s always the chance for robbery. There’s always the
chance for altercations of some form or fashion. And, I wasn’t always
comfortable with the thought of, “Could I handle myself in that situation?”

Stocky in his build, but relatively short, Patrick was concerned that he might not be able
to scare off potential perpetrators or protect himself if he encountered violence, or
became a threatened subject, while at a truck stop. Even more than the threat of robbery,
however, Patrick was unsettled by the possibility of sexual violence in the men’s
bathrooms, especially as it related to his pre-bottom surgery embodiment.

Patrick recalled that a large number of truck stop bathrooms had holes in the
stalls, commonly referred to as “glory holes,” for the explicit purposes of facilitating
sexual encounters between individuals in adjacent stalls. He states, “The glory holes in
the bathrooms always worried me, especially if there were people in the stalls next to me
because they would be watching as I’m sitting down.” Patrick was concerned that the
glory holes would make visible what would generally be hidden from others in bathrooms stalls, the fact that he urinated from a seated position and that he had not undergone genital reconstruction surgery. He commented, “There’s always the possibility of rape and men are not immune from that…but to have an opportunity to take somebody who’s got both holes, you know?...There’s always that. It’s always in the back of my head.” He feared that the discovery of his trans status would make him more susceptible to sexual violence in bathrooms, but not because of his failure to resignify sex, or what Butler (1993) calls a “tragic misreading of the social map of power.” Instead, he feared that his trans male body presented possibilities for sexual violence against a man with “both holes,” and not that he would be raped as a woman who failed at maleness. Patrick reinforced this interpretation by relating the prospect of experiencing rape to the fact that “men are not immune from [sexual violence],” especially in the sexualized spaces of truck stop bathrooms.

Nevertheless, Patrick discovered that while his body may present possibilities for trans-specific sexual violence, it could also startle an attacker expecting to see normatively sexed genitalia. One time Patrick pulled off the road around midnight at a roadside park bathroom only to find that there were no doors on the stalls, only small dividers sticking out from the walls. He recalled, “You could stand and talk to the guy next to you while you were going to the bathroom.” In his peripheral vision, Patrick noticed a man move from a toilet two stalls over to the stall next to him:

I got my hands down like this [covering my genitalia], doing my thing. He’s looking at me and he leans over and looks down the stall. And, I look at him and I give him a dirty look and that doesn’t dissuade him. So...I stand up, and immediately he looks and is [startled]….He freaked. I mean he just freaked!
The man rushed away from Patrick’s stall and after a few moments uttered a brusque “I’m sorry,” to which Patrick replied, “You should be.” Patrick said, “He was an older man and...I had been throwing flatbed for years. I could have taken him...I wouldn’t have done that to somebody that I didn’t think I could have taken....If had it been three of four guys I would have been in trouble.” In this scenario, Patrick revealed his non-normative body in order to stave off a potential assault, but only under the premise that he could have defended himself if the man reacted violently. Moreover, he understood this experience as coming with the territory of using men’s bathrooms and accepted the possibility of assault as a customary part of men’s lives.

Patrick’s intentional disclosure of his trans embodiment is the enactment of strategic hybridity, akin to his claim to an intersex identity in the previous chapter. In this case, his embodied hybridity is a productive location whereby Patrick can “talk back” or resist a threat of violence that is directed at a presumed normatively male body. Patrick’s body challenges male/female distinctions, instantaneously unraveling category-specific targets of desire and power for the attacker. For Patrick, revealing his trans embodiment, rather than retaliating with force, provided him with the opportunity to fend off sexual violence without immediately resorting to violence himself. It also served as an empowering moment, for he was able to utilize his trans body to shift positionality from being a threatened subject to a threatening subject, securing his safety in the bathroom. Nevertheless, Patrick’s strategic hybridity should not be read as a politicized act of gender transgression, but as an individualized reaction to a threat related to his trans embodiment. In this scenario Patrick’s perception of his positionality as a
threatened subject would be different if he had a penis or was cisgender, which would engender a different response.

It is worth noting here that interviewees expressed mixed sentiments about their sense of whether or not they would be protected by laws regarding bathroom use. A few people, such as Joyce who considered carrying a copy of the public accommodations law, thought that their right to use sex-segregated bathrooms was supported by local laws. In comparison, Shawna, a Caucasian transgender- and woman-identified person in her late twenties used men’s instead of women’s bathrooms because, as she states, “Everything that ID’s me is male. So I’m not going to, even if I look female, go in [women’s bathrooms] because I don’t think the law would be on my side.” Unlike Joyce, Shawna’s perception was that she wouldn’t legally be allowed to use the women’s restroom until she changed her identity documents from male to female. Irrespective of whether local laws support trans inclusion in bathrooms or not, the ways in which trans people comprehend the laws and the agents that enforce them, patently shapes their decisions for which bathroom to use and their perceived status as a threatening or threatened subject. The coverage and application of non-discrimination laws and implications for bathroom use I return to in Chapter 7.

Concerns of being perceived and treated as threatening or threatened subjects may be ameliorated with time, with the increase in signifiers from medical transitioning, or simply due to consistent use of what were once new or different bathrooms. However, many individuals were reluctant to believe that transitioning would erase the potential for policing in bathrooms, claiming that certain physical changes through surgery or hormones would leave them more susceptible to trans-specific forms of violence or
harassment. It is the visibility of their trans status, not necessarily the failure of their femaleness or maleness, that some identified as signifiers of their outsider status. Furthermore, as seen in the case of Patrick, it was precisely his trans embodiment that was used as resistance to violence, even while leaving him susceptible to violence.

*The Management of Gender Ambiguity*

In my study, I found that individuals with a non-normative gender presentation as well as those who were not consistently read as cis men or women frequently encountered policing in sex-segregated bathrooms. Numerous scholars have documented this social phenomenon, especially the prevalence of gender policing of masculine women in women’s restrooms (Browne 2004; Cavanagh 2010; Devor 1989). The scholarship on trans people’s experiences in bathrooms, however, is minimal and a fairly recent addition to scholarship on gender and identity (see Cavanagh 2010 and Molotch and Noren 2010). As a result, studies on and anecdotal evidence from non-normatively gendered cis women is often applied to trans people’s experiences (see Halberstam 1998). It is often assumed that gender identification is irrelevant in the cases of gender policing as the focus is often on the act of regulation itself and not on the different ways that people interpret and respond to the experience. However, the recognition of oneself as trans or gender variant uniquely shapes individuals expectations of gender policing, decisions around which bathrooms to use, and responses to “wrong bathroom” accusations, which I explore in the sections that follow.

*Androgynous Appearances.* In order to illustrate the role that gender identification plays in experiences of bathroom policing, I will compare and contrast the
experiences of two white, working-class, genderqueer individuals, Ace and Sam, both sexed female at birth and in their late twenties. In addition, neither Ace nor Sam had any gender-related surgeries, undergone hormone therapy, or changed their gender or name on any identity documents at the time they were interviewed. The significant overlap in their appearance, embodiment, and gender identification allows for greater focus on the differences in their experiences.

Ace and Sam both identify as genderqueer, a term used to characterize a number of behaviors, attitudes, embodiments, and perceptions about sex and gender. As such, people employ the term for self-identification in a variety of ways. Sam uses it because they\textsuperscript{15}, for example, find the labels of man and woman to be limiting and unable to capture the complex ways in which they see themselves:

I don’t know which [gender] I am, I just know that I am Sam and that’s it… I don’t like to label myself…[People perceive] me as a woman, but inside I don’t feel like a woman at all. I feel like a guy. And I feel comfortable when doing things as a man... I’ve just accepted the outside and the inside as the yin and yang that it is and I just go about my business…

Sam also observed that their gender identity differs depending on their current sexual partner. At the time of the interview Sam was engaged to a cis woman and categorized this as a lesbian relationship. However, Sam considered themself and a previous trans man partner as “gay men” when they were together. Counter to assumptions that trans people’s gender identities are the foundation from which sexual identities take shape, Sam’s sexuality as “gay either way” illustrates how gender identity, for some, changes in order to sustain the dominance of the sexual identity. For Sam, genderqueerness is based

\textsuperscript{15} They is used in the singular here to reflect Sam’s identification. When asked for pronoun preference during the interview, Sam stated, “I don’t have one.” Rather than use ze/hir/hirs which usually indicates a third-gender identification, I decided to use “they” which I think lends itself to a broader interpretation of Sam’s gender.
on the presence of discordance between how they are perceived and their internal sense of self, and the subordination of their gender identity to their sexual identity.

Sam’s description of their genderqueerness emphasizes a split between the “outside” (woman) and “inside” (man), whereas Ace, on the other hand, accentuates the mixing and blending of genders, both internally and externally. Ace characterizes his gender as “complicated,” telling people that she doesn’t have a “hard and fast pronoun [preference]” and actually prefers people to mix them up in the same sentence. Ace is a gender shape-shifter; his relationship to pronouns is emblematic of her gender identity and expression as both “not a man” and “not a woman.” Although he often uses the word genderqueer to self-identify, Ace also came up with the word “trangenderous,” to capture her gender transgressiveness and androgynous appearance, because, like Sam, Ace feels like “nothing quite fits.” He noted that the ways in which her gender is read is highly shaped by appearance, context, and what personal history others are aware of. For example, Ace commented that his family members use the pronouns she/her/hers, lovers use he/him/his, and pronoun use is varied amongst everyone else, but that even within these typical trends she found exceptions. Ace argued that it was impractical to speak in generalities about her experience being gendered by others because it is so variable.

The fact that Sam and Ace appear androgynous, having a mixture of male and female-appearing characteristics, contributes to the gender policing they encounter in sex-segregated restrooms. Ace observed that upon entering women’s bathrooms she frequently receives comments like “Sir, you can’t be in here…Sir, this is the women’s room.” Similarly, Sam reported, “Sometimes the women in bathrooms are nasty.
They’re like, ‘You’re in the wrong bathroom!’…” When questioned about who was doing the regulating in women’s bathrooms, Ace singled out specific groups:

A lot times the people that give me the most looks are women who have kids, younger kids, or elderly women. They’ll be the first people to be vocal about it. So if I’ve just seen like a tour bus of old women going into the women’s room at the rest stop, I’m not going to go in the women’s room. I don’t want to make people feel frightened or their kids to feel frightened, so I’m going to avoid that.

Sam correspondingly remarked, “Mostly it’s like very uppity, bitchy looking ladies…They make sounds and they stomp off…They say horrible things. One time I heard some lady say ‘fucking dyke’ under her breath….”

The various groups of border enforcers that Ace and Sam identify point to multiple vectors upon which “safety,” normativity, or insider status is coded and reinforced in women’s restrooms. In Ace’s experience, it is age that is highlighted, as he is perceived as a threat to the safety of young children and elderly women, likely taken as a sexual threat to the former and a physical threat to the latter. In either case, Ace’s gender attribution as a young man or as a masculine woman is somewhat irrelevant since both of these positions signify a threatening “other” status in a normatively gendered and heteronormative woman’s space. Sam’s comment, on the other hand, highlights border enforcement on the grounds of class-specific femininity. The language of “uppity” and “ladies” suggests perceived socioeconomic disparities between Sam and the women who repudiate Sam’s presence in the bathroom. It is not that Sam is an immediate threat to women’s safety, as Ace is read, but that Sam is perceived as not performing a “respectable” femininity, as characterized by middle- or upper-class standards. Sam, then, becomes a “fucking dyke,” a dirty pollutant who is sullying the purity and sanctity of the space.
Another notable difference between Ace’s and Sam’s experiences in women’s bathrooms are the ways in which they respond to people who are questioning their presence in the bathroom. They both engage in strategic normativity, but in ways that are still validating to their gender identity. Sam retaliated against women’s accusations of “You’re in the wrong bathroom” with “Why?” and physically grabbing body parts that mark their alignment with the category “female”:

Most of the time it just ends with me pushing up my boobs and saying, “I got boobs and a vagina and I bleed…I’m using the bathroom because I can.” If they’re going to be bitchy to me, I’m just going to be blatantly honest with them. This “[blatant honesty]” is Sam’s positioning of themselves as a normative female vis-à-vis their breasts, vagina, and reproductive capacity. Even if Sam doesn’t state, “I’m a woman,” they are undoubtedly aligning themselves with an intelligible gender category in order to be included within the space. This retort makes sense given Sam’s genderqueerness of having a male “inside” and female “outside” as the alignment with femaleness affirms, rather than disrupts, their genderqueer identification.

In contrast, Ace responds to “wrong bathroom” accusations with, “I’m fine,” stressing that, “It’s not a correction thing. I try not to correct. I don’t want to be like, ‘But I am a woman!,’ or ‘I’m in the right room,’ because it’s not the right room.” Neither Ace nor Sam claims the identity of “woman” in these instances, which would likely be the response from a cis person experiencing similar policing. However, Sam validates their right to bathroom use by emphasizing signifiers of femaleness, countering accusations that Sam is in the “wrong” bathroom. In comparison, Ace’s “I’m fine,” is employed to side-step questions of embodiment and identity altogether, lending support to Ace’s characterization of genderqueerness as both male and female, and neither male
nor female. The outcome is the same; both Sam and Ace are likely regarded as women. Nevertheless, Ace’s reaction is, albeit subtly, a way of eluding claims to femaleness and womanhood. This is not to say that Ace’s response is more or less subversive or normative than Sam’s, but the comparison highlights the relationship between perceptions of identity and the claims to inclusion that are made in women’s spaces.

_Bimodal Gender Comportment._ Gender ambiguity is not only characterized by an androgynous appearance, but also by the inconsistencies between documented identity, self-identification, and appearance. While many trans and gender variant people sexed female at birth take on androgynous appearances, I found this was less likely the case for trans and gender variant people sexed male at birth. Scholars claim that the inability for trans women and people on the trans feminine spectrum to live and appear androgynously is the result of a combination of factors including the different effects of hormones and trans specific forms of misogyny (Serano 2007). Data from my interviews provide preliminary evidence that trans women and trans feminine spectrum people live more bi-modally than androgynously. Those I interviewed who were situated in the liminal “in between” space of gender spoke of their presentation of self in dualistic terms, as being either in “male mode” or “female mode,” or similarly mentioning when they were “fully dressed” or “en femme.” Even the identity of “genderqueer” was held by only two trans women in the study, both under the age of thirty-five, and who used it in conjunction with a transsexual or female identity. The bi-modality of trans women and trans feminine people’s lives compared to the androgyny of trans men and trans masculine lives results in different experiences with bathroom use, which I explore through the stories of Ginger and Joyce.
Introduced in the previous chapter, Ginger, a white and Native American trans woman in her early thirties, who identifies as both female and a “tranny,” describes her gender as, “If you got the pink side and the blue side and then that fuzzy gray, I’m somewhere in the fuzzy gray leaning more towards the pink side.” Ginger lives bi-modally, presenting as male while at work and when attending religious services, and as female outside of these contexts. At the time of our interview, she had been on hormone therapy for a little over six months and was in the process of working with her religious leader and her human resources manager towards integrating her female self into these aspects of her life. Ginger had been using women’s bathrooms for about a year and a half at the time of the interview, but only when “fully dressed” in what she refers to “female mode.” Even so, Ginger commented that, when “in a pinch,” she will use and has used the men’s bathroom, even when in female mode. The following is a story of one such experience:

I was on my way up to see friends…I really had to go [to the bathroom]. So I pulled in [to a rest stop]…[there was a] very, very nice gentleman at the desk…and all he’s seeing is basically my side and my back as I’m about to go into the men’s room and he’s like, “Miss! Miss! Other one!” And realize, I really have to go. So I just turned back to him, I go, “No, I got the equipment to use this one,” and I walked in.

In this instance Ginger was “fully dressed” in female mode, but had not yet “started transitioning.” Also, her driver’s license was marked male and listed her birth name. Although dressed in female mode, Ginger did not question her decision to use men’s restrooms because she had the “equipment,” and because she was not yet pursuing a transition. She understood herself, at this time, as a man dressing as a woman, that her bi-modality reflected a temporary, not a transitory, female mode. Ginger noted that she
even “stood up” to urinate, further emphasizing the basis under which her decision to use the men’s bathroom was made.

After she was done using the bathroom, Ginger approached the security guard with the intent to clarify that she was male and to apologize for creating what she perceived as a confusing scenario for him. “I said, ‘You were just doing your job. You were fine…but I really, really had to go….I understand completely why you were doing it’…We talked for about a minute…and we were both laughing and smiling afterwards.” Although Ginger did not mention this, it is likely that her use of the men’s restroom was quickly reduced to a misunderstanding because she was not seen as a threat to other occupants in the way that an apparent man using a women’s bathroom would be. From Ginger’s perspective, she was responsible for the guard’s attempt to keep her out of the men’s bathroom. Ginger accentuated her observation that the security guard was an “older gentleman” with eyesight “standard…for those who are retired” and seated at a significant distance from the bathroom door. “There’s a big difference between…a two to three car length distance verses somebody walking in and seeing someone that’s obviously not supposed to be in there. My makeup style was even much, much different than how it is now,” said Ginger, suggesting that if the security guard had better vision and been in closer approximation to the bathroom, then he would have noticed that she was “supposed to be in there.” In other words, the guard’s confusion was presumably not based on the premise that Ginger was a woman going into the “wrong” bathroom, but that he was unable to see that she was a man dressed as a woman.

The way that Ginger made her decision on which bathroom to use, and consequently her interpretation of the gender regulation she experienced in this scenario,
are both shaped by her self-identification as a person who is “not yet transitioning” and
by her embodied “equipment” characterizing her as male. Although she is “fully
dressed” as a woman, she is nevertheless in “female mode” and not simply female or
transitioning. I wouldn’t call Ginger’s understanding of herself during this instance as
cisgender, but Ginger’s reaction is likely comparable to how a cis person might act in this
situation. Ginger’s privileging of her self-identification, legal, and embodied gender over
her presentation of self runs counter to the perception that gendered appearance is
analogous with gender identity. For others, however, their presentation of self aligns
with their gender identity, which supersedes their bodily configuration in terms of which
bathroom they decide to use and how acts of policing are interpreted.

Joyce, a white trans woman in her late fifties, rarely used public bathrooms. “I
can probably count the number of public restrooms I’ve used on one hand and have a
couple of fingers left over. I take care of it before I leave the house or thank God I’ve got
a massive bladder,” she recounted. Describing herself as a “female with a male body,”
Joyce was days away from starting hormone therapy at the time of the interview. Like
Ginger, and a few other trans women in the study, Joyce was not yet living full-time as a
woman and when she went out in public dressed in female mode she was often read, in
her words, as a “man dressed like a woman.” She remarked, “I have this fear that I’m
going to go in, use the ladies room, and the genuine woman’s going to freak out because
there’s somebody who isn’t a genuine woman in the ladies room.” Joyce acknowledged
that her tall frame, muscular build, and body hair pose a challenge to being read as a
woman, but she also spoke of the variation in women’s bodies, critiquing the process of
gender policing as a whole:
There are a lot of women in this universe who are bigger than me who are more masculine than I am even with this mug on… [Are they] going to start busting everyone?….It’s only going to get super critical once long sleeve season leaves. But, for the most part, as long as I shave my hands and just keeping moving and don’t raise any ruckus. You’re in, you’re out. I don’t have a copy of the [local] public accommodation law in my bag, which I should carry just in case somebody does raise a ruckus but as long as I’m presenting as a female, I can use a women’s restroom any time I want. But do you really want to stand there and go toe to toe with some knucklehead security guard? I only live 20 minutes away from the farthest point I’ve gone so far. I can make it.

Joyce is concerned with her appearance, but not because she thinks that any sign of maleness should discount her from using women’s bathrooms. Comparing herself to cis women who are bigger or more masculine than she, Joyce constructs the policing of her gender ambiguity as a cultural problem, not one located in her trans status. From this perspective, Joyce considers how other people might react to her presence as a trans woman, as opposed to focusing on whether or not her trans status will be visible.

Comparing Ginger’s and Joyce’s experiences living bi-modally, Ginger’s decision-making is founded on her identification as “not yet transitioning” and her “equipment,” irrespective of her presentation of self in “female mode.” In contrast, Joyce privileges her identity as female and her presentation of self as a woman over her bodily configuration. Ginger’s story complicates and challenges the conflation of gender presentation with gender identity. It is often assumed that one presenting “en femme” is female-identified and that is their reason for using women’s bathrooms. This assumption underpins public accommodations laws aimed at protecting trans people’s use of public facilities. As Joyce interprets the law, “as long as I’m presenting as female, I can use a women’s restroom any time I want.” Overall, Ginger and Joyce exemplify the different ways that bi-modal gender experiences inform and shape bathroom use.
Gender Policing as Identity Validation

Gender policing is not always internalized as a negative or invalidating experience. For individuals who do not align themselves with the sex designation of the bathroom they use, any challenges to their occupancy of this space are taken as signs of identity affirmation. Take the case of Maxine who was introduced in the last chapter.

“I’m blessed with being [relatively short], of moderate weight, and with facial features that aren’t that bad. I can pass,” she said, describing herself. Unlike some other trans women I interviewed, Maxine was never confronted, challenged, or even stared at when using women’s bathrooms. She claimed that the only time she was ever policed by others was when she used men’s bathrooms while was in her “transitional mode.” “Before I had made any announcement [of my transition], three different times in that year I got pegged and I was going to the men’s room each time,” she recalled.

I was at [a department store], I was going to the men’s room and the woman clerk yelled out, “Ma’am, that’s the men’s room.” It’s like, okay. I continued on, I went in. And then the other time was, I was coming out of the bathroom at [another department store] and two guys probably in their 20’s gave me a double-take and said, “You shouldn’t be coming in here.” And that one I was like, geez, I don’t know if I could have gotten beat up or, which way did they mean that? I don’t know what that was…And then the third and last time when I finally stopped going into a men’s room…I escorted [my dad] to the bathroom…then a boy comes in with his dad, this boy is probably like six to eight and he looks up to his dad and says, “Why is she in here?”

After the last incident, Maxine stopped using men’s bathrooms permanently and soon after announced her transition and shifted to using women’s and gender-neutral facilities. She described these experiences with policing as “nice challenges,” ones that signaled to her that she was more frequently being read as a woman. Policing in bathrooms, as depicted in this story, functions to reify the differences between men and women, but this
border enforcement can symbolize, to some, the success of their crossing from one category to another, or minimally, the significant movement away from one category.

Conclusion

Bathrooms, like other sex-segregated facilities, are shaped by cis normative binary standards of embodiment and appearance. As a result, people who fail to meet these standards are susceptible to harassment, aggression, or expulsion from these spaces. Furthermore, the architectural segregation of these spaces reinforces notions of threatening/threatened based on perceptions of trans status as well as racialized, class, and gendered constructions of us/them. Perceptions of who is a threat and whether or not one is perceived as threatening shape the decisions that trans people make about which bathrooms to use. Not surprisingly, so does the self-identification of the trans person. Upon encounters of gender policing in bathrooms, trans people’s perceptions of these experiences and their responses to border enforcement are shaped by the ways in which they conceive of their identity in relation to cis normative binary categories.

Part II: Strategies for Navigating Sex-Segregated Spaces

Due to the ubiquitous nature of sex-segregated spaces, the frequency in which they are used, and the reliance on visual and auditory cues for insider/outsider status, these spaces are critical sites for examining the interactional aspect of trans people’s identity management strategies. Previous literature on transgender identity management, though not focused on bathroom use, characterizes the agentic ways that trans people shape their embodiments to operate within cultural and institutional constraints as
“reflexive bodywork” (Schrock et al 2005; Schrock and Boyd 2006) and “transgendering” (Ekins and King 1999, 2006). These two concepts capture some of the strategies, such as “redecorating” (Schrock et al 2005) and “substituting” (Ekins and King 1999), that trans people use to rectify the discordance between their internal sense of self and the ways in which other people are reading their gender. Interviewees in my study participated in similar practices of hiding surgery scars, refraining from conversation in bathrooms, and following the gendered “codes” of behavior in each specified space. However, as seen in the previous chapter and throughout this manuscript, identity management at border crossings is manifestly different from identity maintenance in other contexts. These acts exist within a larger rubric of insider/outside, us/them dynamics across various degrees of regulation. In response to the consistent, or cursory, experiences of regulation at sex-segregated spaces, the trans people I interviewed developed responses for navigating the use of these particular spaces, which I examine in this section.

The Buddy System: Border Ambassadors

Trans people who are inconsistently read as one gender or another, or those who are confronting “first times” entering sex-segregated spaces commonly utilize the support and presence of normatively gendered friends, family, and partners, and what I am calling border ambassadors, to act as authenticators of their gender identity. As Joyce mentioned, “My friends in one of the communities I’m part of said when you’re transgendered, always go with a genuine girl…just to cover your, your back.” The outcome of this strategy is twofold. First by entering a bathroom with a “genuine girl,”
for example, one avoids calling attention to their trans status by distancing themselves from other trans or gender variant individuals. Second and more importantly, being accompanied by a border ambassador allows other bathroom occupants to defer to the ambassador for confirmation that the trans person is “really” a man or a woman, and not a threat. It is not always the case that cisgender individuals fill this role in the lives of trans people, as other trans people can and do so as well. However, it is consistently the case that the status of border ambassador is granted to a trans person only as long as they are perceived as cisgender and meet the demands of normativity of the bathroom in question.

I begin this section by returning to the case of Ace who, as an androgynous appearing person, experienced frequent policing when using women’s bathrooms. From time to time, Ace brought friends or girlfriends in the bathroom with her so that they could carry on a conversation. Ace’s voice was relatively high, a signifier of femaleness, and he found that he was less likely to have her presence in women’s bathrooms questioned if she continued to talk while in that space. However, this marker of femaleness did not consistently guarantee that Ace would be treated as a non-threatening insider in women’s bathrooms. In some instances, the border ambassador plays a more significant role in procuring an insider status for Ace, which is unveiled in the following experience.

One time Ace and her girlfriend pulled over at a rest stop along the highway to use the bathroom. Ace’s girlfriend ran ahead while he parked the car and headed in several yards behind her. Ace recalled that the rest stop was very full of people that day and so, in the moment, she decided to use the women’s room. “Immediately, I felt like
somebody was looking at me, something was going to happen….The [woman attendant] was like, “Sir, you can’t go in there. Sir!” Ace remembered thinking to himself, “She’s not talking to me. I’m just going to ignore it. Eventually she’ll just give up.” Unfortunately, the attendant did not give up and followed Ace into the bathroom and began banging on the stall door yelling, “Sir, this is the women’s room, you can’t be in there!” and drawing a crowd of onlookers. In this instance, Ace did not respond to the attendant’s accusations and instead called out to her girlfriend:

“[My girlfriend] looked up and she realized what had been happening and she was like, “Oh, she’s a girl,” and the woman was like, “Well,” and walked away…so I’m embarrassed, like mortified, and [my girlfriend] had to be the one to verify for me, not me, and she said I was a girl, and I’m not, and so like all these things were happening…It felt like crap. That was the worst bathroom experience. Rather than say “I’m fine,” as Ace had done in other instances of policing, he attempted to both use his voice as a signifier of femaleness and to alert her girlfriend of the situation, thus inviting her to participate in the process of authenticating his inclusion in the space. The attendant did not stop her crusade against Ace’s presence in the bathroom when Ace shouted out, indicating that his high voice was not evidence enough of his belonging. It was only when Ace’s girlfriend declared that Ace was “a girl” that the attendant retreated to her station. In this scenario, it is evident that Ace’s girlfriend performed the duties of a border ambassador by validating Ace’s inclusion in the space.

Another example of the use of a border ambassador occurs in the case of Damien, an African American male of trans experience in his mid-twenties. Once he became aware of himself as trans, Damien began avoiding the gym and didn’t return for another five years. “I did alternative workouts, like workout at home or…at friends’ homes and stuff like that,” he shared. Although he acknowledges the role that gender plays, Damien
claimed that the primary reason for his absence from the gym was due to not having one readily accessible. All the same, once he began his medical transition, Damien returned to the gym, this time using the men’s locker room:

The first time I went into a men’s locker room since transitioning, it was with my biological brother. And he led me into the locker room, so that really shocked me because I was wondering how this experience was going to go. It was the first time he saw me since I had top surgery [and] our first time working out since my medical transition. And like we spoke and he said he was cool but sometimes what people say and what they do are two different things. But he led me in...he was like “Oh, come on. Let’s go.” And [we] went into the men’s locker room and it was fine.

The fact that Damien’s brother led him into the locker room for the first time had a significant impact on his attitude about occupying men’s spaces. He remarked, “If I could go in the men’s locker room with my biological brother who knows my situation, then me going in with a bunch of strangers is no big deal.” Damien’s brother served a border ambassador by securing his entrance into a men’s-only space. In comparison to Ace, for example, Damien’s use of a border ambassador bolstered his sense of inclusion and served to validate and affirm his identity.

Since this experience, Damien has taken on the role of border ambassador in relation to other trans men, escorting them into men’s restrooms to provide a sense of security and to serve as a marker of inclusion. In one incident, however, he went in with a trans man who didn’t abide by the unwritten codes men’s bathroom use, putting his status as a man in jeopardy. “They wanted to have a whole conversation in the men’s bathroom,” said Damien. “[I thought] can you just hurry up and get the hell out? And that person had a very high voice so they were read [as female] and people were like, ‘Why is this fucking girl in the bathroom?...Are you boys? What’s going on?’” The initial perception that Damien was cisgender quickly shifted as a result of his association
with a trans person who failed to signify codes of maleness in the bathroom. Damien declared, “First off, going in the back is not something that men do, just from my experience, and then having conversations in the bathroom is not something that men do, and [hanging out] in the bathroom is not anything I’m going to do.” In this situation, going into the men’s room with a border ambassador was not enough to secure inclusion for the one trans man. The person’s failure to abide by codes of what “men do” resulted in the exclusion of Damien and his friend, and the nullification of Damien’s ambassador status.

The very act of escorting a trans person into a sex-segregated space, knowing that the person is trans, functions as a marker of validation, acceptance, and inclusion on its own. Nevertheless, these three scenarios demonstrate the questionable place of border ambassadors in the lives of trans people. On the one hand, the ambassador lends support to the trans person who might feel unsure of themselves in this space or who might not gain entry on their own. On the other hand, the ambassador may be treated as the ultimate judge of the trans person’s insider/outsider status, and any claim they make regarding the trans person’s identity is held in higher regard than the trans person’s. While this might ensure entry or inclusion, it also reifies the place of cis and normatively gendered people as arbiters of trans people’s “real” genders, a form of cissexism. For instance, Ace who identifies as “not a woman,” was allowed to remain in the women’s bathroom only upon his girlfriend’s assertions that she was “a girl.” Ace’s inclusion in the space was accomplished with the negation and invalidation of his gender identification. Lastly, as depicted in the case of Damien, the position of the border ambassador is contingent on being perceived as cisgender or normatively gendered,
which again marks insider status as something to be held and enforced by cisgender people.

Identity Management Strategies: Avoidance, Mapping, Compromises, and Accessibility

In response to the actual or perceived regulation of gender in sex-segregated bathrooms, another common strategy that trans people used when confronted with such situations was outright avoidance. Anna, a white trans woman in her late thirties states, “You have good days, you have bad days. If I felt like I was on a day where I didn’t pass as well, I definitely would be less likely to use a restroom. But, again, the bad days are few and far between now.” As her comment suggests, bathroom avoidance was a conscious strategy to avoid gender policing, but one that was transitory as she was more consistently read as a woman.

The relationship between bathroom avoidance and gender presentation is demonstrated in the case of Monty, a white and Native American trans man in his early thirties. Monty found that towards the end of high school, after he cut his hair, he experienced frequent confrontations when using women’s bathrooms. Before he started testosterone, Monty had no facial hair and his voice was fairly high. When confronted with glances or questions in women’s bathrooms he would use his voice to validate his inclusion in the space. He knew that this signifier of femaleness would be interpreted as a reflection of a female identity, even though that is not how he identified:

I didn’t want to be like, “Hey, I’m a woman” because I’m not. So, they’d just be like, oh, you’re in the wrong restroom and I’d be like, “No, I’m not,” and they’d be like, “Oh, okay,” which obviously now I couldn’t do that.
Like Ace, Monty never argued for insider status on the basis of identifying as a woman. In response, Monty started limiting his use of public facilities, stating, “Avoidance is really my M.O….I [adopted] the strategy of finding the most isolated restroom in the building or just waiting until the end of the day.” Monty went without drinking in order to avoid bathroom use, and would often walk long distances to use low traffic or single stall bathrooms.

The consistent reading of one’s body as male or female plays a significant role in decisions regarding bathroom use, but it is not always the primary factor. The degree to which peers, colleagues, and coworkers know of one’s trans status also shapes bathroom strategies. Jack, a white trans man in his early twenties avoided using public bathrooms for about seven years and started using them more frequently after having been on hormones for about a year. As a college student who considers himself very “out” to his community, he avoids using public bathrooms in high traffic areas in places where he lives, works, and goes to school. “I feel weird running into another guy that knows I'm trans….I just don't want to have other people think about me, thinking about the bathroom, then thinking about trans stuff…. I feel weird being out and then being in such a gendered space…[I] feel very exposed.” Jack is less concerned about whether or not he is read as male, but about the fact that many people in his everyday life know that he is trans. He worries that peers or coworkers will be provoked by the bathroom environment to think about his genital differences. Jack shares, “It's like I don't care, but at the same time its kind of a back of my head trained nervousness that I just haven't totally shaken. It's kind of a residual nervousness perhaps.” In other words, embodying hegemonic
notions of maleness increases the accessibility of public restrooms, but only to the extent that one’s personal history as trans is unknown to others.

Avoiding bathroom use takes a significant amount of planning and preparation, especially if one plans on being away from home for several hours. Many individuals spoke of changing their eating and drinking patterns in order to avoid bathroom use. For instance, Maxine, who was told by her human resources department that she could only use gender neutral restrooms, often worked in a facility where the only gender neutral bathroom was in a VIP reception area. She said, “I have to wait until they’re not in there because I don’t want to get fired now.” When asked whether she experienced any negative outcomes such as intestinal pain or “accidents” due to extended periods of waiting, she remarked, “Luckily not.” However, she shared that she was diligent about making sure that she wouldn’t have to use the bathroom:

The last time I worked [at this facility], I made sure I didn’t drink anything before I worked the event…sometimes I actually have to make sure I don’t drink or maybe eat a certain thing because then I’m concerned about bathroom access.

Maxine’s strategy of not drinking or eating certain foods was echoed in several other interviewee’s statements. Particular to Maxine, however, is her employer’s knowledge of her transition. Maxine avoided sex-segregated bathrooms at work for fear of being fired. Since Maxine’s employer denied her the use of sex-segregated bathrooms until she underwent genital surgery, her strategy of avoidance became an integral part of her experience in the workplace. Like Maxine, Jack’s bathroom use was shaped by the knowledge others had of his transition. He also engaged in avoidance or, similarly, mapping out isolated or low-traffic bathrooms. In comparison, Monty’s experiences in bathrooms changed throughout the course of his physical and social transition. His
patterns of avoidance and location mapping became less about his trans visibility and more defined by whether he had privacy within a certain bathroom to urinate while sitting. “Now it’s way, way easier. I just use the men’s room. If there are no stalls or anything, I’ll just leave. I don’t bother with the whole standing up. I’m not really that coordinated,” he shared. Albeit limited by his inability to urinate while standing and desire for privacy, Monty finds using men’s bathrooms “way easier” because he doesn’t experience harassment or rejection from other occupants.

Compromises. Anna, a white trans woman in her early thirties, was similarly concerned with using gendered bathrooms alongside people who knew that she was transitioning. Rather than avoiding shared bathrooms altogether Anna told her coworkers which of the two women’s bathrooms she would be using. In the event that any of Anna’s coworkers did not want to share the bathroom with her, they could make the decision to use the other one. Anna considered this action a type of preemptive compromise to ward off any potential complaints. “I get it. Things come with the territory…I don’t want to be that in-your-face…at work…it’s just a bathroom.” Anna was relieved that she could give her coworkers an option, but stated nevertheless that, “If there was only one restroom, I would still use it,” said Anna. Like Jack, Anna also had not undergone genital reconstruction surgery. However, her concern with sharing a bathroom with coworker was not about unwanted exposure, but rather about being able to maintain a modicum of collegiality despite the possibility of differing thoughts and feelings about her transition.

Accessibility. Avoidance, however, is not always a realistic strategy for navigating sex-segregated bathrooms as Monty discovered in his first year of law school:
I hadn’t started transitioning yet and there were no unisex bathrooms that I could find and there was no isolated bathroom so one day I was like, fuck this, I have to pee...and so I used the [women’s] restroom and...I happened to run into a professor...She looked at me and ran off...

When Monty emerged from the bathroom a security guard was waiting for him. “Son, you’re in the wrong restroom,” the security guard said, to which Monty replied, “No, I’m not.” This incident was a turning point for Monty. He decided that he would no longer go on trying to avoid bathrooms or using the women’s room. Instead, he went to the administration and asked for a bathroom accessible to him:

I was like, “Hey, is there a restroom I can use? Because, it’s not working for me. And she’s like, “I’m so sorry that happened earlier. Some people are just so unenlightened.” I’m like, I don’t know what that means but just find me a restroom. So, I used the fourth floor faculty/staff unisex restroom for the rest of the law school. And it was great. It was single stall...honestly that was wonderful.

Having a gender identity and presentation divergent from the sign on the bathroom door left Monty susceptible to policing and the threat of penalty for using the “wrong restroom.” The administrator’s response of “people are so unenlightened” treats Monty’s experiences as an issue of personal values and beliefs rather than as an issue of institutionalized sex segregation and cissexism. The solution then, becomes one of educating the “unenlightened” masses instead of addressing the way that cissexism is embedded within institutions and the social spaces.

Damien, introduced earlier in this section, also avoided using public bathrooms for most of his life. Not only did he consider them to be unhygienic, but he also had numerous experiences while growing up of being policed in women’s restrooms, most of which happened well before he came to understand himself as male. “People would stare at me in women’s bathrooms because I looked like a little boy in the women’s...
bathroom….People have said, ‘Why are you in here?’” As a result of these frequent encounters with judgment and harassment, Damien felt unwelcomed and uncomfortable in women’s bathrooms. In response, he traced out locations with single stall bathrooms that he frequented while he was away from his home. “I learned early that Starbucks, all of them, have single stall bathrooms….McDonald’s [too].” Since transitioning to male, Damien avoids multi-stall bathrooms less and less although he still prefers the privacy of a single stall.

Damien had not undergone bottom surgery at the time of our interview, but had a strong desire to do so and was tentatively planning for its completion in five years time. Meanwhile, Damien was one of two people I interviewed who used a stand-to-pee device and could easily urinate while standing into urinals or troughs. He found that his capacity to stand-to-pee reduced his anxiety in men’s bathrooms because he didn’t have to worry about whether a stall would be available. Commenting on his use of urinals, he remarked, “It’s not even a thing anymore…To be honest though, that’s when I think of bottom surgery as being useful.” Standing to pee was not described as a requisite for maleness, but for making it possible to urinate in the available fixtures or when privacy was minimal.

Damien and Monty’s stories demonstrate that accessibility can be found through changing individual actions – using stand-to-pee devices or pursuing genital surgery – or through requests for single or multi-stall facilities open to all genders. These actions — access to genital surgery or requests for all-gender bathrooms – can be and are politicized by different constituencies. In the stories I present, however, they are individualized responses and not connected to collective forms of resistance. Moreover, the experiences
of Damien and Monty illustrate the ways that men’s bathrooms pose a challenge regarding accessibility for trans men who have not undergone genital reconstruction surgery. Men’s bathrooms are sometimes equipped with few to no stalls, stalls without locks or doors, and some have full visibility across urinals or even an open trough. Irrespective of how “male” one looks, for a trans man who cannot urinate while standing, some bathrooms become completely inaccessible. Bathroom use, then, becomes a “hit or miss” situation, contributing to trans men’s strategies for bathroom use. Although there is currently no data available documenting the percentage of trans men who can urinate while standing, none of the trans men in my study did so without the aid of a device or after having genital surgery that included a urethral lengthening.

**Conclusion**

In response to gender policing at sex-segregated bathrooms the participants in my study enacted a variety of strategies in order to be included in these spaces. Many trans people avoided public bathroom use altogether or selectively chose bathrooms that were unisex or in low-traffic areas where they minimized interactions with others. Other individuals tacitly resisted the enforcement of normative embodiment borders by striking compromises over bathroom use with coworkers or making requests for accessible bathrooms. In addition to these single-handed border-crossing strategies, some trans people also called on friends, family members, or acquaintances to serve as border ambassadors, cis and normatively gendered individuals who accompanied them into sex-segregated facilities. While the presence of border ambassadors assuaged the discomfort
of some of the interviewees, the reliance on their authority only reproduces the notion that trans people are unqualified to authenticate their own identity.

**Part III: Beyond Bathrooms - Gender Incongruence in Sex-Segregated Facilities.**

Bathrooms are not the only spaces in the social geography of the United States that are segregated on the basis of sex. Locker rooms, college dormitories, jails, and hospital rooms, for example, are other facilities that are commonly sex-segregated. Unlike entrance into a bathroom or locker room that hinges predominantly on an unambiguous physical appearance of gender, the inclusion or exclusion of a trans person in a hospital, dormitory room, or workplace locker room involves identification records where discordance between one’s appearance and documented identity may be available to staff or administrators. Additionally, the likelihood that one encounters the aforementioned sex-segregated facilities is influenced by demographic variables including age, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability. In this section, I examine the role that personal history and documented identity plays in the regulation of gender at sex-segregated facilities.

Myke, a white trans man in his early thirties, who was living on disability at the time we met, had spent time in detox and chemical dependency rehabilitation facilities prior to as well as throughout his transition. Myke’s gender identity and bodily configuration is similar to that of several other trans men in this study: he identifies as male, but not completely; he has been on testosterone for over a year; he is post-operative for chest surgery and has not and probably will not undergo any genital surgeries; and, he is consistently read by others as male. On top of these characteristics, there are two
additional factors that shape Myke’s identity negotiations. The sex on his driver’s license is marked as female and in adulthood a doctor informed Myke that he had an intersex condition, which he believes was hidden from him during his childhood. Prior to learning this information, Myke already felt a sense of being both sexes, but now he commonly uses intersex logics when asked to describe his identity. “I feel like I was born both sexes, so therefore I am both sexes….I have more leanings towards being a male but I feel like I’ll always be both.” Myke continues to use intersex logics of being born “both sexes” or “both genders” when accounting for his bodily differences across various situations, whereas non-intersex trans people may use other strategies or logics.

Some time after having chest surgery and starting hormone therapy, Myke entered a detox rehabilitation center and was housed with cis men, most of whom he observed had recently been released from jail. “These are tough, tough, guys,” he said. In this particular facility he was housed as male, albeit without a roommate, but still expected to use the men’s bathroom and the showers, which had no curtains on the stalls. “If I was going to shower in front of [the other guys]… I knew I had to explain to them…what was going on,” he asserted. At one of the group meetings, Myke announced, “I was born both genders and…I don’t have a penis and you’re going to see that.” The group reacted positively to his disclosure, some stood up and clapped, and others commended him for his courage. “It was one of those moments when I was like, you would expect that these guys were going to kick my ass and then they told me that they thought I was brave,” he recalled. After this verbal disclosure of his identity, he felt a sense of inclusion and acceptance by the other men in treatment. While he didn’t disclose his intersex or trans experience to peers in every treatment center, he found that overall he was treated as one
of the guys by the fellow patients. This, however, was not the response he received from staff within each treatment center.

Every time he was hospitalized or entered a treatment center, Myke was placed in a single room and was denied the opportunity to room with other men. “I’ve had experiences where guys have said, to the staff, why don’t you let Myke room with me? I’m cool with it. I have no problem.” With his medical records as female and, yet, being read as male, staff refused to allow Myke to room with men or women. When this resulted in a private room, Myke was pleased, but in one instance of an overcrowded facility Myke was housed in the “quiet room” sectioned off as a location to isolate patients who are placed in restraints. The decision to place him in a non-standard room was not done so at the request of other patients, but based on administrative demands for sex segregation. This was not Myke’s only experience with exclusionary treatment by medical personnel.

One time, hospital staff sent Myke to a detox and rehabilitation center where the ward had been split into a women’s side and a men’s side in response to increased incidences of male patients harassing female patients. Although male in appearance, Myke’s medical history, hospital intake forms, and drivers license all documented him as female. Confused by the incongruence between his appearance and his documented identity the staff refused to house Myke in this facility. He describes:

I show up and they look at my name and then they look at me and they look at the chart and they’re like, “We’re confused, I thought you were a girl.” And I’m like, “Well, I have girl parts but I’m a guy…so, put me on the men’s side.” And they’re like, “Well, we can’t do that because you have a vagina.”…. “You’re going to put me on the women’s side?” And they’re like, “Well, I don’t know yet”….The room was split down the middle by a piece of tape and they put me in a chair with the tape in the middle so I was literally on both sides and they had me wait there for an hour.
After the hour wait Myke was transferred to a different facility where he was placed in a single room with a private bathroom and shower.

In a more harrowing experience, Myke was again housed in a single room in a facility where staff members were aware of his trans status. The night staff locked the only single stall bathroom on the ward and told Myke that he had to use the women’s bathroom and if he tried to use the men’s that he would be restrained. Myke refused:

Women in a hospital should not have men in their bathroom. Any man, trans or [not]…..They’re going through traumatic experiences and… it’s not fair to them to have a man in their bathroom…. I was not willing to put women in that situation…. And the men didn’t care that I was in their bathroom….So, I used the men’s room anyway and I did get restrained.

In each of these experiences Myke found community and inclusion with other men placed on the ward, and actively excluded himself from using women’s facilities in order to meet the real or perceived needs of female patients and to affirm his “male…leaning” identity. Nevertheless, Myke continued to face gender policing from staff in a setting where he is dependent upon their care for his wellbeing. Myke was denied full inclusion in the male community in these facilities through physical restraint, isolation in single rooms, and placement on the line that separated a sex-segregated ward.

A similar experience occurred in the life of Maxine, a 53 year-old white trans woman, who was living full-time as a woman for several months and had been on hormones for just under a year at the time of the interview. She described herself as someone who “passes easily;” with shoulder length hair and near the average height of cis women in the United States\textsuperscript{16}, Maxine was seen as female by virtually everyone she

\textsuperscript{16} Determined from National Health Statistic Reports from 2008 of white cis women in the United States.
met. She even recalled a few instances where individuals who knew her when she lived as a man were unable to recognize her in this new gender comportment. Like most trans women I interviewed, Maxine had not undergone sex reassignment surgery and while she hadn’t considered it to be an immediate concern she expressed a sense of increased urgency in light of an experience at her place of employment. On the college campus where Maxine worked as a security guard there were sex-segregated, single use locker rooms where people would leave their personal effects before going out on duty. Maxine stopped using the men’s locker room leading up to the announcement of her transition, but remained ambivalent about using the women’s locker room. “But…[t]he women were entirely accepting of me…questioning why wasn’t I in the locker room?,” she claimed. After receiving positive reinforcement from her coworkers, she started using the women’s locker room stating, “For me it was hugely symbolic…having the acceptance of my peers.”

When Maxine told her supervisor about her locker room use, the information traveled up to the Human Resources department and she was asked to meet with them. At this meeting, Maxine was informed that she could no longer use sex-segregated locker rooms and bathrooms at work. She was told that if she did use those facilities, then she would be “held responsible” for her actions, which she interpreted as a threat that she would be fired17. This was particularly difficult for Maxine, whose work required her to be at different locations across the campus throughout the day. Sometimes she was

17 In jurisdictions with anti-discrimination laws, trans people are not necessarily protected in these instances. For example, a trans woman required to use single-stall bathrooms at work brought a lawsuit against her employers under the Minnesota Human Rights Act and lost on the basis that, “an employer's designation of employee bathroom use based on biological gender is not sexual orientation discrimination in violation of the MHRA” (Goins v. West Group 2001).
assigned to work at sites that did not have gender-neutral facilities and would have to alter her normal food and beverage consumption so that she could avoid having to use the restroom while working. Although Maxine reported no detrimental health effects from this practice, studies suggest that trans people who avoid bathroom use, because they cannot or chose not to use available facilities, experience health problems ranging from dehydration to bladder infections and kidney damage (Toilet Training 2003; Transgender Law Center 2005).

The marginalization of Myke and Maxine as a gendered “others” occurred as a result of what I am calling administrative gender differentiation, not out of individual, interpersonal, or communal necessity. Maxine was marginalized in her workplace due to the fact that she did not fit normative standards of femaleness. And in fact, this was not as a result of her coworkers’ perceptions of community, safety, and womanhood, but a result of administrative sex differentiation – the bureaucratic and administrative enforcement of a sex binary based on cissexual norms of male and female bodies. Shaped by a bureaucratic enforcement of gender norms, this instance of exclusion is not the same kind of institutional erasure that Namaste (2000) argues is being enforced upon trans people. Maxine and Myke are not being rendered invisible, as it is clear that staff and administration recognize their trans status by singling them out. It is precisely due to their visibility and the recognition of their trans bodies that prohibitive policies and rules were created. Consequently, Myke and Maxine find themselves in the paradoxical situation of receiving both recognition of their trans status and exclusion on account of it.

Myke responded to such marginalization and exclusion by resisting this treatment, but the room for resistance is limited in his case due to his dependence on medical staff
and on the recognition that he would be in these facilities temporarily. In comparison, the desired permanence of Maxine’s employment put her in a different position. “Work has caused me to rethink [sex reassignment surgery],” she exclaimed. In addition to her exclusion from sex-segregated bathrooms and locker rooms, Maxine felt forced to mark her sex as male on benefits documentation, as mentioned in the previous chapter.

Compelled to make decisions about her identity and surgical status in order to fully participate in the workplace, she discloses:

> It left me feeling a bit dejected of, like, great I can…transition in the workplace but…they make it clear that unless there’s surgery, you’re not really fully accepted…so what [this experience] caused somebody like me to do is to realign my priorities. And no, I wasn’t looking for surgery in the first place but particularly since what occurred two months ago, it’s changed 100%. So it’s like, if I’m going to have true acceptance in the workplace, that’s what I have to do…Granted, I did want to change it but it wasn’t number one on my list.

As her reflection on the incident illustrates, the exclusion of trans people from institutions that are important in their daily lives results in emotional harm and, moreover, a distinct shift in considerations around surgery.

The decision to rearrange her priorities, where the surgical normalization of her body becomes more pressing, reflects the interactional dynamic between institutions and trans people’s subjectivity. Although Maxine “wasn’t looking for surgery in the first place,” she is moving forward with plans to undergo sexual reassignment surgery in response to the significant experiences of exclusion and erasure from her employer. The decision to align herself with a normative female embodiment is not a “selling out” or false consciousness, but a complex and strategic settlement. Maxine is involved in making decisions about her body that are informed by both her sense of self as well as the context of her work, a place that she feels connected to and where she wants to remain
employed. Furthermore, it is only the timeline in which she planned on having surgery that changed, not her decision whether or not to have it.

*Exclusionary Benefits?*

Not all exclusionary practices in sex segregated facilities result in negative outcomes for trans people. Several people I interviewed reported receiving special treatment because administrators and staff refused to place them in units shared with cis men or women. For example, I’ll turn to the case of Jack, a white trans man in his early twenties. During the first two years of his college career Jack lived with cis women while identifying as a man. He remarks feeling lucky that his first year roommates accepted his gender identity and after that point he took a staff position in campus housing, which came with the benefits of choosing roommates. However, the campus housing administrators restricted his choice of roommates to “friends” who knew that he was trans. In other words, if Jack couldn’t find a friend to live with, they refused to let a randomly assigned cis man or cis woman share his room. The first year Jack was on staff he invited another trans man, who had been assigned three cis women roommates, to share his room. After that year, however, it was hard for Jack to find friends to room with since most of them no longer lived in the dorms.

Jack thought he resolved the problem when a cis male friend agreed to room with him, but then backed out before the beginning of the term. With no friend to room with Jack received paperwork stating that he would be living with a cis female student. “I brought it up and was like, “If this is your attempt at gender neutral housing I’m fine with it, but since it’s not”….I have a problem with it because it was done under the
presumption that I identify as female.” Jack asked the head of campus housing if he could be roomed with another male identified student, to which they replied, “Legally at this moment we can’t,” unless it was another trans male student. Although desiring to have a roommate, Jack ended up in a one-room double by himself for the entire school year. “Everyone is so jealous. They all walk by and they're like, ‘You're room is huge.’ I was like, ‘It's discrimination!’,” he says laughing.

Similarly, another white trans man, Syd, in his mid-forties, found that his trans visibility resulted in special, and in his case beneficial, treatment during a hospital stay. A few years into his transition Syd underwent a hysterectomy as part of cancer treatment. Syd had not had any gender related surgeries, but had been on testosterone for several years leaving him with a low voice and full beard. As Syd explains:

[The hospital] found it medically necessary to put me in a single room and they did not charge me for a single room. They were great about it. They really were. I don’t think they knew what to do and didn’t want to cause a stir so they just put me in a single room. I don’t really know what they would have done.

Syd was pleased that he had the opportunity to recuperate from surgery while being a single room. While Syd more clearly felt that being put in a single room was to his advantage, Jack did not. He lamented not being able to room with another guy and, although the size of his room made other students jealous, having a big room did not offset the isolation and marginalization he experienced being “othered” by administration. Additionally, Syd and Jack were placed in single rooms out of “medical” or “administrative” necessity, not out of personal interest, serving as further examples of administrative sex differentiation.
Conclusion

At normative embodiment borders where border enforcers were privy to the identity documents and records of the participants, I found that staff, administrators, and other personnel responded to the presence of trans people by imposing administrative sex differentiation. They were not turned away from said facilities, but instead of being incorporating into these spaces alongside cis people, the people I interviewed recalled instances of deliberate exclusion and marginalization. Even those who perceived this exclusion as beneficial, the end result of being formally treated as a gendered “other” remains. At first glance these instances may appear to be administrative misrecognition, but they are not. The individuals in this section are not facing exclusion under the premise that they are not who they claim to be. Instead, they face exclusion on the very basis of the recognition of their trans status, and the rigid enforcement of cis normative sex/gender binary policies and protocols.
Chapter Seven
Border Crossings and the Future of Trans Politics

It is no surprise that contemporary mainstream trans politics in the United States is following in the footsteps of gay and lesbian identity politics by lauding the media boom of trans visibility and lobbying for anti-discrimination laws and hate crime legislation (Spade 2011). While this is undoubtedly influenced by the neoliberal political landscape that emphasizes “freedom,” “personal responsibility” and “equal opportunity,” the structure of trans politics is also shaped by the ways in which trans identities are framed. The ideology within mainstream gay and lesbian politics, for example, is that a culture of homophobia causes individuals to repress and hide their homosexuality, the crux of the “coming out” narrative. This framing of oppression as exclusively repressive inevitably leads to a politics centered on inclusion and incorporation rather than on redistribution and parity. Along the same lines, trans politics and scholarship centralizes the role of intra- and intersubjective recognition. From this perspective, the trans experience is shaped by the acknowledgement of an internal, differently gendered self and the subsequent emergence of this self through bodily transformations. Transphobia, characterized by the actions, attitudes, and behaviors that stigmatize and devalue trans people is seen, like homophobia in the lives of gays and lesbians, as the root of trans oppression and discrimination (Hill 2002). Accordingly, trans politics frame trans people as a disenfranchised group requiring protection from ignorant and intolerant people and it is assumed that liberation will come from the eradication of institutionalized and interpersonal forms of transphobia. The downside to framing trans subjectivity as a

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18 See Chapter 2 for a full review of this scholarship.
struggle for intersubjective identity recognition only, if not primarily, is that it encourages the simplification, essentialization, and reification of group identities and the displacement of redistribution and parity (Fraser 2000). Recent scholarship on trans populations and efforts made by grassroots trans organizations have begun to address the issues of redistribution, parity, and status through offering new conceptions of power, identity, and inequality (Namaste 2000; Valentine 2007; Spade 2011). It is alongside these works that I see this project having the most effective contribution.

In this project, I shift the analytical standpoint away from “coming out” style models of identity development, by creating a theoretical framework of borders and border crossing. Through this lens, one can envisage the lives of trans people as being constantly produced and constrained by institutions and social spaces that perpetuate the cis normative binary sex/gender system. The borders that are central to the lives of trans people are those that participate in the maintenance of a two-sex model of sex classification, what I call sex classification borders, and those that conserve the exclusivity of sex-segregated facilities, institutions, and services, what I call normative embodiment borders. In Chapters 5 and 6, I presented an analysis of the decision- and meaning-making processes involved in these two types of border crossings. A summary of the findings, implications for trans scholarship and politics, limitations, and directions for future research will be discussed in what follows.

Sex Re/Classification

The process of sex classification at birth is so naturalized that even with the recognition that intersex embodiments occur in one of every two thousand births, there is
no “intersex” category, nor has this led to the destruction of sex categories altogether. It is widely recognized within the field of medicine that humans are born with a range of genital configurations and are placed into the categories of male or female by medical practitioners (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Infants that exhibit characteristics of both maleness and femaleness such as a clitoris large enough to penetrate, a penis that is “too small” or with chromosomes other than XX or XY are classified as intersex. The most common types of intersex conditions or “nondimorphic sexual development” are: gonadal dysgenesis, hypospadias, Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH), full or partial Androgen Insensitivity Syndrome (AIS or PAIS), and variant chromosomal compositions such as XO (Turner Syndrome) and XXY (Klinefelter Syndrome) (2000: 51). Intersex infants are labeled as “pseudo” males or “pseudo” females under the assumption that there is a “true” sex as male or female that can be reached through surgical and hormonal treatments. Thus, intersex is not treated a third sex category, but a liminal, “pseudo”, in-between embodiment that requires surgical or hormonal “fixes.” Sex categories are not natural, but produced through the actions of doctors and parent(s), hospital policies and procedures, and record-keeping practices in the sex classification process.

Sex is similarly produced through policies, agencies, institutions, organizations, and agents involved in the reclassification process. In his book *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law*, Dean Spade summarizes the sex reclassification process:

Many agencies, institutions, and organizations have formal or informal gender reclassification policies that require proof of some kind of medical care. Every government agency and program that tracks gender has its own rule or practice (sometimes depended on a particular clerk’s opinion) or what evidence should be shown to warrant an official change in gender status in its records or on its ID. The policies differ drastically. Some require evidence that a person has
undergone a particular surgery; others ask for evidence that the person has had some surgery but to no specify which; and some require a doctors letter confirming that the person is trans and attesting to the medical authorization for or permanence of their membership in a particular gender category. Others will not allow a change of gender at all. A small set of policies allow a person’s self-identification to be proof enough to change their gender classification ….The wide range of policies and practices means that many people, depending on where they live and what kind of medical evidence they can produce, cannot get any records of ID corrected, or can only have their gender changed with some agencies but not with others…. For the many people who feel that neither “M” nor “F” accurately describes their gender, there is no possibility of obtaining records that reflect their self identities. (2011: 144-5)

Spade contends that it is precisely the inconsistencies and contradictions in the legislation, jurisprudence, and policies regarding sex reclassification that make it impossible for some individuals to change their sex marker on all identity documents even after a medical sex reclassification (Spade 2008). Similarly, Currah (forthcoming) argues that there is a clear “lack of uniformity between state actors’ policies and decisions on sex reclassification,” positioning trans people as recalcitrant subjects in this web of sex reclassification:

When some individuals cross borders, walk into a government office to apply for benefits, get a driver’s license, go to prison, sign up for selective service, try to get married, or have any interaction with any arm of the state, the legal sex of some people can and often does switch from male to female, or female to male….The lack of a uniform standard for classifying people…means that some state agencies will recognize the new gender of people who wish to change their gender and some will not (from The United States of Gender, forthcoming).

My findings echo these sentiments, that there is a lack of uniformity between the policies and the ways in which the policies are interpreted and arbitrated. As illustrated in Chapter 5, participants in my study encountered agents who were unaware of sex reclassification protocols, who accused them of fraud, or even who changed the sex marker on their identity card without question.
One trend did appear across all interactions with agents within the process of sex reclassification, that upon the visibility or recognition of trans status, individuals were held suspect and unqualified to authenticate their own sex. The cissexist ideology that trans people’s genders are fake and unnatural and that sex realness depends upon adherence to cis normative binary standards shaped the strategies that trans people used when interacting with agents. Trans people in my study engaged in practices that I call strategic normativity and strategic hybridity, of appealing to contextually specific expectations of identity, in order to achieve sex authentication. These practices included hiding one’s trans status, presenting as stereotypically feminine or masculine, and claiming an intersex identity. These practices extended beyond the interactions in the reclassification process and into all types of sex classification borders. In order to achieve administrative recognition and participate fully in the social world, trans people are compelled to achieve consistency across their documented identity, embodiment, and presentation of self.

At sex classification borders, administrative recognition, or the verification of one’s documented identity, is necessary for a successful border crossing. Unlike everyday instances of intersubjective misrecognition, administrative misrecognition has far greater consequences than identity invalidation alone. Depending on the degree to which the border is restricted, a failure to border cross can result in exclusion from vital support services and institutions, detention or incarceration, or a denial of benefits, to name a few examples. As such, administrative recognition plays a vital role in the ability for trans people to be treated as legitimate social actors on par with their cis counterparts. Demands for administrative recognition in a cis normative binary sex/gender
classification system include consistency of the sex marker across identity
documentation, and also signifiers sex normativity on the body and across the
presentation of self. Accordingly, individuals who fall short of meeting these standards
are at risk of being denied access to important social institutions. I found that individuals
in my study responded to the potential and real threats of administrative misrecognition
by enacting strategic normativity with the goal of achieving administrative recognition.
In some instances strategic normativity included the disclosure of one’s trans status and
in others it did not. The identity narratives that participants told border regulators were
shaped not only by the cis normative binary sex/gender system, but also by the immediate
context and the informal dynamics between the trans person and the agents. As the
stories in Chapter 5 demonstrate, a consistent implementation of strategic normativity
resulted in more consistent experiences of administrative recognition. Even so, some
trans people cannot or will not meet the cis normative binary standards for sex
reclassification and instead sought alternative means to achieving administrative
recognition.

The findings of my study suggest that institutionalized gatekeeping is broad
reaching and diffuse. In her seminal piece The Empire Strikes Back: A Post-Transsexual
Manifesto (1990), Sandy Stone contends that trans people are compelled to present
certain narratives of their lives and experiences to medical professionals in order to
access gender-related medical care. These “hegemonic transsexual narratives,” which are
then retold in autobiographical accounts, are not an accurate reflection of trans
experiences, but instead they are a product of the unequal relations between trans people
and medical gatekeepers. I argue that trans people craft presentations of self and
accounts of their identities, in a similar fashion, at sex classification borders. They do so in order to achieve administrative recognition and gain access to institutions, venues, social services, and pass through identity checkpoints. Furthermore, since trans people live their lives in and through interactions with institutions, most of which rely on a two-sex model of identity, their lives are highly shaped by this incessant gatekeeping and demands for cis normativity.

Stone suggests that, in the face of these constrained self-narratives, trans people disclose the complexities, inconsistencies, and variations within their gendered histories. In other words, she calls for trans people to give voice to their true or authentic selves. If, however, gatekeeping is systematic across a vast range of institutions and dependent on informal interpersonal dynamics, then how can one identify which parts of their histories are true or authentic? My findings demonstrate that even as trans identities are based on the discordance between one’s self-identification and an identity that is assigned to them at birth, these identities do not exist prior to culture. The ways which trans people come to understand, communicate, and manage their identities is produced through and restricted by an institutionalization of the cis normative binary sex/gender system.

Stone calls for transsexuals to end the modification of their narratives and to voice their diverse, raw histories, what she refers to as polyvocalities, in order to decouple trans narratives from the structures involved in medical gatekeeping. Rather than polyvocality as being characteristic of multiple trans people, I push this concept further to argue that individual trans people rely on multiple, shifting, and sometimes contradictory accounts of their identity, what I’m calling an individualized polyvocality. For example, if we look at the case of Sal introduced in Chapter 5, Sal utilizes different and somewhat
contradictory narratives of self in the various situations of border crossing. At one checkpoint he identifies himself as a “tomboy” dressed in American fashion and the other as a “female… transitioning,” and then during the interview as “not completely male.” His description of self as “being a tomboy” is no more or less accurate than being a “female…transitioning” or “not completely male.” Each account characterizes, within that specific context, how his identity is intelligible to others. Rather than trying to pin down the “truth” of Sal’s identity or claim that one of these two representations is “false,” I argue that Sal’s multiple identity narratives are emblematic of *individualized polyvocality* that defines trans subjectivities. It is this individualized polyvocality, and strategic use of different narratives that allows for agency across a variety of institutions and interpersonal interactions. From this perspective, it is not that Sal’s identity is shifting or fluid or more or less authentic, but that he employs different explanations of his identity that render him intelligible, non-threatening, and valid in each scenario. What becomes important than, is not a politics of authenticity, but a politics that calls into question the demands for certain types of normativity, one that is critical of the ways in which gender borders are defined and enforced.

Sex-Segregation

Normative embodiment borders are similarly shaped by cis normative binary standards of sexed embodiment and appearance. People who fail to meet these standards are susceptible to harassment, aggression, or expulsion from these spaces. Unlike sex-classification borders, the architectural segregation of sex-segregated spaces also reinforces notions of threatening/threatened individuals based on perceptions of trans
people as artificial, pathological, and deviant, on top of racialized, classed, and gendered constructions of us/them. The findings of my study illustrate how the perceptions of who is either threatening or threatened shape the decisions that trans people make about which bathrooms to use. Not surprisingly, so does the self-identification of the trans person. Cavanagh (2010) argues that the cissexist and heterosexist safety narratives that are used to justify sex-segregated facilities perpetuate the cultural perception that men or masculine people are always the perpetrators of violence and women are always the victims, rendering violence against queer people invisible.

In response to gender policing at sex-segregated bathrooms the participants in my study enacted a variety of strategies in order to be included and treated as non-threatening insiders in these spaces. Many trans people avoided public bathroom use altogether or selectively chose bathrooms that were unisex or in low-traffic areas where they minimized interactions with others. Other individuals tacitly resisted the enforcement of normative embodiment borders by striking compromises over bathroom use with coworkers or making requests for accessible bathrooms. In addition to these single-handed border-crossing strategies, some trans people also called on friends, family members, or acquaintances to serve as border ambassadors, cis and normatively gendered individuals who accompanied them into sex-segregated facilities. While the presence of border ambassadors assuaged the discomfort of some of the interviewees, the reliance on their authority only reproduces the notion that trans people are unqualified to authenticate their own identity.

My findings stand in opposition to claims of institutional erasure made by Viviane Namaste. Namaste argues that the reliance on a two-sex model of identity classification
leads trans individuals with inconsistencies on their identity documents to either operate outside of these institutions or have their trans status rendered invisible because they become statistically or categorically equivalent to cis people. Namaste asserts that by ignoring the specificity of transsexual and transgender experiences, these individuals are invisible to administrative systems and forced to function outside of mainstream institutional practices. In my research I found that this was not case, especially in sex-segregated institutions where administrators and staff were aware of an individual’s trans status. Instead of being erased, trans people were produced as the “other”

At normative embodiment borders where border enforcers were privy to the identity documents and records of the participants, I found that staff, administrators, and other personnel responded to the presence of trans people by imposing what I call administrative sex differentiation. Instead of being incorporated into sex-segregated facilities at the behest of other occupants, the people I interviewed recalled experiences of deliberate exclusion and marginalization. Even for those who perceived this exclusion as beneficial because they received “private” accommodations, the end result was the same; they were designated as sex/gender “others.” At first glance these instances may appear to be administrative misrecognition, but they are not. The individuals described in Chapter 6 were not facing exclusion under the premise that they were not who they claim to be. Instead, they experienced isolation and seclusion on the very basis of the recognition of their trans status, and the rigid enforcement of cis normative sex/gender binary policies and protocols. In other words, institutions produce trans subjectivities through relying on a two-sex model of identity to maintain sex-segregated facilities.
Looking to the Law

If trans identity negotiations rely on informal dynamics, one has to consider whether or not issues of exclusion and administrative misrecognition can be addressed by laws and policies. In his book *Normal Life*, Dean Spade (2011) criticizes contemporary mainstream trans rights movements for their neo-liberal political agendas including the fight for hate crimes legislation and non-discrimination policies. He argues that fighting for inclusion and recognition within these systems only serves to bolster the institutions that subject marginalized trans populations to harm and those which decrease the life chances of trans people. Alongside Spade, numerous scholars have critiqued the effectiveness of non-discrimination laws asserting that the interpretation and application of the laws are inconsistent and that those who are successfully able to prove discrimination do so through appeals to gender normativity and nationalism (Aizura 2011; Weiss 2011). Let’s look briefly at the proposition that gender policing at bathrooms would be remedied by the implementation of non-discrimination laws.

Laws regarding bathroom use are often unclear, inconsistent across jurisdictions, and unknown to those affected by them, a likely consequence of the first two attributes. In what follows is a brief sketch of legislation related to trans and gender variant public bathroom use in the United States. A report published by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 2011 stated that 44% of the United States population is covered by a Transgender-Inclusive Non-Discrimination Law. This percentage is a reflection of 15 state laws and 143 city and county laws that have legislation cover discrimination in areas such as housing, employment, and public accommodations. One might assume from this data that these laws would protect trans people’s use of public bathrooms, but that is
generally not the case. First, not all non-discrimination legislation includes “public accommodations” and even so “public accommodations” doesn’t necessarily refer to bathrooms. Only a handful of jurisdictions have policies that specify protections for bathroom use on the basis of gender identity (Transgender Law and Policy Institute 2012). The city of Boston, for example, has an ordinance that makes it discriminatory for a place of public accommodation to prohibit, “the use of restrooms, baths, showers, dressing rooms, or other private accommodations based on the gender identity publicly and exclusively expressed or asserted by the person seeking to use such [facilities]” (GLAD 2011). Boston’s policy is exceptional and without specific language, most non-discrimination laws are open to interpretation. As a result, bathrooms can be treated as exemptions to non-discrimination statutes. For example, “gender identity and expression” is included in the Minnesota Human Rights Act, but the Minnesota Supreme Court ruled that the designation of workplace restroom facilities based on “biological gender” is not considered discrimination (see Ross-Amato 2002). Given the case in Minnesota, it is uncertain how other courts would rule in the case that a trans person was denied access to a sex-segregated bathroom. This overview does not even begin to address the problems associated with application of the law and what standards would need to be met to prove that one was discriminatorily excluded from the “wrong” bathroom. In addition, despite the obscurity of whether or not laws protect trans individuals from discrimination, it is clear from my research that even with policies in place, such as those regarding sex reclassification, individual agents may or may not abide by them. That being the case, what recourse do trans people have especially if
litigation, like other scenarios, operates under demands for normativity? Are there other strategies of resistance or avenues for change?

*Opting Out: Localized Resistances, Transformative Possibilities?*

Some social scientists have argued that being trans is an act that challenges the binary gender system for the very existence of trans people destabilizes the notion that sex determines gender (Gagne and Tewksbury 1998; Schilt and Connell 2007; Schilt 2010). Because the sexed body is inextricably linked to the gender attribution process, trans people find validation of their gender identity through a normative embodiment and presentation of self. Most, if not all, trans people experience pressures from communities, the workplace, and other institutions to enact a normative self or face stigmatization, harassment, exclusion or erasure (Gagne and Tewksbury 1998; Namaste 2000; Schilt and Connell 2007; Schilt 2010). As a result, the ways that trans people seek recognition as men or women often results in a reification of the binary gender system as it simultaneously disrupts it. In situations where trans people are compelled to identify within the limited categories of male or female, it might be asked, what recourse do trans people have? In what ways can they resist these classificatory mechanisms? Is resistance to the gender binary always circumscribed by a reification of sex categories?

Studies on multi-racial and biracial individuals (Haritaworn 2009; Khana 2011; Storrs 1999) show that multi- and biracial individuals engage with classification systems by utilizing strategies of selective disclosure of their identities, and at times resist disclosure altogether. In a study on mixed race students in college, Renn (2004) quotes a student as saying, “I don’t buy into the system that says boxes are more important than
the people in them,” after refusing to check race and relationship status boxes on paperwork (197). Renn found two key factors that played a role in these resistance strategies: social support from families and peers that explored identity beyond monoracial or multiracial categories; and, academic systems that exposed students to the idea of social constructions. These factors when working together created a context through which students felt empowered to resist classificatory systems, by adopting an “extraracial identity.”

These individualized acts of resistance are not organized or systematic and thus not connected to large social movements. However, simply because they are individualized responses does not mean that they are insignificant. Renn’s work shows that the rejection of racial classification regimes is directly linked to the intellectual and political project of identity deconstruction. “At the one campus (Ivy) where postmodern theory permeated the ethos of peer culture, half of the participants fit this pattern” (216). The social context in which students of mixed race are exploring and understanding their identities comes to inform their acts of compliance or resistance to the expectation of a coherently racialized self.

When asked, “What box do you check off on paperwork such as job applications or medical intake forms?” some participants said they’d leave the gender boxes blank or they’d write in “transgender” or “trans” next to male and female. These strategies may give the impression of avoidance or even ambivalence, but they are indeed individualized acts of resisting gender categorization. The participants never commented on why they did this, but there might be several reasons that show a resistance to the forced classification. For one, they might see themselves as not fitting within either of the two
sex categories. It’s highly likely that if someone felt strongly identified as one sex or the other, they would check one of the boxes with little hesitation. Another possibility is that it isn’t clear to trans people what sex they are supposed to mark on intake paperwork when they are seeking gender or non-gender related health services, especially if they are on hormones or have had surgery. What sex does one mark when existing in the in-between? What happens when they check the “wrong” box? What is the “wrong” box? Or, more importantly, what is the relevance of the sex category at all?

There is no apparent connection between trans people’s refusal to mark gender boxes and exposure to or interest in intellectual projects of identity deconstruction. However, it must be considered whether an opting out of sex classification systems, as practiced by some individuals, could be a viable political strategy and for whom? And could this tactic be similarly applied to sex-segregated facilities? People who depend upon these institutions or facilities, however, have less agency to simply opt out. Instead, these might be viable locations for interventions, critiques, and radical transformations that challenge the cis normative sex/gender binary.

Suggestions

The findings of my research make clear three things. The first is that while trans identities are the starting point for my research, they are certainly not an ideal focal point for a politics of social change that addresses issues of trans marginalization and exclusion. Trans identities are produced, constructed, and negotiated in and through relationships and interactions with institutions, processes, and people. It is precisely these external influences that must be critically examined and interrogated, as I have done
The second is that recognition, administrative or otherwise, hinges upon institutionalized policies, protocols, and practices that define the sex classification and reclassification processes. I suggest that consistent recognition and, subsequent incorporation and inclusion, for people of all gender identities, embodiments, and expressions will not be achieved without modifications to these processes that account for inconsistencies and that allow for trans people to authenticate their own sex and gender identities. This may include the removal of the sex category on certain records or forms of documentation or the addition of multiple categories of identification, for example. While I am more inclined to advocate for the former, the addition of a T or “transgender” category in certain instances might be a productive and useful step for meeting immediate needs. It might also include a politics of reducing the extent to which one must provide documentation of their identity and/or a politics of minimizing administrative or bureaucratic forms of surveillance and population management.

The third is that sex-segregated spaces rely on and reinforce notions of us/them and threatened/threatening subjects that are racialized, sexualized, classed, gendered, and so on. Debates over who is included and under which conditions tend to fortify rather than challenge these perceptions. Instead of shifting the line in the sand, I suggest that issues of accessibility and privacy for all bodies, identities, and expressions be considered in the re/construction of facilities that are currently sex-segregated. This may include the construction of more single-occupancy or all gender spaces that have, in the case of bathrooms, changing tables, handicap accessible fixtures, and menstrual product dispensers and bins. At the very least, we must acknowledge that sex-segregated
facilities are not only products of, but help to produce cissexist notions of sex differentiation and sex immutability.

Limitations of the Study

Demographics. Since my research is exploratory, qualitative, and theory-driven, I did not expect to incorporate all trans positionalities nor account for all types of trans experiences in my study. As I expected, I encountered difficulty in accessing trans individuals who had little to no relationship with trans communities, organizations and services, or other trans individuals. I was able to reach a few individuals who described having a marginal relationship to trans communities through snowball sampling, but the majority of the individuals who volunteered to participate had come across the posted advertisement in trans-inclusive spaces and forums. In other words, individuals who have completely cut ties with trans communities were not included in my sample. With that said, the demographic representation in regards to race and ethnicity were similar to large quantitative studies on trans and gender variant populations (Grant et al 2011). By recruiting through community centers and social service agencies, I hoped to increase my access to marginalized trans populations including poor or low-income trans people and/or trans people of color. However, these direct postings did not attract participants. The overwhelming majority of individuals who responded to my advertisement had come across the posting on the Internet. Overall, populations that were noticeably missing from my sample were individuals who were homeless, marginally housed, or experienced housing insecurity. I also did not interview anyone who was currently incarcerated or a ward of the state, although two individuals had been in jail briefly.
Another possible limitation in my research design is the way in which I decided to measure class status. I originally decided to use educational attainment and occupation of the participants as a measure of financial capital as well as the educational attainment and occupation of the participants’ parents for a measure of cultural capital. My intent was to use these two factors to approximate the class status of the participant, but in the analysis I ended up relying upon the language that the participant used to talk about their class location. I was unsatisfied with these measures as it wasn’t clear how effectively they captured the class status of trans people. Trans people face widespread discrimination from family estrangement to eviction and underemployment, all of which would contribute to a class status lower than what would be expected from measures used in the general population. It might have been more useful to ask participants to give their income or to self-identify their class status, but these too might be ineffective measures.

In terms of the overall analysis, my impression is that a discrete variable such as “class status” when applied to a small sample does little in and of itself to contribute to the understanding the lives of trans people. It is evident that access to medical care and the ways in which participants expressed agency in certain situations, especially in the workplace, was shaped by class considerations including income, wealth, and cultural capital, but the extent to which class is an exclusive or primary factor in these scenarios is open to question. For example, a number of individuals claimed that they were not pursuing any sex/gender-related surgeries because they could not afford them and they were not covered by health insurance. Income and wealth are clearly factors in this decision, but so are things like health insurance coverage, ability to take time off of work, social support systems, health status, and so on. Questions that did appear to be useful
included, “What barriers have you faced when seeking out medical care?” followed with probes about financial limitations and insurance coverage. With that said, it is possible that my research would have benefited from different measures of class status.

*The Trans Researcher.* This research explored topics that might be viewed as sensitive (e.g., perceived or actual threats to one’s self and the management of a stigmatized social status). On top of this, many trans individuals are suspicious of the intentions of researchers since their history is marked with “scientific” research, conducted mostly by cis people, which has discredited, stigmatized, and silenced their experiences. I hoped that my trans identification would not only provide me with insights into the experiences that trans people encounter, but that it would help me to build rapport with participants and encourage them to share stories with me that they might not share with someone perceived to be an outsider. I identified myself as being “part of the transgender community” in my recruitment materials and identified myself as a trans person in communication with potential participants. For the most part, however, I limited the prominence of my trans identity, and withheld from talking about my own history, politics, or transition while the interviews took place. I focused on validating the perspectives and experiences of the participants through nodding my head and mirroring their emotional responses. It was my impression that my active witnessing – as a validating interviewer – and mirroring – as another trans person – encouraged participants to be less guarded and more willing to share their experiences with me. A number of participants reflected this dynamic by saying things like, “Well, you would know.” One participant remarked, “It’s fortunate I’m speaking to you because you can kind of understand the whole trans mindset where this feels completely right…To people
on the other side of it, they’re going, this does not compute, this does not compute.”

Another participant mentioned that she shared information with me that she hadn’t yet
shared with her cis woman therapist because she “wouldn’t understand.” On the flip side,
it is possible that participants did not describe their experiences in full detail because they
assumed I “knew” what they were thinking and feeling. Likewise, I think that I didn’t
probe or follow up as much as I should have in the interview because I was assuming that
I knew what the participant was thinking and feeling. I think these “unsaid” moments
created an intimacy between the participant and myself, which allowed them to share
things they might not have otherwise, but possibly at the expense of minimizing or
glossing over certain details.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the interview is like every other social
interaction where trans people will manage their identities and presentations of self based
on expectations they had coming into the interview and what assumptions they made
about me. Participant’s responses were likely influenced, to different degrees, by the
visible markers of my identity as a young, white, middle-class, and male researcher.
How this shaped their responses, however, was largely invisible to me. What was
noticeable during interviews were responses that had clearly been prepared in advance.
Most commonly these were responses to questions about how one identified their sex and
gender and how this has shifted over time. I observed a change in the tone of voice,
affect, and vocabulary of the participants that came with these canned responses. It was
as if they had told these stories on numerous occasions; they were teaching tools. In most
of these responses participants defined terminology and offered intelligible explanations
for their trans identity that often mirrored the arch of the hegemonic trans narrative. It
was only later in the interviews that trans people’s descriptions of their identities, bodies, and experiences became richer, more complex, and rife with contradiction and obscurity. These canned responses indicate the challenges of capturing the complexities of identities in qualitative research. Even with open-ended questions that allow people to describe and define who they see themselves to be, there exists an unwritten script that many, if not all, will still follow.

Ideas for Future Research

Upon the completion of this manuscript, I have considered a number of possible directions for this project. First, I intend to take the data on sex classification borders and more directly engage with literature on biopolitics, surveillance studies, and post-colonialism. Research on the racialized production of national subjects and the ways in which citizenship is enforced through biopolitical apparatuses is directly connected to this part of my project. I did not pursue this path thoroughly in the creation of this dissertation as this literature appears to be less relevant for the other types of borders that I was exploring. It is possible that the framework of borders is more fitting to describe the process of identity management that involves identity documents, records, and clear connections to institutions and the state. I am considering the idea that the ways in which trans people negotiate sex-segregated facilities is less a border-crossing as it is a process of integration, belonging, membership, and safety. I intend to explore the ways in which the findings presented in Chapter 6 correspond to my data on lived gender borders and the ways that trans people negotiate their identities in spheres of intimacy and sexuality, which came up in my interviews. Until I examine this data more thoroughly, I think it
won’t be clear as to whether the border framework holds up across all types of identity management experiences. At this point, I hesitate to make a strong assertion either way.

In addition, I would like to explore some of the concepts that I developed in this dissertation including *individualized polyvocalities, strategic normativity*, and *strategic hybridity*. I think that this language will be of great use in the field of trans studies and I intend to return to my data to find more examples of the ways in which these notions are expressed in the ways that trans people manage their identities. In a different direction, I am also left pondering the ways in which my findings are limited by the American context in which these classifications and borders exist. For instance, in the past year Nepal formalized a third sex category of transgender for its citizens. Similarly, Australia and New Zealand have an “X” option on their passports in addition to “M” and “F” and people in Bangladesh may register and vote in elections as “eunuchs.” I think a cross-cultural application of my research framework might yield interesting data regarding the possibilities and limitations of implementing a third sex option.
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Appendix: Interview Guide

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research project. I am interested in the experiences trans people have managing their identity in different situations. I would like to remind you that everything we discuss today will be kept confidential. Your identity will be anonymous in all papers, presentations, or publications that come from this research. Please remember that if you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions, you are under no obligation to answer them and you may stop the interview at any time.

Do you mind if I tape record this interview? Taping frees me from having to take notes, so that I can focus on our conversation. However, I may take some notes as we speak to remind myself of any questions or areas of our discussion I may need to clarify with you.

Section 1: Basic Demographic Information
Let’s begin with some general information…

How old are you?

How many years of education have you completed? What is the highest degree you’ve earned?

What are your parents’ occupations? Highest degree earned?

How do you identify in terms of your race and ethnicity?

Do you consider yourself to be religious? Do you have an affiliation with any religion?

Would you describe your city/town you currently live in as rural, urban, suburban, or a college town? If not, how would you describe it?

Section 2: Sex, Gender, and Identity Documents
Now I’d like to ask you some questions regarding your sex and gender identity (and transition).

Could you describe for me how you see yourself in terms of your sex and gender? What are your sex and gender? How do you identify or categorize your sex and gender?

What pronouns do you prefer I use? What pronouns do people generally use when referring to you? Is this consistent or do people in your life use different pronouns when referring to you?

Do you call yourself or do others call you by the name you were given at birth? Who does/doesn’t? If you changed your name socially, what was the process in doing so and how did you decide on your new name?
In what ways have you changed your body physically, if at all, in regards to your sex and gender?

Have you/are you on hormones? Duration?
Have you had any surgeries? Which? When?
    If not, do you intend on going on hormones or having any surgeries in the future?
    Could you talk about this and how it relates to how you identify?

Now, I’d like to talk specifically about your gender marker on identity documents and any changes you may have made.

To begin, what was the sex you were designated at birth?

On any identity documents, have you changed your name or gender marker from what was given to you at birth? (birth certificate, drivers license, passport, social security card, health insurance etc?)

If yes, which ones have you changed and could you describe how you went about changing them?
    What was required for their change?
    How did you come to figure out which identity documents you would or could change and which ones you wouldn’t or couldn’t?

If no, do you plan on changing your name or gender marker in the future?

If yes, could you describe your reasons for waiting to do so?
How do you plan to go about changing them?
    If not, how did you come to decide that you would not change your name or gender marker on your identity documents?

What do you currently do for a living? How long have you been at your current employer?

How would you compare your current job to jobs you had before identifying and living as trans?

Could you describe for me your sexual orientation? How has this changed, if at all, since you began to identify as trans or since your transition?

What is your current relationship status?
    If in a relationship, how long have you been in this relationship? Were you with this person before you identified as trans? Before starting to transition?
    If transition(ed/ing), has the legal status of your relationship changed since your transition?
Have you experienced any legal issues since identifying as trans? Were they about your gender identity or affected by it? Could you tell me what happened?

**Section 3: Sex Classification Border Crossings**

*I’d like to talk to you now about your experiences using your identity documents such as passports and licenses.*

**Airplane Travel/Passport Use**

Have you traveled at all by plane since identifying as trans (or since beginning your transition) either within or outside of the United States? Or even driven across international borders to Mexico or Canada?

If yes, could you tell me what happened during this experience? Or even about a couple of them if you travel frequently.

For what reasons were you traveling? Where were you traveling to/from?

Could you describe to me how you prepared for this trip, if at all, in regards to your gender (body, appearance, documentation)?

Describe the experience of going through the security checkpoint. What form of identity documentation did you show? How did you feel? What were your interactions with the security personnel?

Did you encounter any problems while traveling by airplane such as being stopped at the border, remarks made by flight attendants, etc.? Please describe.

If not, tell me what, if any, are some of the reasons why you have not traveled by airplane or across international borders? How are they related, if at all, to your gender (body, appearance, documentation)? How does that make you feel?

What are your plans for future travel or passport use?

**Driver’s License/DMV ID**

Could you describe to me times that you’ve had to use your driver’s license or DMV ID to confirm your identification such as when writing a check, purchasing alcohol, getting pulled over while driving, etc?

How did people respond when looking at your ID? How did that make you feel? What was your reaction?

Do you carry more than one license or DMV ID with different information on them? In what types of situations do you use one or the other? Are there times when you were asked, but did not show your ID? If so, could you tell me about them?
**Other Identity Records/History Issues**

*I’d like to hear more about how you manage your identity records and personal history in certain situations. Can you think of any instances where you’ve had to disclose or manage your identity records or personal history (such as references) with other people? Some examples would be when applying for a job or being interviewed, going to see a doctor, applying for an apartment, or registering for an athletic competition/event.*

Tell me how about these interactions? What information did you disclose or withhold and why? How do you explain your past or current identity to people in these interactions? How do you present yourself? What were your interactions like with personnel?

Did you encounter any problems? How did you deal with them? What did you feel, think, say, and do?

If not, are you actively avoiding these situations/interactions? Could you talk to me about that? Which ones and why?

Do all of your identity documents (Soc Sec, DMV ID, Birth Cert, and Passport) have the same sex listed? If not, has it ever been brought to your attention or the attention of your employer that they were not matching, such as the case of “no match” letters?

If yes, could you tell me what happened? How did you and/or your employer react?

**Section 4: Normative Embodiment Border Crossings**

*I’m going to shift now and ask your experiences in sex-segregated facilities like bathrooms and locker rooms.*

**Bathrooms**

I’d like to talk about different contexts/situations in bathroom use.

When in public, how do you decide what bathrooms to use? Are there contexts/situations where you would use one bathroom over the other? Does this change? Why?

Are there locations or times of the day you prefer over others? How far would you walk to find a public bathroom you feel safe in?

If you avoid using public bathrooms or did so at a certain point in your life, please describe when and why.

Could you describe for me how you interact with others while in the bathroom? Are there certain people you will or will not go in with? If so, why?

Describe the interactions you’ve had in bathrooms where you may have felt your presence was being questioned. Have you encountered any problems such as remarks,
being asked to leave, or even physical threats while using public toilets? If so, tell me what happened.

**Locker Rooms**
Since identifying as (trans id) have you used locker rooms (at work, the gym, etc.)?

How do you decide what locker rooms to use? Are there contexts/situations where you would use one locker room over the other? Does this change? Why?

Are there certain locations (work, school, etc.) or times of the day you prefer to use locker rooms to others? How far would you travel or how much would you pay (in gym membership) to find a locker room you feel safe in?

If you avoid using locker rooms or did so at a certain point in your life, please describe when and why.

Could you describe for me how you interact with others while in the locker room? Do you change in front of others? Are there certain people you will or will not go in with? If so, why?

Describe the interactions you’ve had in locker rooms, if at all, where you may have felt your presence was being questioned. Have you encountered any problems such as remarks, being asked to leave, or even physical threats while using locker rooms? If so, what happened?

Are there any changes you plan to make in the future in order to feel more safe occupying the bathroom or locker room of your choice? If so, what are they?

**Other Sex-Segregated Facilities**
I’d like to hear more about your use of sex-segregated facilities. Other than bathrooms and locker rooms, can you think of any other sex-segregated facilities you’ve used since identifying as trans? Some examples would be changing rooms, domestic violence or homeless shelters, residential housing, or at hostels.

Tell me about these situations? Which facilities did you decide to use and why? Who were you with? What were your interactions like with other people there?

Did you experience any problems? What did you think, do, feel?

**Section 5: Political Association Border Crossings**
I’d like to talk to you now about any single-sex social or political clubs, organizations, or events that you’ve experienced since identifying as trans.
**Clubs and Organizations**
Since you have identified as (trans id), have you become involved with or continued involvement with any men’s-only or women’s-only social or political clubs or organizations?

If so, could you describe them, their goals/aims? What were your reasons for joining them?

What was the process like becoming a member? What have your interactions been like with the other members and representatives? How does that make you feel?

Did you encounter any problems while becoming a member or during your membership such as being asked to leave or only attend certain events or meetings? What happened?

**Events**
Since you have identified as (trans id), have you attended any women’s-only or men’s-only social or political events?

If so, could you describe the one’s you’ve attended? What were your reasons for attending?

Describe the experience of the event. How did you present yourself to others? What were your interactions with the other attendees and administrators of the event? How did this make you feel or act?

Did you encounter any problems while at the event regarding your gender such as being asked to leave or restricted to certain activities? If so, tell me what happened. How did you feel? How did you react?

If not, what are the reasons you haven’t joined any single-sex clubs or organizations or attended any women’s-only or men’s only social or political events? Do you have any plans to attend one in the future? Are there any changes you are making to do so?

**Section 6: Lived Gender Border Crossings**
*At this point in the interview, I’d like to talk to you about your everyday life and day-to-day interactions with other people.*

How would you describe your daily gender presentation? Is it more or less masculine or feminine than the average person or androgynous? Would you say that your presentation is fairly constant or does this change from day to day?

If you have not had surgery, what practices (binding, gaffing, packing, etc.) do you use to present yourself as more/less male/female? In what instances or situations do you or do you not practice these things?

What are your experiences with your gender on a daily basis such as when going grocery shopping, going to school, out to eat at restaurants?
Are there certain places in public that you avoid going to or only go to certain parts of the day? If so, why?

Which places in public make you feel safer in regards to your gender identity? How often do you frequent or pass through them?

What are some places or situations where your gender identity has been called into question by others or when they mis-gendered you? How does this make you feel? What do you think, do?

Is there anything else would like to tell me about your trans identity or about experiences that you’ve had?

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This has been very informative. I appreciate your time and willingness to help with this project. Considering the things I’ve asked about during the interview, is there anything else you would like to say?

Again, I thank you for participating in this research.