Deconstructing the Otherness of Queer Identity in Contemporary Lesbian Fiction

By

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Declaration

"I declare that the dissertation hereby handed in for the qualification MA English at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another University/faculty."

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Ms M.L. Calitz

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"I'm permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble."

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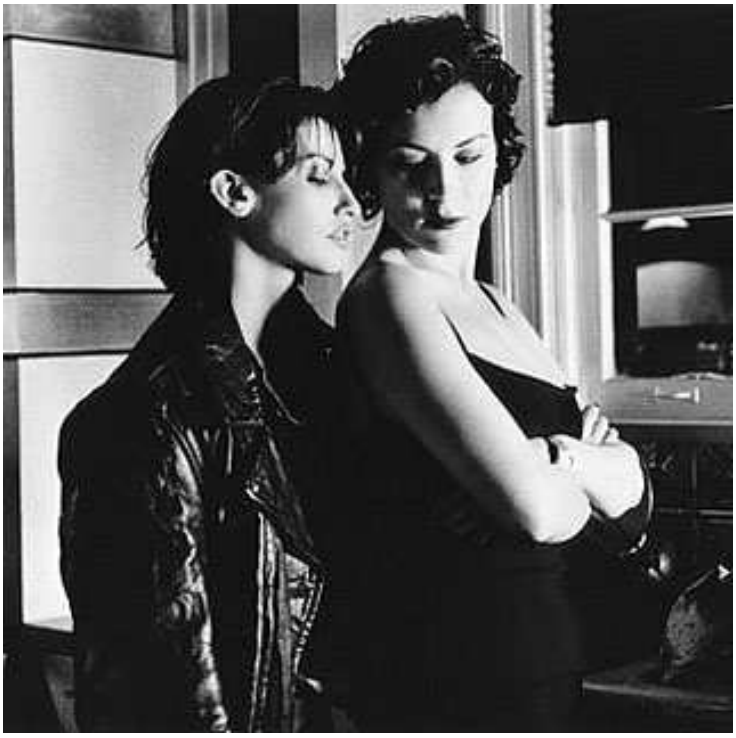


gender queer – A person who plays with gender, or who does not want to be defined in terms of gender. A term for people who bend or break gender rules.

In *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa.* Marais, Morgan & Wellbeloved. 2009.

Introduction

Queer gender identity is an alternative to the expressions of sexuality that are reliant on the masculine/feminine binary. Although the establishment of specifically gay and lesbian identity categories has been necessary to oppose the invisibility of alternative gender identities, gay and lesbian identity excludes a number of other important gender configurations. For this reason, the identities in the LGBTI acronym – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersex – represent a far broader range of gender configurations, which is explored throughout this dissertation. The deconstructive analysis of a selection of lesbian novels challenges sexualities that are based on binary discourse, which relies on either/or dichotomies. The arguments presented in chapter one illustrate how binary discourse creates a privileged position for only one element in the binary. The male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual binaries are subverted in texts which clearly favour fluid identity construction. The dominance of binary structures is disproved as a misleading notion which fixes boundaries, which in turn, restrain the expansion of different genders. The analysis also demonstrates how binary structures in language restrict the expansion of alternative gender categories. The theoretical backbone of this deconstruction draws upon Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* One of Butler's major contributions to queer theory is the concept of gender as unstable and performative, which contradicts the idea that gender is an inherent quality that remains fixed throughout a subject's life. Butler incorporates Foucault's views on discourse which assume hegemonic authority, as well as the punishment of alternative sexualities. This punishment occurs when gender rejects the norms of heterosexuality, i.e. heteronormativity. Jacques Derrida's theory of iterability exposes the way in which repetitive acts of power create the myth

of heteronormative dominance. The deconstructive method reveals how previously invisible gender categories have remained silent and unimaginable.

Although the inclusion of queer is essential to the creation of gender multiplicity, Butler argues against the reliance on gender specificity. Butler illustrates how the categories "women" and "lesbian" have restricted gender expansion. The limitations inherent in both categories are illustrated in the textual analysis. For example, the fixation on femininity as an expression of *female* bodies has removed the possibility of masculine performances for women. Therefore, any dependence on categories, such as outdated interpretations of "butch" or "femme", works *against* the expansive potential of queer. Butler's theory of an original versus its imitation also constitutes an important theoretical thrust throughout the dissertation. The gender performances of the subjects are proven as "real" expressions, as opposed to imitating the origin. The imitation myth is exploded with the focus on women performing masculinity. Butler also proves that neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality is the origin of sexuality, since both categories contain aspects of sexuality within and beyond LGBTI identity.

The expansion and subversion of gender categories are impossible unless the relation between sex and gender is radically challenged. For as long as male sex is assumed to precede masculinity, and female sex is assumed to precede femininity, sexuality will be reduced to the restrictive relationship between sex and gender. Butler insists that gender is not forced upon a subject by social expectations; rather, gender is a complex interplay of performances that reflects

logocentric discourse. When the binary logic of this discourse is challenged, it becomes possible to extricate gender from the limitations of biological sex. The arguments in this dissertation show that gender expressions must be allowed fluid movement between both masculine and feminine representations, regardless of sex. When gender fluidity replaces the rigid expectations of biological sex, then gender configurations are expanded to include previously marginalised gender identities. Subjects who embrace masculinity are the primary focus of this dissertation, since female masculinity is a significant inversion of the sex/gender connection. Drag will be illuminated as a parodic subversion of the female/femininity binary because it reveals the performative nature of any gender. Expressions of alternative masculinities are analysed throughout the texts to reveal the subversive potential within queer gender performances.

The novel *Trumpet* by Jackie Kay presents the possibility of radically subverting the lesbian category to include expressions of transgender passing. The character of Joss Moody, a biological female passing as a male through a series of masculine performances, challenges the notion of sex preceding gender. Joss's performances are complemented by his marriage to a heterosexual woman, which then arguably positions Joss and his wife Millie within the heterosexual matrix. This dissertation argues that the "ordinary subversive" nature of their relationship contradicts this charge of heteronormativity because the reality of Joss's female body distances him from the confines of heterosexual masculinity. The analysis of *Trumpet* also illustrates the embodiment of the discursive power in legal and medical institutions, which posthumously pronounces Joss as "female" in an attempt to erase his choice of male identity through masculine performances. Joss's sociocultural milieu is also significant to the analysis of his gender identity. As an Afro-Scottish biological woman, Joss is subjected to invisibility in

terms of race and gender. Since Joss's gender configuration is unimaginable within his sociopolitical context, his marriage is perceived as ordinary within the realm of heteronormative ideals. However, as the analysis of *Trumpe*t demonstrates, the seemingly ordinary nature of their marriage provides the platform from which the binary expectations of heterosexual marriage can be subverted. Joss's ambiguous masquerade – a woman performing masculinity – is powerfully liberating not only to Joss, but also to queer sexuality. Joss contradicts all the requirements of his female biology, thus obliterating the sex/gender link, and releasing masculinity from the territory of biological men. Butler's argument against lesbian specificity is useful in the deconstruction of *Trumpet* given the lesbian feminist critique of female masculinity as an imitation of "men". The transcendence of lesbian specificity in *Trumpet* extends the parameters of queer representation to include marginalised categories such as transgender and transsexual. Joss's performance will be read as an expression that is as real or authentic as his female biology. The repetitions of masculine performance define Joss's identity as emphatically as his female body. Joss's masquerade is politically subversive because of its everyday presence, as opposed to the playfulness of theatrical performance. Heteronormative expectations are represented by Joss's son Colman, the journalist Sophie Stones, and the legal and medical voices who attempt to "correct" Joss's male identity to match his female body. Their rejection of Joss's masculine identity signifies the power of the law to regulate the sex/gender connection.

The deconstruction of Barrie Jean Borich's autobiographical novel *My Lesbian Husband* reveals the force of heteronormative expectations in the lives of a lesbian couple who question the possibility of marrying each other, despite a society that rejects lesbian love, relationships and marriage. Of all the texts in this dissertation, *My Lesbian Husband* illustrates most aptly the

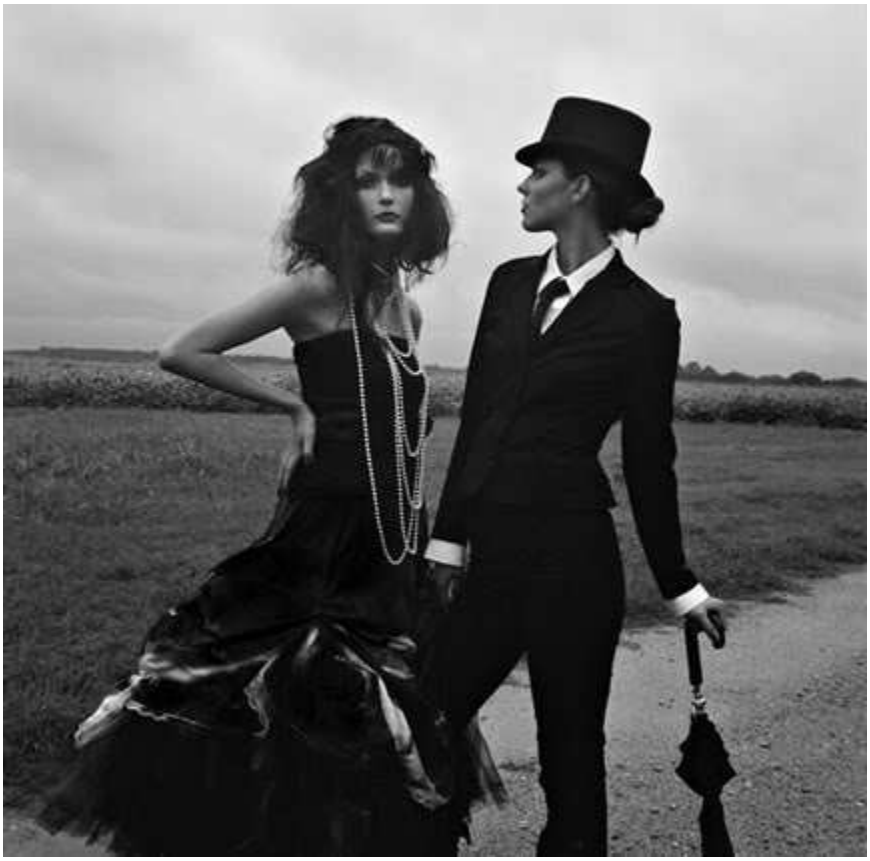
restrictions created by heteronormative ideals. Barrie Jean Borich narrates the novel, and is the "feminine" partner in her relationship with Linnea, a woman identified as butch. The engagement of Barrie's heterosexual younger brother is an important subplot which Barrie uses to interrogate her own relationship, in contrast to the perceived normality of a heterosexual union. Throughout the novel, Barrie mourns the absence of social sanctioning for her and Linnea's relationship. This analysis suggests that Barrie relies on the approval of the hegemonic law, and cannot reconcile the Otherness of lesbian identity with the expectations of heterosexual priority. Linnea's masculine performances demonstrate the function of queer drag, exposing the limits of heteronormative identity. The butch/femme dichotomy is also investigated as a potentially subversive category, as opposed to a mere imitation of the masculine/feminine tension inherent in heterosexual relationships. The analysis in chapter three shows how Barrie's preoccupation with defining herself and Linnea as wife and husband hinders the expansion of gender categories, since performances that are hinged on the primacy of binary logic defeat the purpose of gender fluidity.

Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* is most conducive to the subversion of gender binaries, both in terms of sex and gender. Feinberg's narrative explores the experience of working class women who perform a variety of gender positions, varying from butch/femme dynamics to frequently misunderstood transsexual identities. Through an exploration of alternative masculinities, this text poses a radical challenge to the norms that govern the creation of sex and gender categories. Halberstam's work on female masculinity is particularly significant in this chapter, as it highlights how the erasure of female masculinity within lesbian identity has prohibited the emergence of gender categories that celebrate masculinity performed by female bodies. A

detailed exploration of the butch/femme dynamic counteracts the charge of imitation. Butch/femme is not an imitation of heterosexuality but rather a parodic challenge to heteronormativity. The transgender characters in the novel demonstrate the subversive capacity of identity that challenges the link between sex and gender, which is radically subverted in the text, and creates the potential for the expansion of gender with the LGBTI community. These alternative gender expressions are however met with despicable acts of violence. Feinberg relates the brutality of the attacks against men and women who refuse to perform socially imaginable forms of gender. The reality of gender-based violence represents the force of hegemonic power and the attempts to control and punish alternative gender expressions. Feinberg insightfully depicts the divisions inherent within the LGBTI community, which allows for the analysis of a variety of butch identities. This dissertation shows that the multiplicity of gender categories in *Stone Butch Blues* is made possible by the subversion of the binaries inherent in the categories of both sex and gender. The objective of this deconstructive analysis is the creation of spaces in which subjects are not limited by biology or redundant gender categories. The liberation of LGBTI individuals is a human rights issue, for as long as alternative gender expressions remain unimaginable, the queer community will be subjected to ridicule, marginalization and violence.

Chapter One

Theoretical framework



deconstructing gender binaries

The emergence of queer theory into academic discourse in the 1990s has since produced cutting-edge works of film, literature, visual art, music, and psychoanalysis. The queer movement developed from both the feminist and the gay and lesbian movements and has contributed significantly to the broader spectrum of gender studies (Kopelson 2002: 17). The introduction of queer theory into academic discourse has enabled the construction of gender identities that elude restrictive categorisation. The theoretical parameters of queer as an identity category embrace the anti-essentialist nature of gender identities, roles and subject positions, which were in the past

very much limited to what was called “the gay and lesbian community”. The aim of this project is to illustrate by means of deconstructive textual analysis the ways in which women from a wide range of cultural, economic and social contexts adhere to and resist the expectations of their biological female sex. The assumption that queer gender identity is alternative, inferior, or secondary will also be interrogated. This research critiques outdated modes of gender expression by questioning the masculine/feminine binary which has created significant restrictions within gender identification. Significantly, the constraints imposed upon gender identity relate to Foucault’s view that discourse is reified. Reification indicates the control and confinement that shape discourse, and points to what discourse is silent about, in this case queer identity categories (Foucault 1972: 4). Judith Butler’s post-structural philosophy creates the theoretical framework for this dissertation, which poses a challenge to the binary nature of gender and sex. Deconstruction, which is integral to contemporary discourse analysis, is also used throughout the examination of gender identity. For the purposes of this research, discourse is defined as language which involves subjects, as opposed to objective language that exists as a system of signs that possibly excludes subjects (Eagleton 1983: 115). Wolfgang Iser (2006: 172) argues that discourse is inextricably linked to the process of its creation:

> Discourse maps a territory and determines the features that it charts, thus projecting a domain to be lived in. There are many current discourses, e.g. hegemonic, oppositional, feminist, minority, ethnic, colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial. Each individual discourse claims to pattern the world by equating it with a ground plan. Discourse not only structures the domain which is charted, but also preordains the practice of that domain.

Butler (in Fuss 1991: 14) notes that Foucault views discourse as "both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy." Therefore, discourse can either restrict or liberate gender identity. Foucault (1972: 4) reiterates that discourse has the power to shape the reality that it names:

> We should not imagine that the world presents us with a legible face, leaving us merely to decipher it; it does not work hand in glove with what we already know; there is no prediscursive fate disposing the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence that we do to things, or, at all events, as a practice we impose on them; it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity.

Exclusionary discourse therefore has the power to silence previously unimaginable identity categories such as queer. Meaning is thus imposed upon identity through the assumption of essential truth. Discourse relies heavily on the existence of regulated constructs such as the division between true/false, valid/invalid, etc. These constructs operate primarily through the exclusion of the negative side of the binary, for example, the exclusion of certain racial and ethnic groups in the form of racial segregation. Similarly, within discourse a binary such as heterosexual/homosexual restricts the fluidity of gender constructs. Foucault (1972: 4) locates the function of discourse in the duality of regulation and exclusion:

> Discourse considers social subjects, social consciousness, to be formed, not through ideologies, [that, in Marxism for instance, have their base in economic or class relations], but through a form of power that circulates in and around the social fabric, family, social subjects, through strategies of regulation and exclusion, and constructing forms of knowledge which make possible that which can be said, and that which cannot.

The analysis of the primary texts in this dissertation demonstrates how subjects are abjected under the influence of patriarchal and heteronormative discourses. Binary discourse in this dissertation is subjected to a process of deconstruction, which Christopher Norris (1982: xii) assures the reader is not "a freakish or marginal philosophy, the perverse sport of super-subtle minds disenchanted with the workaday business of literary criticism." If Norris (1982: 3) hesitates to offer a concrete definition of deconstruction, it is because "[d]econstruction is avowedly 'post-structuralist' in its refusal to accept the idea of structure as in any sense given or objectively 'there' in the text." The deconstructive method calls into question the rules about writing, interpretation and criticism. Norris (1982: xi – xii) defines the subversive potential of deconstructive analysis thus:

> Deconstruction is a constant reminder of the etymological link between 'crisis' and 'criticism'. It makes manifest the fact that any radical shift of interpretative thought must always come up against the limits of seeming absurdity…Deconstruction works at the same heady limit [of scepticism], suspending all we take for granted about language, experience and the 'normal' possibilities of human communication.

Deconstruction rejects the idea of a "correct" interpretation of any text and instead complicates meaning by opening up a wide range of possibilities for any given moment within the text. For this reason, the deconstructive method is suited to the analysis of gender configurations which reject the idea of origin versus alternative. An important aspect of deconstruction is its subversion of binary oppositions; this dissertation questions specifically the masculine/feminine, the male/female, and the heterosexual/homosexual binaries. Deconstruction therefore suspends what we take for granted about human sexuality, i.e. the "natural" link between males and masculinity, or females and femininity. In *Theorizing Gender,* Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon

(2002: 97) identify the binary nature of sexual distinction as a significant barrier to alternative sexuality:

> Our understanding of material, anatomical differences is mediated through our cultural frame of meaning. Rather than gender following from biology, for Butler, our gender norms are seen as structuring biology. We view biological factors as requiring a binary division into two sexes, male and female, because of a socially constructed gender to which *heterosexuality* is central.

This quote is pivotal to the analysis of subjects who challenge the notion that biology determines gender. The binary division of sex into male and female maintains heteronormative ideals, and creates restrictions on gender categories which attempt to transcend this binary structure. Eagleton (1983: 133) summaries the tension between the structuralist and the post-structuralist understanding of binaries to illuminate how these oppositions are able to invert the hierarchies which they are meant to maintain:

> Structuralism was generally satisfied if it could carve up a text into binary oppositions (high/low, light/dark, Nature/Culture and so on) and expose the logic of their working. Deconstruction tries to show how such oppositions, in order to hold themselves in place, are sometimes betrayed into inverting or collapsing themselves, or need to banish to the text's margins certain niggling details which can be made to return and plague them.

The difference between the structuralist project of "exposure" and the post-structuralist project of "dissolution" is that the latter suggests the possibility of criticism beyond binary limitations. The collapse of binaries is therefore necessary to amplify the focus on subversive gender categories. Butler's work is significantly influenced by Derrida's subversive examination of binary structures, and literary criticism is heavily indebted to Derrida for questioning the foundations

upon which entire hierarchies of thought have been constructed (Eagleton 1983: 132). According to Derridian philosophy, hierarchical systems of thought which depend upon a "founding principle" or a logocentric assumption, such as male dominance for example, are defined "by what they exclude" (Eagleton 1983: 132). In other words, the historical dominance of men and masculinity would not have been possible were it not for the consequential alterity, or Otherness, of women and femininity. Derrida's philosophy alerts the reader to the function of exclusion; the dominance of one element is dependent on the exclusion of its opposite. In fact, the very assertion of one element would imply its opposite. Deconstruction reveals how the split between the dominant "one" and the alternative "Other" relies on an artificial distinction to maintain the superiority of the "one". Eagleton (1983: 133) elaborates on the role of deconstruction in challenging the rigidity of this binary logic:

> Deconstruction…has grasped the point that the binary oppositions with which classical structuralism tends to work represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies. Ideologies like to draw rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth and falsity, sense and nonsense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth.

These rigid boundaries restrict the production of meaning within language and discourse, which subsequently stunts the creation of meaning within culture. Eagleton points out that ideology selects what is acceptable, and what is not. Therefore, because queer sexuality has historically been rendered as an unacceptable form within ideological discussions, queer must be consciously removed from this marginalised position. The analysis of texts in this dissertation demonstrates how varying discursive trajectories are restricted by the ideological ceiling of binary oppositions. The title of the novel *My Lesbian Husband* exemplifies this restriction. The woman in this title is

a husband, as opposed to being a wife. This distinction is problematic because it establishes a strict binary within the relationship. The husband/wife fails to create relational possibilities *outside of* these sociocultural expectations because historically, husband/wife was a functional binary to describe the roles played by a man and a woman in a heterosexual marriage. The origin of the word husband is hūsbōndi from the Old Norse, which literally meant "master of a house" while the word wife in Old English simply meant "woman" (Answers.com). If these definitions are interpreted literally, to "become" a man's wife was to become his woman, while "taking" or accepting a man as a husband was to accept him as the master of the home. The binary inherent in language thus creates a dynamic in which both partners adopt the identity category that corresponds to masculinity or femininity. The adoption of husband/wife could be problematic for LGBTI relationships, many of which are redefining commitment and marriage outside of traditional binaries. However, it is possible to reclaim historically repressive or derogatory terms for the purpose of empowerment, as long as the terms are not uncritically integrated into new discourses. An alternative to this would be fluid identity categories which do not delimit gender roles to masculine or feminine modes of behaviour, and which seek to expand "what language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender" (Butler 1990: 9). Butler (1990: 113) uses the term lesbian as "a category that radically problematises both sex and gender as stable political categories of description", and thus it becomes clear that structures in gender cannot be taken for granted or assumed as dominant.

In his analysis of post-structuralist theory, Eagleton (1983: 134) elucidates the parameters of structure within literature:

> [A] structure always presumes a center, a fixed principle, a hierarchy of meanings and a solid foundation, and it is just these notions which the endless differing and deferring of writing throws into question.

Deconstruction queries the notion of a presumed center, and allows meaning to be deferred in order to create alternatives that subvert the primacy of the binary logic. The subversion of a solid foundation of meaning is also evident in Butler's (1990: 1) challenge of the category "women":

> The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of 'the subject' as the ultimate candidate for representation or, indeed, liberation, but there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women.

Butler's interrogation of the representation of "women" as a category within feminism could also be applied to the strictures of the female/male and feminine/masculine binaries within gender identity. The category "women" fails to represent all women, just as femininity fails to define all women. Some feminists embraced the so-called feminine qualities of women (nurturing, maternal instincts, creativity, closeness to nature, and so forth) in opposition to the patriarchal domination of masculine qualities such as aggression, competition and power. However, this reinforces the stereotypes that underlie the masculine/feminine distinction. Butler's (1990: 37) critique of a feminist discourse that seeks to isolate "women" as a "natural" category is based on the criticism of the culture/nature binary:

> The binary relation between culture and nature promotes a relationship of hierarchy in which culture freely 'imposes' meaning on nature, and, hence, renders it into an 'Other' to be appropriated to its own limitless uses, safeguarding the ideality of the signifier and the structure of signification on the model of domination.

The category "women" – which corresponds to the "nature" element in the nature/culture binary – is thus relegated to the position of alterity or Otherness in an attempt to elevate its status over that of assumed patriarchal domination. Although the feminist movements have made enormous strides towards the liberation of women, there is disagreement about exactly which groups of women have benefitted most from feminist movements, since women of colour and LGBTI women are often still stranded on the outskirts of representation. Butler (1990: 128) asserts that any identity category founded on the principle of exclusion limits the trajectory of its representational power:

> What a tragic mistake, then, to construct a gay/lesbian identity through the same exclusionary means, as if the excluded were not, precisely through its exclusion, always presupposed and, indeed, *required* for the construction of that identity.

An overzealous attempt to release homosexuality from the "grip" of patriarchal dominance could defeat the purpose of gender subversion because an obsessive focus on heteronormative control reinscribes power back to the hegemony. When Butler (in Fuss 1991: 17) refutes the idea that patriarchy is wholly to blame for the inequality within sexual orientation, she presents a convincing argument about the assumed dominance of heterosexuality:

> Is it not possible that lesbian sexuality is a process that reinscribes the power domains that it resists, that it is constituted in part from the very heterosexual matrix that it seeks to displace, and that its specificity is to be established, not *outside* or *beyond* that reinscription or reiteration, but in the very modality and effects of that reinscription.

The attempt to differentiate lesbian sexuality as an entity with specific qualities that are entirely removed from the heterosexual matrix will be unsuccessful. Lesbian sexuality defeats its own purpose when it assumes that rejecting heterosexuality will render lesbian specificity more

powerful. If heterosexuality continues to be trumped as inevitable, and homosexuality defined as an "alternative" sexuality derived from or imitating heterosexuality, then queer identities will always be classified as inferior, the "Other" and a bad copy of the ideal. For this reason, the gender categories in this dissertation avoid reverting to lesbian. The purpose of queer theory is not to establish the legitimacy of lesbian or gay sexuality because to establish legitimacy assumes that the category was illegitimate in the first place. Instead, the rigid distinctions drawn between heterosexuality and homosexuality are blurred. Butler (1990: 121) insists that both categories of identification are legitimate in their own right:

> My own conviction is that the radical disjunction posited by Wittig between heterosexuality and homosexuality is simply not true, that there are structures of psychic homosexuality within heterosexual relations, and structures of psychic heterosexuality within gay and lesbian sexuality and relationships.

If the historically indelible lines between heterosexuality and homosexuality are blurred and later possibly eliminated, then the domination of "One" over the "Other" will become redundant. In fact, Kopelson (2002: 19) argues that queer and performative theories are wary of the notion of a "gay" category, because this shifts the priority to homosexuality and creates the type of essentialism which the notion of queer opposes:

> In its disintegration of coherence and especially pointed assault on any notions of the real, performativity, and queer theory more generally, 'renders the entire category of "the gay" suspect' (Savoy 138), and instead exposes and dismantles the regulatory processes of subject formation and categorization themselves.

Butler (1993: 237) explains that "heterosexual norms are not commands to be obeyed, but imperatives to be twisted and queered as heterosexual imperatives are not necessarily subverted

in the process". The deconstruction of this binary becomes possible when it is established, as Butler points out, that neither category is mutually exclusive but that elements of both sexual "orientations" are present in its "opposite" (Butler 1990: 121).

The author of *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, Jeanette Winterson, has been criticized for her exclusive focus on lesbian sexuality. Laura Doan (1994: 138) points out that Winterson's rejection of heterosexuality prevents the subversion of naturalized gender categories:

> As with *Oranges*, where the reconceptualization of the normal makes lesbian experience possible by, in effect, reversing the dominant culture's definition of the natural and unnatural, in her more recent work [*Sexing the Cherry*, (1989)] Winterson stalls any potential charge of transgression, or label of transgressor, by appropriating the very terms that legitimize heterosexual union.

Doan adopts Butler's stance on the fallacy that springs from the rejection of heterosexuality. As with any instance of discrimination, there is an understandable tendency for the discriminated-against community to disassociate in ideological terms from the group performing the discrimination. The danger in any form of separatism, however, is the enhanced power that it affords the hegemony. Doan (1995: 146) warns against the danger of reinstating power back into the hands of the hegemony:

> [T]he continued reliance on the terms of heterosexuality – indeed, the lesbian's inability to exist without it – is troublesome because the lesbian is still situated within the binary itself.

Butler refuses to present heterosexuality and homosexuality on a continuum, with each orientation on opposing ends with degrees of heterosexuality or homosexuality defining a

subject. Because discourse is a discontinuous activity – it has various manifestations, some which exclude each other – these exclusions generate a critical potential for structuring new discursive domains and practices (Foucault 1972: 4) Butler (1990: 2) explains that juridical power creates the reality of a subject who is then punishable by the law:

> Juridical power inevitably 'produces' what it claims merely to represent; hence, politics must be concerned with this dual function of power: the juridical and the productive. In effect, the law produces and then conceals the notion of 'a subject before the law'[1] in order to invoke that discursive formation as a naturalized foundational premise that subsequently legitimates that law's own regulatory hegemony.

The law's production of subjects called "women" serves to legitimate its control over the subject. Therefore, production and control cannot be separated, even though the law claims only to control that which has willingly resigned itself to control and regulation. For this reason, a subject position such as "lesbian", originally created by the law in order to pathologise and control, cannot escape the bind of the law since this same law has created and thus inadvertently controls this identity category. Butler (1990: 2) argues that "[f]eminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women'…is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought". This model of production and restraint can similarly be applied to the category "gay and lesbian". Just as "women" is not a stable category, but rather a "a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety", "gay and lesbian" signifies redundant identity categories that have erroneously been assigned a common identity, while ignoring crucial differences of race, gender, class and ethnicity (Butler 1990: 3). The

[1] References throughout this work to a subject before the law are extrapolations of Derrida's reading of Kafka's parable "Before the Law," in *Kafka and the Contemporary Critical Performance: Centenary* Readings, ed. Alan Udoff (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 1987). Butler 1990: 150 (Footnote 2).

binaries of sex and gender reinforce the stagnation of gender categories, as Butler (1990: 19) clarifies in her exposition of Foucaultian theory:

> For Foucault, the substantive grammar of sex imposes an artificial binary relation between the sexes, as well as an artificial internal coherence within each term of that binary. The binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and mediojuridical hegemonies.

The reaction to this limit of "gay and lesbian" has been the introduction of queer identity, queer theory, and the process of queering, into literary theory. Queer introduces the possibility of gender and identity which supercedes the limitations of "gay and lesbian". The identity category queer complements the deconstructive process because it could potentially circumvent redundant categorisation.

This dissertation identifies women in texts who do not reject masculinity as the representation of a heteronormative ideal, but who embrace masculinity within gender as suited to women as much as femininity could be. Butler's (1990: 21– 22) critique of Monique Wittig's interpretation of gender as the "unproblematic claim to 'be' a woman and to 'be' heterosexual" highlights the limitation inherent in these binaries:

> In the case of both 'men' and 'women,' this claim tends to subordinate the notion of gender under that of identity and to lead to the conclusion that a person *is* a gender and *is* one in virtue of his or her sex, psychic sense of self, and various expressions of that psychic self, the most salient being that of sexual desire…Hence, one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair.

Butler critiques the notion of gender "being" an expression of an inner self. This "being" is also restricted to either one or the Other, which compels a subject into binary identification. Butler's (1990: 22 – 23) detailed investigation of gender construction veers away from a focus on enforced patriarchy or dominant heterosexuality:

> 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.

Thus the existence of masculine depends on the existence of its opposing feminine. The deconstruction of this binary assumption will not only free the category "women" from its interdependence on female which is equated to feminine forms of identification, but will also enable the construction of gender that resists adoption of either masculine *or* feminine. Butler (1990: 6) elaborates upon this argument by reminding the reader of the problematic sex-gender relationship which is the source of this binary: "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it." Although Butler's politics is perhaps not as radical as Wittig's rejection of "sex", the inadequacy of these two genders becomes evident in the analysis of different subject positions which are unable, or rather unwilling, to satisfy the expectations of the masculine/feminine binary. Within a social context, a feminine gender is expected to mirror a biological female sex, and restricts the development of gender outside the parameters of what is culturally associated with female/feminine behaviour.

While examining the tension between sex and gender binaries, it is also necessary to understand the tension which Butler (1990: 8) terms the "conventional philosophical polarity between free

will and determinism". This polarity comes into play within the context of performative identity formation. Often the question is asked: "Are you born gay, or do you *become* gay?" Butler (1990: 8) applies the criteria of social construction to the problem of gender construction by challenging the idea that gender is constructed deterministically on "passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law". Since gender is not a state of "being" but is fluid and performative, Butler maintains (1990: 15) that the stability of the category of "women" remains suspect:

> Without the compulsory expectation that feminist actions must be instituted from some stable, unified, and agreed upon identity, those actions might as well get a quicker start and seem more congenial to a number of 'women' for whom the meaning of the category is permanently moot.

Similarly, the category "lesbian" threatens to exclude women who do not fit either masculine or feminine expressions of gender. It also becomes evident in a text such as Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* that women who reject the gender identity associated with their biological sex are excluded from both the categories of women and lesbian, and thus they become unidentifiable. To achieve a gender fluidity that opposes these restrictions, Butler (1990: 8) proposes the liberation of the body from the confinement of a "passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed". In opposition to the idea of the body as a passive recipient of meaning, Butler (1990: 8) suggests that gender is not simplistically imposed upon bodies:

> Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender; the question then emerges: To what extent does the body *come into being* in and through the

> mark(s) of gender? How do we receive the body no longer as a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will?[2]

These questions challenge assumptions about gender construction as either a choice of will or the result of cultural inscriptions. Although gender is not chosen at will, as one would choose an outfit of clothing, neither is it forced upon a subject unknowingly through the historicity of hegemonic expectations. Butler (1990: 9) suggests that the limitations of gender are determined by the binary structures of hegemonic discourse:

> The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture…These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic culture discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality.

This does not imply that these "unimaginable" forms of gender do not exist, as is evident in the endless array of gender configurations within the LGBTI[3] community. What is absent however is language to describe the difference that until recently was unspeakable because of the limitations of "universal rationality". This dissertation suggests that the "queering" of language is an alternative to the hegemonic linguistic structures that impose their rationality on the expansion of gender.

[2] Note the extent to which phenomenological theories such as Satre's, Merleau Ponty's, and Beauvoir's tend to use the term *embodiment*. Drawn as it is from theological contexts, the term tends to figure "the" body as a mode of incarnation and, hence, to preserve the external and dualistic relationship between a signifying immateriality and the materiality of the body itself. See Butler 1990: 152 (Footnote 15).

[3] Some organizations extend this acronym to include a Q, i.e. LGBTIQ, which denotes a "questioning" identity category. These individuals usually identify as heterosexual and are said to be in a process of exploring their own sexuality and do not identify as either of the other categories in the LGBTI acronym.

gender as performative

Berger, Wallis & Watson (1995: 6) argue that Foucault's assumption that power is productive, as opposed to being restrictive, provides the scaffolding for Butler's theory of gender construction: "According to Foucault's model of gender…identity is not fixed but fragmented and shifting. Thus it is possible to destabilise conventional notions of identity and gender." For Foucault, power is modeled on "'disciplinary systems' [which] are the processes and institutions through which power is replicated and enforced" (Berger, Wallis & Watson 1995: 5). The instability of power structures is the loophole through which alternative categories of gender can be created. Therefore discourse is not fixed, but inherently unstable. Butler (1993: 12) advances this theory by examining the constraints inherent in sex categories:

> When, in Lacanian parlance, one is said to assume a 'sex,' the grammar of the phrase creates the expectation that there is a 'one' who, upon waking, looks up and deliberates on which 'sex' it will assume today, a grammar in which 'assumption' is quickly assimilated to the notion of a highly reflective choice. But if this 'assumption' is *compelled* by a regulatory apparatus of heterosexuality, one which reiterates itself through the forcible production of 'sex,' then the 'assumption' of sex is constrained from the start.

At issue here is the assumption that biological sex forcibly "causes" its corresponding gender. Sex is not the product of a stable, immovable entity, but is produced by the constant reiterations of hegemony. Therefore the inversion of this hegemony allows a challenge to the power structures that restrict the fluidity of gender categories. Butler (1993: 14) contends that the category of sex is produced by the law:

> If 'sex' is assumed in the same way that a law is cited – an analogy which will be supported later in the text – then 'the law of sex' is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced by the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command.

This ontological power inherent in the reiteration of sex categories destabilises the assumed priority of the law since the repetition of any speech act is dependent upon these repetitions for its continued production and existence. Butler (1993: 14 – 15) explains that the law is therefore not a stable entity which exists in a prior state to the law in itself:

> The presumption that the symbolic law of sex enjoys a separable ontology prior and autonomous to its assumption is contravened by the notion that the citation of the law is the very mechanism of its production and articulation.

This implies that the "power of the law" is only as functional as its repetitions; the law is created by the force of repetitions and does not exist as an entity that "governs" by the force of its own transcendent power. Therefore, the limits of sex or gender created by the repetition of any given speech act, such as the legal pronouncement of "man and wife", rely upon the reiteration of this act within a context of heterosexual superiority for its continued existence. According to Butler, it is crucial to challenge the origin of the subject, because therein lies the possibility of reframing queer identity in terms of subverted power relations. Butler maintains that the formation of the subject position "I" is *preceded* by the iterable force that gives that subject its power to speak, act and make binding decisions. The example she uses is that of the judge in a court of law. Butler insists (1993: 225) that s/he is not powerful because s/he exists as a proponent of the law; rather, the judge wields power by repeating speech acts, which are then accepted as part of discourse:

> Indeed, it is through the invocation of convention that the speech act of the judge derives its binding power; that binding power is to be found neither in the subject of the judge nor in his [sic] will, but in the citational legacy by which a contemporary 'act' emerges in the context of a chain of binding conventions.

The power inherent in these spoken repetitions defines the power underlying heterosexual discourse. The judge who will "pronounce you husband and wife" has been articulating that legal phrase since the formal instatement of legalised marriage. Thus, heterosexual marriage is legitimate because of the power inscribed by the repetitions of the acts and the legal pronouncement of these acts. Marriage ceremonies between men and women have become socially entrenched because they have been repeated over many millennia. As a result of the historical refusal to acknowledge or accept the legitimacy of "alternative" relationships marriage and families, it has been impossible until recently to create a "chain of binding conventions", since any relationship *outside* of heterosexuality was outside of the law and the "binding power" of its conventions. Paradoxically, this power imbalance creates an ideal environment to imagine shifts in power, such as those now being documented in queer theory and culture. Butler's (1993: 109 – 110) interpretation of Foucault exposes the limits of power:

> In his words, 'In general, I would say that the interdiction, the refusal, the prohibition, far from being essential forms of power, are only its limits: the frustrated or extreme forms of power, are only its limits… In the case of sexuality, which is no ordinary instance, the prohibitive law runs the risk of eroticizing the very practices that come under the scrutiny of the law. The enumeration of prohibitive practices not only brings such practices into a

> public, discursive domain, but it thereby produces them as potential erotic enterprises and so invests erotically in those practices, even if in a negative mode.[4]

Historical records suggest that women who were *visible* as lesbian couples were arguably a greater threat to the dominance of heterosexuality than perpetrators of other sexual transgressions because the former created "alternative" households that challenged the ideals of heteronormativity. In anti-gay rhetoric, pivotal arguments are often built around the fear of families that transcend the norm of a male father and a female mother. What is often underscored in hate-speech against the family structure in the LGBTI community is that gay families are perceived as a threat to the dominance of hegemony not because they are doomed to fail but because they have been shown to provide a viable alternative to an assumed norm.

The analysis of selected lesbian fiction deconstructs instances in the texts where characters challenge the expectations of hegemony by engaging in social structures that were previously exclusive to the heterosexual community. The assumption of power from hegemonic sources is challenged by identity categories that insist on representation by the tangibility of their presence. Importantly, the gender category queer uses the power that has attempted to illegitimise the individuals that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual or intersex to its advantage. The ideal of heterosexual exclusivity is rendered as obsolete by the illumination of the instability of *any* gender category. When it becomes clear that it is simply the historical repetition of heterosexuality as a norm that affords it a position of historical dominance, then the possibility of reframing any previously marginalised gender is introduced. Butler explores the role played by

[4] See my "The Force of Fantasy: Mapplethorpe, Feminism, and Discursive Excess" in *Differences*, 2:2 (1990), for an account of how the eroticization of the law makes it available to a reverse-discourse in the Foucaultian sense. Butler 1993: 269 (Footnote 13).

queer politics in the reassignment of power to gender categories that have previously been (mis)understood as alternative, impossible or unimaginable in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. Butler (1993: 223) asks whether it is possible to reassign the term queer as "an affirmative resignification" given its history of injury and insult: "If the term is now subject to a reappropriation, what are the conditions and limits of that significant reversal?" Butler (1993: 224) critiques Nietzsche's theory of history as "a continuous sign-chain of ever new interpretations and adaptations" and reminds us that "[n]either power nor discourse are rendered anew at every moment; they are not as weightless as the utopics of radical resignification might imply." However, Butler (1993: 224) explains that the convergent force of *both power and discourse* simultaneously "constrains and enables their reworking" and therefore the terms of injury constitute a part of the "resignifying practice". This irony enables a closer examination of queer – both the word "queer" as a signifier of subversive possibilities, as well as queer as used in a political sense.

The dictionary defines "queer", when used as a noun, as "an offensive word for a homosexual, especially a man, which is, however, also used by some homosexuals about themselves" (McIntosh, Turnbull, & Wehmeier 2005: 1189). When the meaning of a historically derogatory word is inverted by a subject, as the dictionary definition explains in this rudimentary way, there is a possibility for the meaning to be altered to eliminate the negative connotation of the word. The word "queer" in this dissertation includes gay men, lesbian women, transsexual men and women, men and women who cross-dress, men and women who identify as intersex[5], as well as

[5] "(medical) The physical condition of being partly male and partly female" (McIntosh, C. Turnbull, J. (eds.) & Wehmeier, S (chief ed.)

transgender men and women. Sections of the gay and lesbian community have claimed "queer" for themselves by converting what historically constituted verbal abuse into a new identity category that is not limited by previously repressive identity categories. Other examples of this inversion from the LGBTI include words like 'queen', "an offensive word for a male homosexual who behaves like a woman" (McIntosh, Turnbull, & Wehmeier 2005: 1189), and *moffie*, a derogatory Afrikaans word to describe a gay man (Marais, Morgan & Wellbeloved 2009: 5-7). Despite the negative connotations inherent in these words, individuals who identify as queer have reclaimed these words for themselves to describe uniquely gay or lesbian experiences and/or identity categories. Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon (2002: 95) situate the term 'queer' as a slogan of empowerment for individuals who have refused to accept the labels associated with gay and lesbian identification:

> Queer Nation embraced many communities of sexual dissidents and those refusing to identify themselves by any of the available labels. They reappropriated the term 'queer' as the banner under which such *dishomogenity* and *differences* could be claimed… Its contemporary use within political activism and consequently academic theory is therefore a conscious reclaiming and resignification of the term to put it to use in a positive and productive way.

However, the historical *absence* of words to describe individuals from the LGBTI community which are not demeaning or derogatory has contributed to an overall absence of a language to describe the experience of identifying as queer. For this reason, members of LGBTI communities have often times adopted the language of the heterosexual community. Butler (1993: 226) elaborates on the possibility of creating a reality in the process of its naming:

> The term 'queer' has operated as one linguistic practice whose purpose has been the shaming of the subject it names or, rather, the producing of a subject *through* that shaming interpellation. 'Queer' derives its force precisely through the repeated invocation by which it has become linked to accusation, pathologization, insult.

In contemporary discourse, queer creates a space of resistance in which power can be renegotiated by subjects who reject the adoption of gender roles based on biological sex. The explosion of queer theory, queer politics, queer literature and film, queer studies and the process of queering suggests that the word queer has escaped the confines of hate speech. Importantly, Butler (1993: 228) insists that queer should not be exploited as a comfort zone where gender stereotypes become new bastions of subjugation:

> If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and future imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively.

The political work that Butler refers to is the creation of categories of gender that transcend masculine and feminine, as well as challenge the Otherness of non-heterosexual sexuality. Queer is subversive when the citation of the word becomes a space that allows for radical alternatives of gender identification. While queer theory challenges the heterosexual matrix and its boundaries, it attempts to avoid the creation of new boundaries that exclude a substantial amount of people from the "gay and lesbian" category. For example, some feminists have asked whether transsexual women are "real women" (Alsop et al. 2002: 96). This dissertation explores gender

theory that avoids either the creation or policing of gender or sexuality. Instead, as Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon (2002: 96) argue, gender configurations must include previously unimaginable gender identities:

> The goal is to open up possibilities which our dominant discourses on sex and gender foreclose and which have also been missing from a gay and lesbian movement concerned to delimit its boundaries.

For many individuals in the LGBTI community, queer has signified, either in its spoken or written form, a discriminative labelling on the basis of a failure to conform to expected gender stereotypes. Many people in the LGBTI community are often labeled queer when they do not "fit" either the physical or psychosocial criteria expected of male and female children at a particular developmental stage. Kay Deaux (in Machover Reinisch, Rosenblum & Sanders 1987: 290) suggests that "[g]ender stereotypes have traditionally been defined in terms of the presence or absence or certain specific personality traits." Although in the twenty-first century masculine/feminine stereotypes based on occupational choices are not as firmly entrenched in some societies, children and teenagers who are perceived as markedly different in terms of sex role behaviour are often labeled as "different". An accusation of "queer" usually follows an observation from a child's or teenager's peers that s/he lacks the traits that correspond to his or her biological sex. Although the scope of this dissertation does not allow for a detailed sociocultural investigation of gender stereotypes throughout history, an awareness of the historical force of sex/gender expectations is necessary for the analysis of characters within texts who have inevitably been subjected to these gender stereotypes.

Because gender is fluid, identification need not be predicated on binding traits of masculinity or femininity, but rather on the performative instability of queer parody and possibly even drag. It is evident that the fluidity of gender mimics the discontinuity of discourse. A woman who identifies as gay, for example, is not ontologically gay because she prefers relationships with women. Her identity in her lifetime may shift and alter according to the gender roles that she plays in different relationships, or the performances she gives according to the "audience" who is observing her. Within Butler's philosophy, the pivotal link between gender and performativity is that gender is produced by performative or authoritative speech acts as opposed to being stable and unitary. Butler (1993: 225) maintains that the domain of performatives is one in which discourse becomes a form of power:

> Performative acts are forms of authoritative speech: most performatives, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power[6]…If the power of discourse to produce that which it names is linked with the question of performativity, then the performative is one domain in which power acts *as* discourse.

Performative acts of queer have the power to produce the alterity inherent in LGBTI gender positions by acting as the antithesis to hegemonic discourse. Butler (1993: 226) explains that the discourse of queer becomes a site of trouble when the shaming of the subject associated with its utterance is inverted: "The term 'queer' emerges as an interpellation that raises the question of

[6] It is, of course, never quite right to say that language or discourse "performs," since it is unclear that language is primarily constituted as a set of "acts". After all, this description of an "act" cannot be sustained through the trope that established the act as a singular event, for the act will turn out to refer to prior acts and to a reiteration of "acts" that is perhaps more suitable described as a citational chain. Paul de Man points out in "Rhetoric of Persuasion" that the distinction between constative and performative utterances is confounded by the fictional status of both: "…the possibility of language to perform is just as fictional as the possibility for language to assert" (p.129). Further, he writes, "considered as persuasion, rhetoric is performative, but considered as a system of tropes, it deconstructs its own performance" (pp. 130-131, in *Allegories of Reading* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987]. Butler 1993: 281 – 282 (Footnote 4).

the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity." Butler (1993: 226) compares the power of queer to shame with "the heterosexualization of the social bond" to illuminate the force of reiterated performatives. If the future contingency of gender categories depends on the power of a queer performative to invert the assumed configuration of social power within gender, the nature of the performative queer needs to be explored in further detail.

In her article "Dis/Integrating the Gay/Queer Binary: 'Reconstructed Identity Politics' for a Performative Pedagogy", Karen Kopelson (2002: 17) alerts that Butler's *Gender Trouble* has been pivotal in its contribution to the development of the theory of queer performative:

> Subverting common-sense beliefs that gender and sexuality are fundamental truths of the self, *Gender Trouble*…tells us instead that both are always acts, expressions, behaviors, which, like performative speech acts, bring into existence that which they name, and, through their repetition, come to constitute the identities they are purported to be.

Kopelson confirms that the performance of sexual difference, such as female masculinity for example, establishes the performative identities within discourse. Butler (1993: 225) develops the theory of gender performativity in terms of the relation of power to its subject:

> [T]here is no power, construed as a subject, that acts, but only, to repeat an earlier phase, a reiterated acting that *is* power in its persistence and instability. This is less an 'act,' singular and deliberate, than a nexus of power and discourse that repeats or mimes the discursive gestures of power.

Power is reinscribed within marginalised categories when subversive performances become established as repetitive acts which produce alternative discourses. This shift in power is detailed in Butler's (1990: 41) exposition of the Lacanian position of sexuality within the symbolic order:

> If there is a sexual domain that is *excluded* from the Symbolic and can potentially expose the Symbolic as hegemonic rather than totalizing in its reach, it must then be possible to locate this excluded domain either within or outside that economy and to strategize its intervention in terms of that placement.

The symbolic is also maintained under threats of punishment. In relation to Lacan's position on the symbolic, Butler (1993: 96) emphasises the function of punishment in the maintenance of symbolic power:

> Over and against those who argued that sex is a simple question of anatomy, Lacan maintains that sex is a symbolic position that one assumes under the threat of punishment, that is, a position one is constrained to assume, where those constraints are operative in the very structure of language, and, hence, in the constitutive relations of cultural life.

Who or what decides which symbolic position is abject and thus deserves punishment? The "one" who assumes this position, keeping in mind Butler's insistence on the formation of an "I" who occupies such a position, is made aware of the limited number of identifications which s/he may adopt without punishment. The introductory chapter of the anthology *Constructing Masculinity*, Berger, Wallis & Watson (1995: 3 – 4) summarise Butler's writings on the tension between gender as constructed versus gender as performative:

> [G]ender, rather than merely constructed, is performative, [in] that it inevitably unfolds as a series of 'performed' operations that render complex meanings about the normative standards that we cannot escape, the choices that we make, and the means by which we

> represent both…The formation of gender differences in language – that is, the ways in which categories of the masculine and feminine are defined by and eventually ingrained in language – most often produces a rigid and fictive construction of reality. Men and women, therefore, are condemned to conform to binary sexual differences that appear to be inevitable, even natural.

The complexity inherent in gender performance becomes imperative to the interpretation of subversive gender categories, since the instability of gender enables binary logic to be challenged. The relationship between language and its construction of reality points to a situation within the text where there is no separation between what is said from what is imaginable. If we assume that language is not a simple reflection of reality, but rather that language plays a part in the creation of reality, then it becomes clear why gender performances would be stifled by the absence of language to express gender outside of the binaries discussed above. Eagleton (1983: 60) illustrates that meaning is produced by the presence or absence of language:

> The hallmark of the 'linguistic revolution' of the twentieth century, from Saussure and Wittgenstein to contemporary literary theory, is the recognition that meaning is not merely something 'expressed' or 'reflected' in language: it is actually *produced* by it. It is not as though we have meanings, or experiences, which we then proceed to cloak with words: we can only have the meanings and experiences in the first place because we have a language to have them in.

For this reason, the limits of gender expression are a consequence of the deficiency within language to adequately express the multitude of gender orientations, positions or performances within the biological category of women. Butler's theory on the performativity of gender marks a turning point in writing on gender identity because the nature of the performative lends itself to

the fluidity and nonspecificity which will enlarge the scope for gender identity in the future. It is imperative to note that the performative nature of gender as described above does not imply a performance as one would find in a theatre. Butler (1993: 231) has often corrected misinterpretations by critics who have analysed gender performance in terms of consciously "acting" a particular gender. Rather, a subject is embodied in a constant process of repetitions, "an assignment which is never quite carried out according to expectation, whose addressee never quite inhabits the ideal s/he is meant to approximate" (Butler 1993: 231). The notably subversive nature of repetitive performative gender acts is such that "one might construe repetition as precisely that which *undermines* the conceit of voluntarist mastery as designed by the subject in language" (Butler 1993: 231). However, gender performatives in the form of drag, for example, are not, as Butler (1993: 231) writes, "unproblematically subversive" because although drag may reflect the "mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized", these same performances may also "reidealize heterosexual norms *without* calling them into question." What makes gender performances subversive is the instability of repetitions – it becomes impossible to isolate a fixed nucleus within any gender position because this position is constantly shifting as the subject moves between both masculine and feminine modes. Drag exposes the mechanics that have produced the reign of heterosexuality; the hyperbolic nature of drag shows the instability of heterosexuality as a sexual orientation by illuminating the importance of repetition that is required to maintain its existence. Performing gender subversively requires a radical distance from gender stereotyping that confines subjects to the mundane expectations of the binaries discussed above. The subversive potential of even derogatory representations of sexuality is evident when forbidden alternatives become "thinkable". Queer theory takes advantage of marginal representations of queer subject positions

to simultaneously increase the visibility of alternatives, and to use these marginal positions to invert power structures. Throughout the textual analysis in this dissertation, marginal subject positions will be exemplified as potential spaces for the expression of subversive gender categories.

the function of drag

The function of the hyperbolic in drag is the most important concept within gender performativity for the sake of this dissertation. Drag can be defined as a performance of gender that does not match the expectations of biological sex, for example, a woman dressed in a "man's" suit, or a man in "women's" dress and heels. According to Butler (1993: 237), drag is hyperbolic because it exaggerates stereotypically masculine and/or feminine codes of dress and behaviour to expose the feeble nature of gender norms:

> The critical promise of drag does not have to do with the proliferation of genders, as if a sheer increase in numbers would do the job, but rather with the exposure or failure of heterosexual regimes to ever fully legislate or contain their own ideals. Hence, it is not that drag *opposes* heterosexuality, or that the proliferation of drag will bring down heterosexuality; on the contrary, drag tends to be the allegorization of heterosexuality and its constitutive melancholia.

This deconstructive *exposure* of the heterosexual ideals is the subversive function which the parody of heterosexual norms serves. The "taken-for-granted quality of heterosexual performativity" is exposed through the allegory of drag. Therefore "drag can be read for the way in which hyperbolic norms are dissimulated as the heterosexual mundane" (Butler 1993: 237). Once again Butler does not, in contrast to Wittig, attempt to reallocate power within

homosexuality at the expense of heterosexuality, but rather illuminates the inextricable link between a previously "compulsory heterosexuality" and new forms of queer that glean their imaginability from the structures of this assumed superiority.

The analysis of queer subject positions within texts will investigate whether the characters's various expressions of drag, some more noticeable than others, either employ drag to parody or reemploy power: "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency"* (Butler 1990: 137). The imitative function of drag sheds light on the instability of gender in order to challenge the idea that one "is" one's gender, whether gay or straight. Crucial to this notion of drag in texts is the idea that "complex dynamic exchanges of lesbian and gay relationships" do not "'mirror' or replicate" each other, but rather introduce a range of possible gender identifications for which academic language has yet to formulate descriptions (Butler 1993: 239). The complexity inherent in queer sexualities affirms the futility of labelling any gender position as exclusively masculine or feminine. Butler (1993: 239) argues that desire and identification cannot be assumed to join sex and gender together as would be expected:

> For, if to identify as a woman is not necessarily to desire a man, and to desire a woman does not necessarily signal the constituting presence of a masculine identification, whatever that is, then the heterosexual matrix proves to be an *imaginary* logic that insistently issues forth its own unimaginability.

How does queer contest the "terms of sexual legitimacy?" (Butler 1993: 232). Butler's (1993: 232) call to "theatricality" within queer performative requires the "hyperbolic gesture" which she insists is "crucial to the exposure of the homophobic 'law' that can no longer control the terms of

its own abjecting strategies." Examples of such theatricality imply "the convergence of theatrical work with theatrical activism[7]" which will expose the "injuries of homophobia" (Butler 1993: 233). The hyperbolic gesture finds expression in a gender such as female masculinity, an identification which will be discussed as a subversive possibility.

Subversive representations of the masculine/feminine binary can be explored within LGBTI sexuality once it has been established that gender is not a stable entity, or a basis from which recognisable gender categories that adhere to the expectations of either masculinity or femininity can be constructed, since gender is not a state of being which remains constant within a subject. Although names such as *butch, femme, and dyke,* for example, have been strongly criticised within academia, this study will demonstrate the usefulness and necessity of these terms. As Butler (1990: 122) explains, radical lesbian theorists such as Wittig who attempt to overcome the category of sex entirely, and thereby reject terms which depend on feminine or masculine identification, overlook the "discourses within gay and lesbian culture that proliferate specifically gay sexual identities by appropriating and *redeploying* the categories of sex" (my emphasis). Although the construction of *gender* is challenged in this dissertation, Butler (1990: 122) shows how the distinctions inherent in sex categories – male and female – remain valuable for the purposes of subverting heteronormative gender categories:

> The terms *queens, butches, femmes, girls,* even the parodic reappropriation of *dyke, queer* and *fag* redeploy and destabilize the categories of sex and the originally derogatory categories for homosexual identity. All of these terms might be understood as

[7] See Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989): Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, eds., *AIDSDEMOGRAPHICS* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990); and Doug Sadownick, "ACT UP Makes a Spectacle of AIDS," *High Performer* 13 (1990): pp. 26-31. My thanks to David Roman for directing me to this last essay. Butler 1993: 283 (Footnote 13)

> symptomatic of the 'straight mind,' modes of identifying with the oppressor's version of the identity of the oppressed.

These terms allow for expressions of gender that do *not* mimic the "straight mind" but rather redeploy the binary of sex to expose the limitations of heterosexual gender. As is the case with the word "queer", these terms empower a queer subject by re-claiming words that are steeped in a pejorative history. Furthermore, Butler states that masculine identity in a woman does not imply imitation of heterosexual norms. The fact that a gay woman may identify as masculine is "brought into relief against the culturally intelligible body" (Butler 1990: 123), i.e. her female body. In the same way, women who identify as feminine do not necessarily imitate the expectations of heteronormative femininity: "Lesbian femmes may recall the heterosexual scene, as it were, but also displace it at the same time" (Butler 1990: 123). The disjunction between femme identification combined with the desire for the female body complicates the stability of feminine. Therefore a gay woman who dresses or "acts" in a way that could be traditionally understood as feminine, while simultaneously engaging in erotic interplay with another female body or bodies, suggests a fundamental break with femininity as understood in terms of heterosexuality. What is important with regard to the contingency of gender configurations is not the abolition of either masculine or feminine, or even male and female, but rather the way in which these binaries are applied to gender constructs – either destabilising or reinscribing heteronormativity.

This dissertation shows that masculine and feminine remain useful as categories to explore interaction between queer subjects. However, this binary should not be simplistically applied to gay women based on their identification as butch and/or femme. It does not follow that women

who may appear to be physically butch necessarily identify as masculine and that femme women identify as feminine. The deconstructive thrust of this analysis suggests that both categories in the binary should be freely available to a subject as a mode of gender identification and should not be restricted by either sex or gender expectations. Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon (2002: 98) reiterate the importance of sociocultural specificity for the analysis of gender performances:

> What counts as a performance of masculinity or femininity is *highly contextual* and varies according to social context over time, cross-culturally, and for one person throughout the course of their lives (my emphasis).

This contextuality makes it impossible to name an essential "butchness" that could represent all women who to some degree identify as masculine. The same could be said of lesbians who identify as femme. Butler (1990: 123) reiterates this point in her explanation of femme desire:

> The object [and clearly, there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay.

Given the complexity of gender identity within the body of queer theory, it would be imprudent to assume that masculinity or femininity alone could account for the entire range of behaviours, appearances, speech acts and performances in any given subject throughout her lifetime. The stability of biological sex (when this is the case) has very little to do with the stability of an identification of masculine, feminine or a combination of both, or any category that supersedes either of these two.

A brief investigation of female masculinity will be used here to elucidate the disjunction between sex and gender as observed in lesbian identity categories. In her highly acclaimed work *Female*

Masculinity, prominent queer theorist Judith Halberstam explains how the gender expectations imposed on a young girl intensify as she reaches puberty. Halberstam (1998: 6) explains that a girl who is "tomboyish" i.e. displays so-called masculine traits as opposed to those that would be expected from a girl, experiences greater pressure to assimilate traits that are more fitting to girls when she reaches a certain age:

> Gender conformity is pressed onto all girls, not just tomboys, and this is where it becomes hard to uphold the notion that male femininity presents a greater threat to social and familial stability than female masculinity…for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression. It is in the context of female adolescence that the tomboy instincts of millions of girls are remodeled into compliant forms of femininity.

This "compliant" femininity is problematic because it compels the adoption of feminine traits within the context of compulsory heterosexuality. The constraint mentioned above would forbid the erotic desire of women by women and therefore enforces predictably hegemonic gender constructions. There is a marked difference between a girl who behaves like a tomboy, but identifies as heterosexual in later life, in contrast to the tomboy for whom this stronger identification with "boyish" behaviour dress and activities is only the beginning of gender identification that aligns itself with masculinity. Halberstam (1998: 2) argues that this identification becomes problematic since in most sociocultural contexts, masculinity has been reserved for biological males:

> This widespread indifference to female masculinity…has clearly ideological motivations and has sustained the complex social structures that wed masculinity to maleness and to power and domination.

Masculinity has been exclusive to men for a number of reasons, arguably the most important being that the *power* inherent in masculinity has been reserved until recent decades for men, as Halberstam explains above. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (in Berger, Wallis & Watson 1995: 13) suggests that "we strongly resist…the presupposition that what women have to do with masculinity is mainly to be treated less or more oppressively by the men to whom masculinity more directly pertains." Sedgwick (in Berger Watson & Wallis 2005: 13) argues that the performance of masculinity is not limited to the male body: "As a woman, I am a consumer of masculinities, but I am not more so than men are; and, like men, I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities and a performer of them." It is significant to note that Sedgwick simultaneously underscores both the *consumption and production* of masculinities, thus confirming that gender is a performative act that requires a complex engagement with gender. The consumption and production of masculinity exemplify the instability of gender found in the queer project, and demonstrate precisely the impossibility of claiming either *one or the Other* as one's gender. Another important factor in the prohibition on female masculinity is that, as discussed earlier, gender and desire have been inextricably linked. Thus, female identification as masculine would preclude male desire, thereby disrupting the erotic tension in heterosexual relationships. Within gay and lesbian studies, as well as in queer theory, female masculinity has become a viable category for women, although this gender position has been fraught with bitter conflict within feminist and lesbian circles. In defence of female masculinity, Halberstam (1998: 1) reminds the reader that "far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity." Female masculinity is not inferior, or a "bad copy" of the original, in the same way that homosexuality does not originate from or attempt to imitate heterosexuality. When female masculinity is positioned in

contrast to traditional forms of masculinity, it becomes clear that both female and male bodies have contributed towards the creation of what Halberstam (1998: 1 – 2) calls “heroic masculinity”. When masculinity is extricated from the male domain, it becomes pliable enough for use in the configuration of subversive sexualities. Instead of the need for obliterating the concepts of masculine and feminine, it then becomes possible for individuals to adopt masculine or feminine gender behavior regardless of whether their bodies and/or gender match the corresponding identification. Binaries that delegate male and female behaviour to subjects according to their sexual orientation are then destabilised. The tension between identification with masculine gender by a subject with a female body will be explored in depth in Jackie Kay’s novel *Trumpet*.

Chapter Two

Trumpet by Jackie Kay

Jackie Kay's debut novel *Trumpet* is inspired by the life of American jazz musician Billy Tipton, a biological woman who passes as a man throughout his life, marries a woman, and adopts five children. Tipton's female biology is only discovered after his death. The inclusion of transgender identity in *Trumpet* makes the novel well-suited for the exploration of subversive gender categories. The gender identities in *Trumpet* are particularly useful for challenging the concept of lesbian specificity, and as such the text can be read beyond the confines of lesbian identity. *Trumpet* is, as Tracy Hargreaves (2003: 5) suggests, an important contribution to the literature that challenges the connection between sex and gender:

> *Trumpet*…is part of a long tradition within literature and film that accounts for, celebrates, satirizes, politicizes, historicizes and theorizes some of the possible relations between sex and gender, of which passing or transgender is just one particular manifestation.[8]

[8] A conservative sample takes us from George Moore's The Secret Life of Albert Nobbs in which the head servant of a Dublin hotel is, on his death bed, revealed to be a woman; Woolf's cross-dressing transsexual psycho-biography Orlando (1928); Radclyffe Hall's study of tortured and martyred inver-sion, The Well of Loneliness (1928); Djuna Barnes's gothic sub-culture of transvestism in Nightwood (1936); Ursula LeGuin's feminist-utopian The Left Hand of Dark-ness; Gore Vidal's warring and satirical Myra and Myron in Myra Breckinridge; Angela Carter's The Passion of New Eve (1977); Jaye Davidson's portrayal of Dil in The Crying Game (1992); Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues (1994); Patricia Duncker's James Miranda Barry (1999); Dinitia Smith's The Illusio-nist (1998) and

Kay's text portrays transgender identity and exposes the social prejudice leveled against the transgender character in the novel. This chapter also explores the effects of the gender trouble in the life of a transgender man. Transgender is particularly useful in its inversion of the expected link between the body and the embodiment of gender. *Trumpet* tells the story of Joss Moody, an African-Scottish trumpet player who was born a biological female, Josephine Moore, and lives as a man throughout his adulthood. Joss marries Millie McFarlane, a heterosexual woman, and they adopt a bi-racial baby boy, their son Colman. A number of the sections in the novel are narrated by Millie, who insists upon the ordinary nature of their marriage. Millie's perception of Joss's gender variance as ordinary contributes to the argument against the restrictive nature of gender binaries. In contrast to Millie, however, Colman refuses to accept the idea that his father was a woman. His reaction to the news of Joss's sex provides the basis upon which to illustrate prohibitions against gender difference within heteronormative discourse. Significantly, Colman remarks that the discovery of Joss being a lesbian would have been less traumatic than the discovery of Joss passing as a man. Colman's distinction between lesbian identity, in contrast to Joss's transgender identity, highlights the reality of transphobia, as opposed to the specificity of homophobia.

The performances of gender difference in this novel illustrate why the inclusion of transgender and transsexual identities within the broader spectrum of gender identity is crucial for the enlargement of the scope of gender. The voices of the characters that represent the legal and medical professions in the text signify the dominance of restrictive hegemonic discourse, and declare the fissure between Joss's body and his gender as an abject and unspeakable

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Boys Don't Cry, the film account (released in 2000), both based on the true story of Brandon Teena, murdered for passing as a man. Hargreaves 2003:5 (Footnote 3)

impossibility. The punishment of gender difference and its relegation back into a notion of acceptability become the performed functions of the doctor, the funeral director, and the registrar. After Joss's death, the doctor tries to consolidate Joss's gender and sex, but her red pen that categories Joss as "female" cannot erase a lifetime of masculine identification. The law also requires the agreement of Joss's sex and gender. The registrar tasked with issuing Joss's death certificate finds it impossible to reconcile the disjunction between Joss's female body and his masculine identity. Colman is seduced into collaboration with the sensation-seeking journalist Sophie Stones, who attempts to write a biographical exposé of Joss's life. Sophie's crude stereotypes about Joss's transgender identity signify the broader social ignorance about gender difference, and specifically transgender identity. Sophie thus also represents heteronormative discourse, and emotionally blackmails Colman into revealing details about his father's private life. However, Sophie's attempts at using Colman and Joss's friends and former colleagues as sources of information are ultimately unsuccessful, and in the end Millie and Colman reunite after Colman comes to terms with his father's identity. The dissonance between Joss's female anatomy and his masculine gender identity undermines the obligatory link between sex and gender.

The subversive potential in Joss's gender performances introduces the prospect of innovative gender configurations that invert or obliterate the requirements of the binaries of sex and gender. In other words, the embodiment of Joss's masculinity in his anatomically female body subverts the gender identity that would be expected of Joss as a woman, and more specifically as a black woman in the 1960s and 1970s. Importantly, the unspeakability of Joss's difference in *Trumpet* originates from subjects other than Joss and Millie. For Joss and Millie, his performances of

masculinity are an "ordinary subversive". The abjection of Joss's difference is located within the heteronormative discourse presented by the multiplicity of voices that tell their version of Joss's story. These diverse voices allow for the exploration of transphobic prejudice against the radical dislocation of Joss's gender in terms of his biologically female body. Hargreaves (2003: 5 – 6) explains that the context of gender difference is important to the reading of gender subversion:

> And yet, although all these films, texts and histories disrupt or threaten the received orthodoxies that attempt to calcify relations between maleness and masculinity, femaleness and femininity, their significance and interest also lie in *their precise differences and historical locations*, whether they are satire, pastiche, political parables, or cultural exposures, exploring the myths, ideologies and pathologies that happen in the interstices of sex and gender (my emphasis).

Therefore, gender difference cannot be read as separate from the specific milieu within which gender is performed. The sociopolitical context of any gender performance becomes invaluable in the analysis of difference and radical Otherness. Differences of race and class function as cultural imperatives that further complicate the rejection of sex and gender binaries. Often the violence enacted upon these bodies stems from their rejection of normative sexuality that contradicts the expectations of class and race.

female masculinity and lesbian identity

The deconstruction of *Trumpet* argues against a reading of Joss as a lesbian woman who adopts masculinity as a mask to enable him to negotiate his existence as a musician in a male-dominated environment. Rather, Joss subverts the authenticity of his female body as a transgender man, i.e. he identifies as a man who inhabits a female body. This analysis of Joss's gender construction

demonstrates how his identification as a male, or perhaps more accurately as a masculine subject, is an act of masquerade that positions his anatomically female body in a masculine gender space. Hargreaves (2003:5) observes the significance of Joss's transgender identity in her examination of Kay's text:

> Joss's ambiguity beckons towards an androgynous aesthetic that is as much about a refusal of substance, as it is about a transgender identity that insists upon, to borrow from Judith Butler, a material body that matters.

The significance of this ambiguity lies in the fact that Joss occupies a space in which the rigid masculine/feminine binary is destabilised, because a feminine gender does not imply a female body. Halberstam (1998: 9) laments that, historically speaking, and in some contemporary discourses, feminist and lesbian theorists often pathologise visibly masculine women. However, Joss's passing as a man is empowering in that he chooses to construct an identity that defies society's prescriptions on the relationship between gender and sex. Given the premise of this research to negotiate gender as a *fluid* category that cannot be captured in any one moment of identification, it could be argued that Joss's navigation of identity as firstly a girl and then later as a man is significant in that Joss need not *be* either one or the other gender. Indeed, it is this normative obsession with either girl *or* boy that limits the expansion of gender constructs beyond biological binaries, and which makes the premise of gender as an unstable performative possible.

Because Millie's voice insists upon the normality of her and Joss's marriage, a deconstructive reading of *Trumpet* employs Millie's perspective as the signifier of gender queer, a voice that offers a possibility of meaning beyond the binary structures of language. Some theorists have raised the concern that Joss's masculine performance(s) simply imitates those of a heterosexual

man, with Millie as the wife and Joss as the husband. On the surface, it may appear that Millie performs the role of a heterosexual wife and mother. However, Millie's relationship with Joss remains subversive because she performs this role within the context of radical difference, since her husband transcends his female biology to perform masculinity. Butler (1990: 123) suggests that masculinity in women is thrown into relief by the existence of the female body. This does not imply that gender meaning reverts back to the body, but that the biology of a transgender man such as Joss offers the possibility of challenging heteronormativity because of the radical difference that exists in subjects who identify outside of the natural confines of their anatomical bodies. The radical possibility of gender subversion is, however, one which some lesbian feminists counter as denial of lesbian love and identity. In her article "The Truth is a Thorny Issue': Lesbian Denial in Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*", Ceri Davies (2006: 6) interprets Millie's failure to question Joss's gender as such a denial:

> If Millie accepts that Joss was not a man – that his masculinity was no more than a costume – then she changes her definition of herself, from wife to lesbian. Millie denies the latter categorisation, and seeks to defend her right to be called first a wife, and then a widow, by demanding that people accept her chosen role, and she is forced to deny some essential truths about the relationship.

Queer theory seeks to steer clear of "essential truths" since these imply that identity is in some way natural and therefore rigidly static. Millie's predicament is not her denial of lesbianism because neither she nor Joss identify as lesbian. Therefore the absence of Millie's shock when she learns about Joss's body should not be interpreted as the repression of Millie's female voice. Davies (2006: 6) supports her argument of Millie's lesbian denial with a reference to Millie's silence after Joss's revelation his sex:

> At a point when the reader expects Kay to include reaction, explanation or justification, there is nothing. Instead, Millie changes the subject by focusing her attention on the world outside her window: 'It is light outside now, a frail beginning light' (Kay 1998: 21). Stopping the narrative at such a crucial moment, Kay denies Millie the opportunity to explore and express her feelings. The denial of a reaction – positive or negative – is the denial of a right to a reaction, and this refusal to confront her basic feelings characterises the way Millie expresses herself throughout the text.

Millie's emotional bond with Joss supersedes her need to interpret Joss's choice to identify as a man, and as such she is not denied the right to express her feelings. Millie mourns the loss of a companion whose sex was irrelevant. If Millie silently accepted Joss's transgender identification, it is because the subversion of his sex did not dominate or define their relationship. If anything, Millie's silence liberates her from the obsessive restriction of gender based on a particular sex. After Joss's death, Kay (1998: 21) describes how Millie reminisces about the early days of their relationship and describes the evening Joss revealed his body to her for the first time:

> I'm excited watching this man undress for me. Underneath his vest are lots of bandages wrapped round and round his chest. He starts to undo them...He keeps unwrapping endless rolls of bandages. I am still holding out my hands when the first of his breasts reveals itself to me. Small, firm.

Joss's disclosure, although surprising, fails to repel Millie or alter her perception of their relationship. Joss's desire to identify as a man is more important than the expectations of his biology. Kay's (1998: 11) stresses the normality of Joss and Millie's relationship in Millie's description of their love, which is not focused on Joss's physical difference, but rather on Millie's desire for Joss when she meets him for the first time:

> I can still picture him the day we met in that blood donor's hall in Glasgow. How could I have known then? He was well dressed, astonishingly handsome, high cheekbones that gave him a sculpted proud look; his eyes darker than any I'd ever seen. Thick black curly hair, the tightest possible curls, sitting on top of his head, like a bed of springy bracken. Neat nails, beautiful hands. I took him all in as if I had a premonition, as if I knew what would happen. His skin was the colour of Highland toffee. His mouth was a beautiful shape. I had this feeling of being dragged along by a pack of horses.

Millie insists that their relationship was ordinary despite living in a socially conservative context that would frown upon gender variation. Even before the reader is aware of the fact that Joss is biologically female, Millie describes him as a man, her husband and lover: "I married a man who became famous. He died before me. He died recently. Now what am I? Can I remember? Joss Moody's widow" (Kay 1998: 8). Hargreaves (2003: 6) asserts that Millie's narrative contradicts any attempts to pathologise Joss, and as such presents a compelling subversive possibility:

> Her narrative is in dispute with the repeated attempts to re-inscribe Joss as female, lesbian, dyke or pervert, a range of biological, sexual and medical categories, which are offered as possible solutions to the riddle posed by the perceived dislocation of Joss's lived masculine gender and the material fact of his moribund female body.

Because Millie refuses any of these labels for herself or for Joss, her voice denotes the queer alternative, which is the possibility of fluidly expressing gender beyond either male or female sex.

Butler's (in Fuss 1991: 17) critique of lesbian specificity insists that locating gender identity in a single category introduces the danger of reverting power back to heteronormativity:

> To argue that there might be a *specificity* to lesbian sexuality has seemed a necessary counterpoint to the claim that lesbian sexuality is just heterosexuality once removed, or that it is derived, or that it does not exist.

Any form of specificity becomes restrictive when an emphasis on its exclusivity limits the imaginability of alternative categories, as has been the case with heteronormative discourse throughout history. Queer theory attempts to open up patterns of identification so that lesbian identity is not seen as a neatly encompassing category that represents all gender variant women. As such, it could be argued that *Trumpet* is not a lesbian novel, since Joss identifies as a transgender man, and Millie related to him as a husband. In her article *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory*, Butler (1988: 521) introduces the notion of gender as an unstable performative:

> One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one's body and, indeed, one does one's body differently from one's contemporaries and from one's embodied predecessors and successors as well.

Joss's gender is located in the performances as Millie's husband, and the father of their child, and not within his biological body. Kay represents (1998: 22) Millie's anxiety as her desire to protect the sanctity of their relationship in light of the media frenzy surrounding Joss's death:

> I wish I could see Colman. What could I tell him – that his father and I were in love, that it didn't matter to us, that we didn't even think about it after a while? I didn't think about it so how could I have kept it from him if it wasn't in my mind to keep?

Millie and Joss are oblivious to the difference in their relationship and therefore they seem to extract a particular pleasure from their "secret", which ironically creates a world in which they are arguably less exposed to the mundane challenges faced by heterosexual couples: "For a split

second, I feel jealous, imagining what it would be like if Joss were ever unfaithful to me. Then I remember and feel safe. We have our love and we have our secret" (Kay 1998: 29). Hargreaves (2003: 3 – 4) argues that the invisibility of Millie's and Joss's difference – they pass as a heterosexual couple – threatens the structures of heteronormativity:

> It is precisely Millie's ordinariness that is the source of the threat she poses to dominant sex-gender systems; neither consciously queer, nor camp, nor femme to Joss's butch, Millie's love for Joss quietly announces that anatomically differentiated bodies need not, as Judith Butler observed in her influential *Gender Trouble*, be the guarantee of heterosexuality. Neither, of course, need their cultural assumption of masculinity and femininity mask the homoerotic desire that seems to percolate their unconscious sensibilities and that reverberates around the revered object of the trumpet.

The observation of their homoerotic desire complicates Millie and Joss's assumed position as a heterosexual couple since the assumption of a masculine/feminine binary does not necessarily exclude the possibility of same sex desire. When Millie describes the breast-binding and packing[9] rituals that she and Joss perform together every morning, Kay (1998: 238) alerts the reader to the fact that gender is a conscious performance, which in this case serves as a complex masquerade:

> I wrapped two cream bandages around his breasts every morning, early. I wrapped them round and round, tight. I didn't think about anything except doing it well. Doing it well meant wrapping tight. The tighter I wrapped, the flatter his breasts. That was all he was concerned about. He didn't care if it was uncomfortable. It probably was a little. I don't remember us saying anything whilst I did this I don't remember thinking much…He put

[9] Packing refers to the process of stuffing the crotch to imitate the shape of a phallus.

> on his boxer shorts and I turned away whilst he stuffed them with a pair of socks….My handsome tall man.

Millie captures the delicate sensitivity inherent in this ritual, as she silently performs her role in Joss's masquerade. Butler (1988: 519) expands upon the performative nature of gender in terms of the instability of repetitive bodily acts:

> [G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

As mentioned before, Butler's work is at pains to reject the binary distinction between the real and the copy, especially since the copy is usually classified as inferior to the real. The "stylized repletion of acts" would disprove what Davies calls "Joss's lie" and instead proves that the masculine masquerade is as real as so-called "original" masculinity in biological men. Kay (1998: 159 – 160) cites the response to Joss's life by a transvestite anonymous group:

> 'We question this notion that somebody who lives their life as a man and is discovered to be female at the time of death was really a woman all along. What is "really" in this context? What is the force of that reality?'
>
> *Transvestites Anonymous Group* (TAG)

For this reason, Joss's masculine gender should be acknowledged as authentic, as opposed to performances that conceal the "true" self of his female body. For Millie, Joss's masculinity is the "real", and any other form would be an imitation. The "force of reality" in this case is a reality of

performing a particular gender using repetitive acts that define the subject as a man or a woman. Butler (1988: 520) argues that the subversive nature of gender is found in the instability of its performances:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

What is pivotal in this quote is that these performances constitute gender in a given subject. Thus any subject can combine a unique set of repetitions to create a gender category that radically subverts the expectations of sex, or gender. Butler (1988: 520) also asserts that gender performances present the illusion of a self that exists prior to the performance:

> In opposition to theatrical or phenomenological models which take the gendered self to be prior to its acts, I will understand constituting acts not only as constituting the identity of the actor, but as constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief*.

The reader of *Trumpet* is aware of the fact that Joss is anxious to pass as a man, and that his performative acts are meant to create a believable illusion. Joss's repeated performances of breast-binding and packing, as well as his status as Millie's husband, define his gender as masculine. Although Joss was born a biological female, his gender identity as an adult is the gender that he creates through a lifetime of performative acts. According to Butler (1988: 521), Joss "does his body" in that his body is not simply a body, but is rather "an embodying *of* possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention". Butler (1988: 526) insists that gender is neither an individual choice nor a cultural inscription of norms:

> As a public action and performative act, gender is not a radical choice or project that reflects a merely individual choice, but neither is it imposed or inscribed upon the individual, as some post-structuralist displacements of the subject would contend. The body is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-given cultural relations.

Butler's theory of gender as performative opens a space in which playing at being an identity is as significant as "really" being that identity. According to Butler (in Fuss 1991: 18), the distinction between being and playing at being is nonexistent:

> To say that I 'play' at being one [a lesbian] is not to say that I am not 'really'; rather how and where I play at being one is the place in which that 'being' gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed.

Joss's masquerade – his male clothing, his hair style, bound breasts, and so forth – can be read as radical play that establishes his identity as a recognisable man. However, Joss's gender is not theatrical in the sense that he performs gender within specific contexts only, such as would be expected from drag queens on stage. For Joss, this play at being a man is not playful at all, but rather identification with masculine forms of dress and behaviour for the sake of his career and his marriage. According to Butler (1998: 527), "although theatrical performances can meet with political censorship and scathing criticism, gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions". For this reason, Butler (1988: 527) explains that gender as performative masquerade is subversive when it becomes integrated into the everyday performative:

> On the street or in the bus, the act becomes dangerous, if it does, precisely because there are no theatrical conventions to delimit the purely imaginary character of the act, indeed,

> on the street or in the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from a reality; the disquieting effect of the act is that there are no conventions that facilitate making this separation.

Joss's gender performances are therefore subversive because of their invisibility and the way the performative is integrated into Joss's daily life.

Gender is fluidly constructed in response to a variety of social expectations, such as women who are expected to perform femininity. When these social expectations are flouted or contradicted, as is the case with Joss, two important transitions occur. The first is that the anticipated relationship between sex and gender is obliterated, and secondly new possibilities for gender identification are created. Hargreaves (2003: 5) maintains that gender is expanded within and outside of texts when the "orthodoxies…that attempt to calcify relations between maleness and masculinity, femaleness and femininity" are subverted. Hargreaves includes Foucault's (1980: viii in Hargreaves 2003: 7) argument about the social prohibitions on more than one sex in a single body:

> Foucault has argued that: 'Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in a single body. Henceforth everybody was to have one sex.'

It becomes clear that the restriction on gender in a body of the "opposite sex" is a method of control enforced by a complex network of signifiers that conditions females to become women, and males to become men.

The extended gender performances in *Trumpet* hinge on Joss's ability to cross dress and successfully pass as a man through the course of his life. According to Butler (1988: 519), gender is primarily dependant on physical gestures linked to the body:

> [G]ender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.

Pivotal to this analysis is that Joss's gender is not simply a well-performed masquerade, but that gender identity is inherently unstable. Butler (1988: 528) contends that the assumed substance of gender is challenged explicitly by a performance such as Joss's masculine masquerade:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed.

Female masculinity therefore is a series of acts which exposes the performative nature of gender while simultaneously muting the biological reality, thus radically subverting the expectations of masculinity.

female masculinity and transgender identity

Judith Halberstam's brilliant exploration of female masculinity provides crucial insights into the adoption of masculinity by biological women. Halberstam elaborates on the premise that masculinity has for too long been the exclusive domain of biological men. Her in-depth study of different varieties of masculinity has challenged the notion that masculinity is associated primarily with the subjugation and exploitation of women. Halberstam's (1988: 2) introduction

to the concept of masculinity points to the privileged position occupied by heterosexual male subjects:

> Masculinity in this society inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege; it often symbolically refers to the power of the state and to uneven distributions of power.

What Halberstam's (1998: 2) writing achieves, however, is to remove masculinity from the "white male middle-class body" and instead shifts the focus to "the shapes and forms of modern masculinity [which] are best showcased within female masculinity" (1998: 3). Female masculinity illustrates the ways in which traditional masculinity has been constructed by illuminating how "many of these 'heroic masculinities' depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities" (Halberstam 1998: 1). This statement echoes Butler's previous arguments: far from being an imitation of the "real", queer identity serves to expose the artificial dominance of heterosexuality. Halberstam (1998: 1) argues that dominant forms of masculinity are dependant on the invisibility of alternative masculinities:

> I also venture to assert that although we seem to have a difficult time defining masculinity, as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust; many of these 'heroic masculinities' depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities.

Halberstam (1998: 9) also insists that female masculinity becomes a space in which the prejudice against masculine representations in female bodies can be challenged:

> Female masculinity is a particularly fruitful site of investigation because it has been vilified by heterosexist and feminist/womanist programs alike; unlike male femininity,

> which fulfills a kind of ritual function in male homosocial cultures, female masculinity is generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment, as a longing to be and have a power that is always just out of reach.

Female masculinity does not reinscribe patriarchal power when it functions to "destabilize binary gender systems" and in that way questions assumed understandings of masculinity. Joss, as part of an ethnic and sexual minority, presents an ideal platform upon which the stereotypical interpretation of masculinity can be challenged.

This analysis of Joss's character within *Trumpet* shows that Joss is not a woman who seeks the power inherent in heterosexual masculinity. Rather, Joss is a proponent of an alternative and liberating female masculinity. Halberstam's (1998: 143) discussion on the "border wars" between butch lesbians and transgender/transsexual men demonstrates the complexity inherent in the category of female masculinity:

> If we study the fault lines between masculine women and transsexual men, we discover, I point out, that as transsexual men become associated with real and desperate desires for reembodiment, so butch women become associated with a playful desire for masculinity and a casual form of gender variance.

This is an attempt to delimit a difference between the "real" and playful masquerade, which is what Butler argues against when she challenges the supremacy of the "real" over the imitation or "bad" copy of the real. For this reason, transgender women like Joss Moody present an opportunity to read the complexity of women who do not choose transitional surgery to change their sex, but who prioritise passing as a man. There is nothing light-hearted about Joss's terror

of doctors or the fact that he avoided any medical assistance, even on the brink of death. Kay (1998: 68 – 69) selects Colman's voice to narrate Joss's terror of medical professionals: "My father had a lifelong terror, phobia whatever, about hospitals. Makes a lot of sense in hindsight." Kay depicts the limitations associated with passing through masquerade and dress. Millie describes days at the beach where Joss sat fully dressed in the heat while she and Colman enjoyed the beach and sunshine.

Female performances of masculinity can be understood using the Derridean principle of iterability, which is the repetition of a performative understood as derived from a historicity of other performatives. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993: 13) quotes Derrida's writing on the nature of iterability:

> 'Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a "coded" or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a "citation"?'

Using this formulation, the analysis could question the pronouncement of a girl, or a boy, or a man or woman. In Leslie Feinberg's memoir *Stone Butch Blues*, the transgender character Jess is constantly interrogated from the earliest memories of her childhood: "'Hey pansy! Are you a boy or a girl?'" (Feinberg 1993: 16). Jess laments how "'the world's patience with me was fraying, and it panicked me'" (Feinberg 1993: 19). The world's impatience indicates the necessity to fit into either one or the other. Importantly, queer encompasses transgender identity, which seems doubly problematic because of its links to gay and lesbian identity, but which at the same time does not allow for the "comfort" of being either male or female. Jess describes a life in which she

agonises about the absence of women or girls whom she could identify with in her community. Feinberg (1993: 20 – 21) describes the day Jess secretly dresses up in her father's suit:

> I didn't look like any of the girls or women I'd seen in the Sears catalog...All the girls and women looked pretty much the same, and so did all the boys and men. I couldn't find myself among the girls. I had never seen any adult women who looked like I thought I would when I grew up. There were no women on television like the small woman reflected in this mirror, none on the streets. I knew. I was always searching.

The utterances "boy" or "girl" are therefore embedded in a heteronormative discourse and an individual is required to subscribe to either gender as a result of the historical force behind "boy" and "girl". Jess feels invisible because no women like her are visible on the streets. Her identity is therefore hinged on an abjected notion of her identity as invisible, unspeakable and unimaginable. Butler (1993: 13) explains that "the norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels." Identification with a particular sex is not "an imitative activity by which a conscious being models itself after another" but rather is a manifestation of an ego, which can also be equated with an "imaginary morphology" (Butler 1993: 13). This morphology is "orchestrated through regulatory schemas that produce intelligible morphological possibilities" (Butler 1993: 14). When Butler writes about intelligible possibilities, she highlights how many gender identifications remain unintelligible and are thus regulated and policed through the binary structures that define sex and gender. Butler (1993:1) elucidates Foucault's stance on sex as regulatory:

> The category of 'sex' is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault calls a 'regulatory ideal.' In this sense, then, 'sex' not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory

> practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of a productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls.

In light of Foucault's theory, then, Joss's body is controlled by a power that attempts to govern his identification with gender that matches his sex. Joss's body refuses to be demarcated into a feminine gender, despite that he is anatomically female. In this sense, *Trumpet* can be read deconstructively as a novel that allows for the production of new gender identifications.

Halberstam's (1998: 90) study of Radclyffe [John] Hall, author of the germinal lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness*, reveals that "clothing and costume and 'masquerade' were not the same thing for John, and she seems not to have equated her costumes with masquerade. Masquerade, for her, seems to have been about passing." Similarly, Joss does not use masculine clothes to simply appear masculine, but incorporates masculine masquerade to pass as a man in all aspects of his life. The need for such a clear distinction between a "he" and a "she", even when biology contradicts gender, is indicative of the major strides that are still needed to free gender and eventually sex from the binary confines they currently inhabit. Halberstam's detailed exploration of stone butch identity, as characterised in Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, illuminates the inherent tension even within the comparatively "narrow" queer category of butch. The specificity of stone butch suggests a category in which nonperformance ironically becomes the definitive aspect of the category (Halberstam 1998: 126). In contrast to Butler's definition of gender as a compulsory performance, a stone butch woman is identified as a butch lesbian who avoids certain forms of genital contact. The rampant critique levelled against stone butches, in this case most notably Butler's (1990: 123) assertion that stone butches might be implicated in "the most ancient trap of

female self-abnegation" amplifies the limited movement allowed for women who do not embrace "liberating" behaviour as has been defined by the feminist or gay and lesbian movements. Halberstam's defence of the stone butch alerts us to the fact that there is much work needed to release gender into the broader spaces of queer theory.

As mentioned in chapter one of this dissertation, Butler asserts that any gender that reinscribes the dominant expectations of heterosexuality does not serve to subvert restrictive gender categories. Halberstam's discussion on the theoretical differences between female masculinity and transsexuality demonstrates the subtle division between identity patterns that eventually revert back to essentialism, in comparison to gender that defies sex and the expectations that accompany it. Gender becomes problematic when butch lesbians are criticised for identifying as imitations of men, or transsexual men who have undergone surgery are lauded with the honour of being "real" men. Although transsexuality and the surgical process of transitioning from a woman to a man are beyond the scope of this essay, transsexual theory is valuable in illuminating some of the challenges within queer theory.

heteronormative voices

The rejection of Joss's identification as masculine is representative of the social strictures that limit both sex and gender expansion. The most important of these is Colman, Joss and Millie's son. Colman judges both his parents for their "freakish" lives after hearing the news of Joss's biology through the funeral director. Colman represents the heteronormative voice in the novel as he struggles to accept or embrace his father's transgender identity. His abusive outbursts can obviously be understood as expressions of the confusion and betrayal of a child who was denied

information about an important aspect of his father's identity. But Colman also questions the very foundation and legitimacy of his relationship with Joss. In Colman's mind, the fact that Joss was a woman radically alters the father-son relationship that formed a pivotal part of Colman's identity. Colman's disappointment is thus exacerbated by the fact that he views himself as a failure in comparison to his successful and well-known father. He depended on being "Joss Moody's son". This position of honour is shattered and Colman therefore feels doubly betrayed as a son who has been dependent on his father's approval and success for his own sense of purpose and self worth. Colman relates his yearning to belong to Joss as his son: "I pretended I didn't give a flying fuck what my father thought of me. But I did. I suppose I wanted him to be proud of me as a man, as a black man. I fucking worshipped him (Kay 1998: 49). Therefore, Colman's identity as a black man is challenged by the news that his father was biologically female. Blinded by rage, Colman agrees to reveal details about his father's life to journalist Sophie Stones. He recounts portions of his childhood to the journalist, and tells the story of their close-knit family. Hargreaves (2003: 12) explains that Sophie interprets female masculinity as a false representation of self: "Sophie's perception of Millie and Joss as 'butch frauds' suggests that lesbian identities represent an inauthentic or fraudulent masculinity, as though it is a con or not the real thing." Sophie is driven by the desire to expose Joss's lesbian identity, and this misinterpretation reveals Sophie's ignorance about the complexity of transgender identity. Hargreaves (2003: 12) points out that Sophie's journalistic endeavors are ultimately futile:

> Sophie's writing and trade are not only exposed for their crudity within the text, they are also rejected in the attempt to disengage the speculative generalizing of Joss's private life into a series of attacks upon transgendered lives.

Colman cannot comprehend why his father didn't "come out" as a woman, and his agony about no one else having a "father like mine" (Kay 1998: 57) is indicative of the unspeakability of gender variation. Colman refers to his parents' marriage certificate and wonders how they could be legally married as two women. For the sake of this analysis, the role of the law is significant as a barrier to life where sex and gender do not match. Were it not for legal formalities that require a man or a woman to be classified as either one or the other, Joss's sex would perhaps not have reached the media. Because Joss's gender threatens the structure upon which masculinity is built, "the story of Joss Moody relocates the terms of that question: for if a woman can successfully pass as a man, what then, is a woman, or, indeed, what is a man?" (Hargreaves 2003: 4, quoting Ginsberg, 1996: 8). After a violent inner struggle, Colman comes to terms with his father's difference. He refuses to collaborate further with Sophie and asks her: "'Who do you think I am? I am Colman Moody, the son of Joss Moody, the famous trumpet player. He'll always be daddy to me'" (Kay 1998: 259).

The medical and legal voices in *Trumpet*, which symbolise Foucault's regulatory regime, react with incredulity to the discovery of Joss's female body. The doctor who examines Joss's body after his death is concerned primarily with the "correct" word to classify Joss's body. She is clinical in her naming of Joss as female: "She looked at the word 'female' and thought it wasn't quite clear enough. She crossed that out, tutting to herself, and printed 'female' in large childish letters" (Kay 1998: 44). The emphasis on the clarity of the word "female" contrasts with the obscurity that marked Joss's biology throughout his life. Now after Joss's death, the doctor feels obligated to clarify the perceived misunderstanding of biology. In medical terms, Joss's masculine gender is irrelevant and he is relegated back to the realm of the body. The doctor uses

her "emergency red pen" to correct the mistake that she perceives as Joss's gender, which suggests the sense of pathology linked to people who do not match their sex and gender. Kay (1998: 43 – 44) describes Doctor Krishnamurthy's discovery of Joss's breasts; the doctor initially doubts that the breasts hidden underneath the bandages belong to a woman:

> When she first saw the breasts…she thought that they weren't real breasts at all. At least not women's breasts. She thought Mr Moody must be one of those men that had extra flab on top – male breasts. But they really were too big for that…It took her pulling down the pyjama bottoms for her to be quite certain.

The certainty of Joss's biology does not dissipate the doctor's confusion, and "wondered at the woman waiting for her downstairs" (Kay 1998: 44). A few days later when Millie's records Joss's death, the registrar cannot believe that Joss Moody and Josephine Moore are the same people: "It was as if she had brought to him the certificates and papers of two completely different people – a woman and a man (Kay 1998: 79). This fissure presents an interpretational gap in which gender, which is assumed to precede sex, can be radically subverted. It is significant that Kay omits narrating the time of transition in Joss's life. The reader is not told why or when exactly Joss began performing masculinity. After his posthumous examination of Joss's body, the funeral director narrates his shock at the absence of a penis and how he "found himself rummaging in the pubic hair just to check if there wasn't a very, very small one hiding somewhere. The whole absence made Albert Holding feel terribly anxious, as if he had done something wrong" (Kay 1998: 109). Holding's anxiety is hinged on the fact that Joss's body is undoubtedly female. He is concerned about the certificates that signify social expectations surrounding the sex-gender link, and the legal and medical authorities' function as having the final say in naming a subject as male or female. It becomes clear that there is no gray area for

gender identification given the binary parameters of biology. Kay (1998: 112 – 113) is aware of the punishment of sex and gender that do not correspond, as is evident in her description of the funeral director arming himself with a red pen to make any necessary corrections to Joss's certificates:

> If there was anything untoward in the death certificate, he would be duty bound to correct it with this very red pen…If he could have the satisfaction of brutally and violently obliterating 'male' and inserting female in bold, unequivocal red, then at least he would have something to do.

Hargreaves (2003: 3) suggests that *Trumpet* "dramatises what is at stake in the materiality of the body, and which specific cultural inquiries license a body's visibility or invisibility, its legibility or erasure." The red pen signifies the urgency with which gender errors need to be corrected. Joss's body, which was irrelevant to his gender orientation throughout his life, now becomes a threat to the essentialism of heteronormative discourse. Therefore, the funeral director cannot allow the disjunction between Joss's sex and gender to remain uncorrected. The insignificance of his red pen in contrast with the lived reality of Joss's body highlights the absurdity of a system that punishes those who live outside of cultural expectations. Hargreaves (2003: 7) explains why Joss's female body creates such panic:

> The revelation about Joss's secret body energizes a story of panic and prurience (we have to see in order to believe), but it also has to compete with another story of toleration and acceptance in an exploration of who, in the end, has the right to delimit identity: on what basis, according to whose authority, can an identity be, or not be, named as legitimate and legible?

Clearly, the doctor, the registrar, and the funeral director have the authority to rename Joss as female. Therefore, they pronounce Joss's chosen gender identification as illegitimate. Kay's (1998: 79 – 80) depiction of Millie's request for Joss to be registered as a man is met by the registrar's compassion, but also his "duty" to follow correct procedures:

> She asked Mr Sharif is he could be registered as a man. She said, rather enigmatically, it appeared to Mohammad, that this would have been important for her husband, to be registered in death as he was in life...He told the woman that he could not lie on a death certificate.

To the registrar, registering Joss as a man would be a lie. Millie, on the other hand, is proud of the fact that "Josephine Moore just plucked the name Joss Moody out of the sky and called himself this name and encouraged others to do likewise" (Kay 1998: 80). Joss's "lie" is liberating in that it creates a self-determined identity in which he consciously performs the gender of his choice, regardless of society's regulations, and the binary expectations of sex. Eventually it is Millie's "fine spirit" and her unhesitating confidence that convinces the registrar to write "Joss Moody" on the death certificate: "He paused before he ticked 'female' on the death certificate, then handed the pen to her" (Kay 1998: 81). At this point, Joss's name overshadows the ticked "female" box on the certificate, which is almost an afterthought. Joss's name, as a signifier of his performance as a masculine subject, legitimises his existence above his biological sex.

The expansion of gender configurations inherent in the life of Joss Moody suggests that the dissolution of the sex-gender link is pivotal to the subversion of gender norms. Because the performance of gender is unstable and fluid, gender configurations need not be limited to one

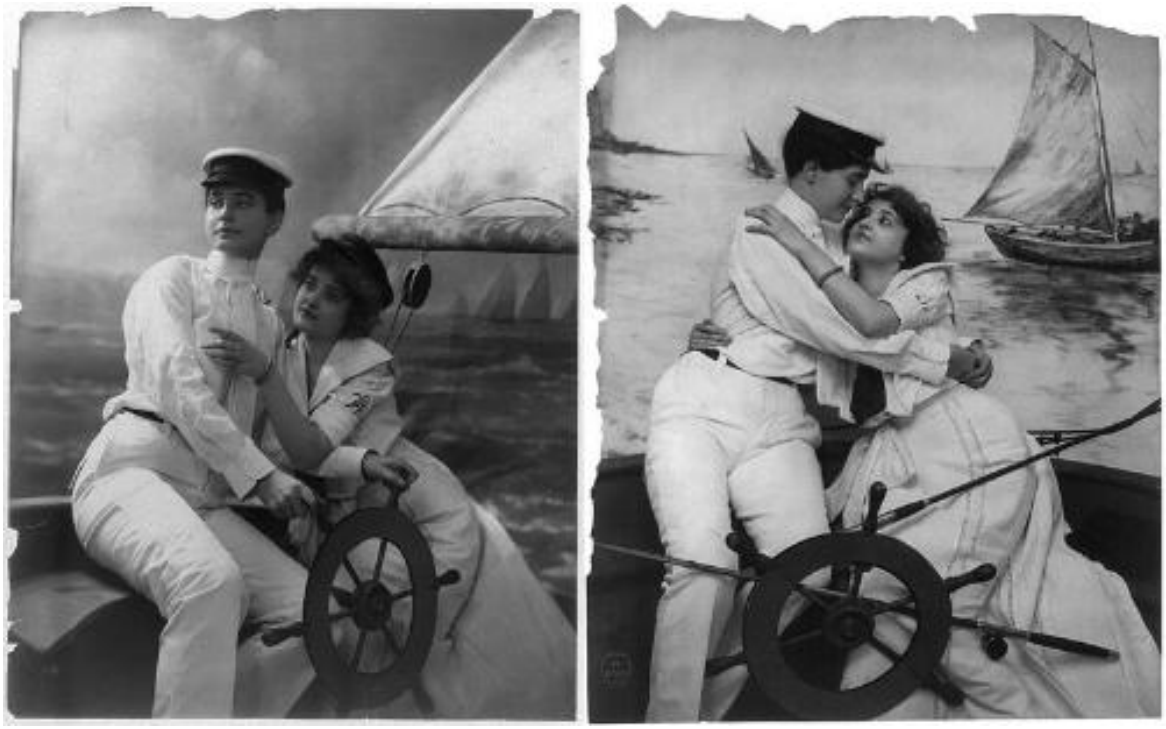
gender in the life of a man or a woman. Joss identified as both a girl and a man – this radical disjuncture points to the unnecessary strictures placed on gender identity. Kay (1998: 131 – 132) offers the reader a rare glimpse into Joss's thoughts; in the rare moment when Joss speaks, he expresses how music allows him to transcend both his sex and his race:

> When he gets down, and he doesn't always get down deep enough, he loses his sex, his race, his memory. He strips himself bare, takes everything off, till he's barely human…When he was something else. Somebody else. Her. That girl. The trumpet screams. He's hot. She's hot. He's hot.

The essentialist self that this description conjures up from Joss's childhood memory, the way he feels "himself" when the trappings of masquerade fall away, is challenged by Joss's declaration: "It is liberating. To be a girl. To be a man". For Joss, transgender identification is troublesome in that it allows him to identify as a girl in childhood and as a man in adulthood. Since neither identity is more real than the other, Joss is liberated by the embodiment of both.

Chapter Three

My Lesbian Husband by Barrie Jean Borich



The political project underpinning queer identity is to create spaces in which restrictive binaries are subverted to allow gender roles and norms to be challenged. In an attempt to create identity that sanctions gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual/transgender and intersex identifications, a dependence on gender specificity has emerged, and as a result many theorists and authors have become preoccupied with attaching labels to any form of sexuality. As shown in the previous chapter, Butler (in Fuss 1991: 17) has warned that reverting to lesbian specificity, for example, invites the danger of reinscribing the power structures lesbian identity seeks to overthrow. Identification as either one or the other, even *outside of* heterosexual categories, can be dangerous in that many categories rely on the adoption of either element of a binary.

As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the deconstructive analysis of contemporary lesbian fiction suggests ways in which alternative gender identification can be constructed. In her article "Queer Theory, Butch/Femme Identities, and Lesbian Space", Alison Eves (2004: 495) suggests the potential of subversive gender:

> Subversive and transgressive gender performances, although framed by the dominant discursive formation, may have some transformative impact, establishing new subject positions and [sub]cultural spaces.

This chapter will explore the creation of these spaces in *My Lesbian Husband*, a detailed autobiographic novel by Barrie Jean Borich, which tracks her journey from her early twenties into later life. Barrie writes about the development of her sexuality, using her relationship with her long-term partner Linnea as a backdrop against which she contrasts previous lovers and partners. An important sub-plot within the novel is the engagement of Barrie's younger brother Paulie to his Japanese girlfriend Mitsuko. The announcement of their engagement and their subsequent wedding become dominant themes which Borich uses to explore the expectations of a heterosexual marriage, understood in terms of heteronormative values, in contrast to Barrie's relationship with Linnea. Barrie contrasts the absence of the legal and social sanctioning of her "lesbian" relationship, with the festivities and religious ceremony associated with Paulie and Mitsuko's wedding.

Throughout the novel, Barrie returns to the question: "Are we married?" Barrie seeks to reconcile her lesbian identity with the absence of social approval for her choice of a masculine female partner. What complicates her relationship with Linnea is Linnea's female sex, in contrast

to her masculine gender identification. Linnea's masculine gender performances are amplified when compared to Barrie's predominantly feminine identification. Linnea is scrutinised as a woman who refuses to adopt feminine codes of dress and behaviour, and she is described as an openly butch woman, a "lesbian husband" who plays the male role in the relationship. This analysis problematises Barrie's preoccupation with classifying herself, Linnea and other individuals in her life as either gay or straight, butch or femme, and feminine or masculine. Both Linnea and Barrie are subjected to expectations of their sex and gender, although each woman identifies differently in terms of gender, i.e. Linnea as masculine and Barrie as feminine. A deconstructive textual analysis of *My Lesbian Husband* highlights each woman's attempts to negotiate gendered meaning in a sociocultural context that is hostile to any incongruence between the established sex/gender binary. The analysis also shows how this rigid division of subjects into binary categories restricts the expansion of new gender identifications which are able to subvert and challenge binary structures. Barrie's comparison of her own relationship with the heterosexual ideal, as represented by her younger brother and his fiancée, highlights the severe limitation presented by these heteronormative expectations.

Barrie offers a colourful account of lesbian love and relationships that is interlaced with her private mourning for the loss of the heterosexual ideals created in her childhood. It becomes clear, through Barrie's revelation of her mother's influence over her as a young child, how expectations of femininity are created in female children. There is almost no information given on Linnea's childhood. Barrie, however, describes in great detail Linnea's choice of clothes, body language and behaviour within their relationship, and therefore Barrie seems aware of the role that masquerade plays in the creation of gender. What is absent from this text, however, is

the dissolution of the distinction drawn between "real" identity and the masquerade of identity that exists at an external level. The division between outer and inner gender identification, with the inner as a psychic being that transcends the impermanence of gender, is problematic in that it creates the expectation that gender can be affixed to a single identification, such as a butch lesbian. The arguments presented in this chapter show that Barrie's classification of herself and Linnea as "husband and wife" creates a theoretical stalemate in which heteronormative expectations in terms of gender roles are reproduced. Barrie is concerned with the legitimacy of a wedding ceremony, and the sanctioning given by a religious figure, in this case the priest who marries Paulie and Mitsuko. The priest represents Lacan's symbolic law, which implies that these patriarchal structures play a significant role in determining the extent to which alternative commitment is sanctioned and recognised in a sociocultural context. In this text, gender categories are, as Butler (in Fuss 1991: 14) writes, "invariable stumbling blocks….sites of necessary trouble." The analysis shows how the problematic nature of identity categories creates the subversive space in which restrictions coerced upon identity can be challenged. Eves (2004: 480 – 481) contends that queer identity enables the butch/femme dynamic to be extricated from heteronormative ideals:

> Queer work on sexual and gender identities has enabled a reconceptualization of butch/femme roles and the construction of lesbian genders [Case 1993]. The problematized status of identities, theorized as contingent, shifting and positioned by discursive structures rather than as fixed properties of the individual, has enabled butch/femme to be viewed as both structured by and exceeding normative heterosexuality (Halberstam, 1998).

Therefore, butch and femme identity are not redundantly imitative of heterosexual identity, but are two of a myriad of possible identity categories which women who identify as queer can adopt. Barrie (Borich 1999: 129) highlights the enormous range of gender configurations available to women:

> These days lesbians speak with another kind of certainty, separating our genders from our genitals, lining up beneath myriad headings, *butch or femme, femmy butch* or *butchy femme, femme top* or *butch bottom, femme-to-femme* or *butch-on-butch, transgender*, or even still, plain old *lesbian feminist*.

However, although Barrie is aware of this multiplicity of genders, she struggles to reconcile her difference, as well as Linnea's masculinity, with the expectations of society.

who is the husband?

Deconstruction in this analysis suggests that the "founding principle" of lesbian specificity is redundant and does not allow for the possibility of expanding gender configurations. A deconstructive reading of *My Lesbian Husband* shows that a primary focus on lesbian identity construction in terms of a butch-femme binary, as well as a focus on the heterosexualised institution of marriage, restricts the potential scope of gender, a scope which is able to escape and subvert the outmoded categorisation of lesbian women as a bad copy of the heterosexual ideal. Barrie's use of terms such as "wife" and "husband" suggests that these labels encapsulate the identity of subjects who seek to escape heteronormative discourse, but who are also subject to its repetitive force under the law. The narrative focus of *My Lesbian Husband*, is, as the title suggests, that of binary labeling that assumes the role of each woman as either the "man" or the "woman", each of which is defined by an "essence" of femininity or masculinity. The rigid lines

drawn between gender roles downplay the possibility of transcending the binary that forces queer identity into lesbian specificity, a specificity that ultimately reinscribes power back to the misconstrued origin of sexuality, i.e. heterosexuality.

Throughout the novel, Barrie draws a sharp distinction between gay and straight identity, particularly in her examination of her previous relationships. Her insistence on lesbian behaviour as "different" opposes the liberatory project meant to free queer identity from the bonds of binary oppositions. Barrie is concerned about the "muscled body of the world" that threatens to separate her and Linnea. "The question is simple. Who are we, the two of us, together? If we could look down on ourselves from above, what would we see?" (Borich 1999: 9). Barrie's family struggles to accept her lesbian identity. Their homophobia is however reflected in Barrie's (Borich 1999: 18, 19) own interrogation of her mother's expectations:

> Throughout my childhood, I felt cornered by my mother's fantasy of a docile daughter, a princess myth from a Disney cartoon…If anything what I craved was under the crust, below the city's surface. I wanted to tunnel my way to a new home. And so, for better or worse, I did, but I had always felt I was less than I should be, a disappointing daughter.

Barrie's mother contrasts her daughter with the seemingly docile Mitsuko, her son's fiancée. Mitsuko is representative of the perfect daughter Barrie (Borich 1999: 19) believes her mother desires:

> But my mother was wrong if she thought Mitsuko was Cinderella, even if she came a lot closer than I did. Although Mitsuko was slight, spoke softly, looked like she needed protection, came from a country where women rarely lived alone, she had left her own

> family, worked as a travel agent thousands of miles from her home…She always had money in the bank and could book her own flight to anywhere.

Barrie's defence of her own acceptability as a lesbian woman involves proving that Mitsuko, as a heterosexual woman, is not as subordinate as she seems. For this reason, butch and femme identities seem to mirror the tension between heterosexual women and men. However, Eves (2004: 494) contends that queer identity is not an imitation of heteronormative values:

> Lesbian masculinities and femininities are frequently read as butch and femme and understood as derivatives of heterosexuality. Butch-femme is often characterized as imitative, unable to imagine an alternative to heterosexual styles, a copy of the 'real' thing.

Linnea is thus negatively viewed by Barrie's family as an imitation of a man, or as a husband, and she is invisible as the "unmarriageable stranger" (Borich 1999: 30).

Barrie and Linnea both perform gender within a space that requires a division into heterosexual and homosexual. Given this restrictive binary, Barrie's interrogation of marriage cannot move beyond the bounds of man and woman, or husband and wife. Barrie (Borich 1999: 5) insists on calling Linnea either a wife, or a husband:

> 'I think you're my wife,' she says…She is completely serious and not serious at all, in that queer way we learn to roll with a language we are at once completely a part of and completely excluded from.
>
> > 'Yes, honey,' I say. 'You are my wife, too.' But this is not the right word for it. I can feel the vague tensing in her limbs as she holds me, the structure of her embrace still solid as something deeper steps away. What is it in her that is

> compromised, knocked off its feet, when I call her wife? A sort of manhood? But this is not the right word either.

Barrie (Borich 1999: 5) is preoccupied with finding identity within the husband/wife binary, although it seems to falsely diminish the complexity of their relationship:

> But who does the word wife fit? Fishwife. Housewife. I don't like it either. But when Linnea calls me her wife all that falls away…We can only use this word if we steal it. Hidden in our laps it is better.

Barrie (1990: 6) now suggests that Linnea is her husband, affirming the assumed necessity of either sides of the binary:

> With this word, husband, I feel her relax, the flow between us returning. Can I call her my husband without meaning a man? Without meaning a woman who wants to be a man? Without even meaning a woman who acts like a man? Even now, over thirteen years a lesbian, I still meet men I am attracted to, but just from the surface layers of my skin. No man can touch my face, my lips, and cause everything in me to drop, bones to water, as Linnea can, as women like her, butch lesbians, do.

Barrie presents the complexity of desire that emanates from a woman like Linnea who defies the stricture between female biology and masculine gender identification. Barrie admits her desire for men, but explains that they cannot seduce her as satisfyingly as a butch woman can. Linnea's difference – her subversion of the norm that requires female anatomy to accompany feminine behaviour and dress codes to accompany female anatomy – defines for Barrie the desire that sweeps her off her feet. Unfortunately, the prohibition of desire between women has been fuelled by the pathologisation of female masculinity. Women such as Linnea, who identify as masculine,

have been placed under endless scrutiny. In the text, Barrie (Borich 1999: 122) refers to the law governing dress codes:

> In the days before gay liberation, women could be arrested, charged with transvestitism, for wearing fewer than three articles of women's clothing. On any day of the week, Linnea does not pass that test. Friends ask me why it matters what any of us wear. Our clothes, they say, are just the facile presentation of our surfaces. The real person is within, contained in our intangible soul.

The division between the clothes donned by gay women, and the essence of an "intangible soul" suggests that there is a need to justify or excuse Linnea's choice of performative gender, made tangible through her choice of men's clothes. Barrie's defence of her lover's wardrobe choices leaves the reader with a sense that this "intangible soul" is blameless in that it is not tainted with choices that contradict and challenge the heteronormative expectation of femininity. If gender is viewed as unstable and performative, the interpretation of the "real person" as an intrinsically inner being is troublesome in that it suggests gender as an indefinable aspect that can be separated from the gender choices an individual makes. Linnea's choice of clothing, her choice between two neckties, her performances as a masculine woman, is as "real" as the "intangible soul" that Barrie suggests. Barrie's questions highlight the expectation to fit the heteronormative role of either man or woman, female or male, masculine or feminine, and consequently the text reveals an absence of space within which to negotiate gender outside of these binaries.

Although Linnea rejects the role or label of wife, she seems more comfortable with being the husband, since this role is associated with masculinity. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the binary husband and wife originated to describe and solidify the power relations and unequal

gender roles which exist between men and women. However, within the context of LGBTI relationships, these binaries are questioned so that new rules of engagement are incorporated into these relationships.

As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, gender becomes problematic when any identity category is defined as stable and unitary, being lesbian, being a husband, being queer, as opposed to a fluid negotiation of these categories. Therefore, even categories of sex, of "being" a woman as opposed to "being" a man, create a space in which sex which is divided into female and male with its corresponding gender assumptions. This male/female binary serves to maintain heterosexual dominance, as well as the norms that define heterosexuality as the origin of sexuality. The problem with the butch/femme binary is that women who identify as femme sometimes remain invisible in their articulation of femininity, while the butch partner is criticised within a heterosexual context as being a bad copy of "real" men. Lesbian feminist theorists have rejected the butch/femme dynamic as an outmoded form of identification that imitates a heteronormative relationship dynamic based on power play, and female/male modes of domination and submission. Barrie (Borich 1999: 179) wonders whether allowing Linnea to always drive the rental car on their road trips is reminiscent of this power structure:

> Linnea always drives when we rent a car. I wonder sometimes why I always let her, wonder if I'm kissing up to some weird notion of what the wife does, what the husband does, old-time pressures to be the rider, not the driver, to be the woman my mother would rather I be. It hardly matters; Linnea is not that sort of husband. If she really were the man passersby sometimes mistakes her for, I'd never let her drive. When I dated men, I was an impossible girlfriend, a she-wolf, refusing to bend for anyone.

Barrie concludes that Linnea is not "that kind of husband", i.e. Barrie feels comfortable relinquishing control to a masculine woman, something she claims not to have done with the men she dated. Barrie suggests that she "bends" for a woman because their relationship, woman dating woman, subverts the expectations of "husband and wife" as has been interpreted within a heterosexual context. Eves (2004: 483) elaborates on the significance of queer performativity within the context of butch/femme identity:

> Within lesbian subcultures, butch and femme are recognised as types of performance which are available to anyone; this is often a source of humour as well as sexual role-play. I examined the ways in which 'butch' and 'femme' are meaningful as adjectives for lesbians who may refuse the labels and still consciously manipulate gender codes, as well as for those who self-identify as either butch or femme.

Eves's analysis of butch and femme gender roles emphasises the issue of choice and self-determination for women who identify as either butch or femme. She also writes that a category such as "butch" is available along a "whole spectrum of masculine gender preference" and that women who identify as such should not be limited by one interpretation of butch identity (2004: 483). Eves explains that the "policing" of exclusively lesbian spaces, and the essentialist nature of these exclusions are a result of discrimination against the LGBTI community, and the exclusions that lesbian women have felt in predominantly heterosexual spaces. Eves argues that the self-policing nature of the lesbian community is based on a defensive position of exclusion from the dominant culture, which promotes a policing of who is a lesbian, and also who is a woman (Martin, 1996) [2004: 487].

Although queer theory is reluctant to draw a sharp distinction between any sexual categories, it is necessary to understand the essentialist discourse within LGBTI identifications. Through a series of interviews with women who identify as lesbian, Eves (2004: 486-487) explores the rationale behind essentialist interpretations of lesbian identity:

> These were key discursive resources in validating lesbian identities in the face of homophobia and charges of inauthenticity, for example when sexual orientation was seen as 'just a phase' in young lesbians by straight society and when butch/femme practices were read as imitative…I would argue that the tension in the accounts is produced by this reluctance to fix identities in a heteronormative culture which tries to insist on these, and which simultaneously makes the defence of safe lesbian space necessary.

If this need for defence of lesbian identity is applied to Barrie's anxiety about her status as wife, and Linnea as husband, then it becomes clear that the pressure exerted by homophobic attacks on queer identity produces the desire to identify as a gender that is acknowledged and publicly sanctioned, and at the same time produces a space in which queer identity is not shown to mimic heterosexuality.

"here comes the bride"

Barrie contrasts her relationship with Linnea with the engagement and subsequent wedding of her brother Paulie. Barrie asks the question: "Are we married?" (Borich 1999: 4) In this text, the term "marriage" signifies Barrie's desire for social sanctioning from a community that requires the legality of the marriage ceremony, although this social sanction is prohibited between two women. Barrie contrasts the celebration of a heterosexual marriage of Paulie and Mitsuko, while examining her long-standing relationship with Linnea. By writing in the first person, Barrie

demonstrates her attempts to make sense of a relationship that is neither celebrated nor sanctioned by her family or the large majority of people within the social context she inhabits. The restriction placed on gay LGBTI marriage in the United States and most other countries worldwide is a reality that philosophers interpret as a function of social control by a predominantly patriarchal law. As Butler explains, this law exists to retain the categories of "feminine" and "masculine" and to prevent the radical subversion of the institution of marriage. Drawing on Lacan's philosophy, Butler (1993: 14) elaborates on the fallacy of the symbolic law:

> [T]he law is no longer given in a fixed form *prior* to its citation, but is produced through citation as that which precedes and exceeds the mortal approximations enacted by the subject.
>
> In this way, the symbolic law in Lacan can be subject to the same kind of critique that Nietzsche formulated of the notion of God: the power attributed to this prior and ideal power is derived and deflected from the attribution itself. [10]

The power afforded to heterosexual marriage is as a result of the repetition of the ceremony, which sanctions the act through the force of its repetitions. Therefore the law does not exist prior to the repetitions which give the law its power in the first place. The acts within the symbolic law thus exert control over the subject by parading as an inevitable origin, whereas it would not exist or be maintained without the repetition of the act itself. Butler (1993: 15) defines these repetitions as the historicity of force:

> What is 'forced' by the symbolic, then, is a citation of its law that reiterates and consolidates the ruse of its own force. What would it mean to 'cite' the law to produce it

[10] Footnote 13. See Butler 1993: 247.

> differently, to 'cite' the law in order to reiterate and coopt its power, to expose the heterosexual matrix and to displace the effect of its necessity?

This ruse of force provides the fissure necessary to introduce alternative interpretations of the law, and to subvert the law by exposing the logic of its origins.

Butler's (1990: 6) political project is to complicate and challenge the sex/gender divide and thereby expand binary identifications:

> Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of "men" will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that "women" will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two.

The cultural construction of gender creates an expectation of gender that matches the biological body. The assumption of "two genders" implies that even within lesbian relationships, one partner is expected to be masculine and the other feminine, which raises the ever-present question: "Who is the man in the relationship?" As a result, subjects such as Linnea who identify as masculine in a female body are relegated to the position of husband, despite the theoretical limitations of this masculine/feminine binary. According the Butler (1993: 107), sex is a category created under the rule of hegemonic power:

> 'Sex' is always produced as a reiteration of hegemonic norms. This productive reiteration can be read as a kind of performativity. Discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make.

Renold (2006: 493) argues that the complexity of Barrie's text is revealed as Barrie attempts to define and create gender that is outside of the confines of "a 'heterosexual matrix' in which 'real' expressions of masculinity and femininity are embedded within a presupposed hegemonic heterosexuality." Renold (2006: 491) elaborates on the effect of the heterosexual matrix with educational institutions:

> What I hope to illustrate…are the different ways in which children actively negotiate and are coerced by a ubiquitous hegemonic heterosexual matrix as they do and become gender/ed within an institutional (primary school) and generational space (middle childhood), and a local and global culture that presumes, if not expects, gendered performances that are the straightest of straight (i.e. embedded in a hegemonic 'heterosexual matrix').

Women and men are shaped by this expectation of heterosexuality as gender is performed according to heteronormative ideals presented from childhood.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Barrie's primary preoccupation is the legitimacy afforded Paulie and Mitsuko through the act of legalised marriage. As their wedding day approaches, Barrie is caught in an agonizing private conflict as she reflects on her own history of gay and straight relationships. Barrie gives entertaining accounts of her many female lovers, and introduces the reader to the historical movements within the lesbian feminist

movement of the 1970s. On the way to Paulie's wedding, Barrie (Borich 1999: 182) sketches the illusion of the reality her mother would expect from her, a heteronormative ideal:

> There's always a mirage. For my parents, it has been me, the mirage of a regular girl getting married to a regular husband in a church on the South Side…I would be thin as a steak knife and wear a poofy white dress. My husband would smash the white cake into my open mouth and I would laugh even though I really wanted to saw his head off…In this mirage, I can't see any more kissing. I can't see my body, not my breasts nor my fingers nor my nose. I can't see the face of my husband…In this mirage, my parents are proud of me.

In an attempt to challenge the conservative morality of her childhood community, Barrie (Borich 1999: 192) rebels against any practice that suggests heteronormative priority:

> Without the nuclear family, our politicians tell us, without that fundamental thing, the one-man-one-woman marriage, our shaky organization will break apart, our insignificant bodies will no longer be held to any ground….

Barrie is surprised that she has yielded to a relationship that reminds her of a marriage, without the legal or social sanctioning. Barrie (1999: 117) describes her reaction to Linnea's proposal of marriage:

> 'Will you marry me?' Linnea asked, cradling a black felt box in her palm…
>
> It is in moments such as these that I have stopped to wonder. I am unable to look the words straight in the face without seeing the history of the wedded world piled up behind them. It is not that Linnea's and my love feels suspect, but rather the language we consider using to describe us. Married. What does it mean when a woman asked a woman to marry her eleven years shy of the millennium?

Significantly, Barrie identifies the absence of language to describe her and Linnea's relationship as an obstacle greater than the concept of lesbian marriage itself. The "history of the wedded world" behind the word "married" is the historicity of force which, for Butler, is constituted by the history of repeated performances that are sanctioned by the mere force of their repetitions. Butler (1993: 13) explains that discourse claims the authority to "bring about what it names through citing the conventions of authority". Given the repetition of heterosexual marriage, these ceremonies have become legalised through the force of the repetitions, and not by the force of an essential authority. For this reason, the tradition of marriage – the union of one man, one woman – is sanctioned through its repetitions. Butler (1993: 13) employs a similar argument for the category of sex, female and male: "[T]he norm of sex takes hold to the extent that it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations it compels." Sex is therefore not a category that compels a particular corresponding gender, but is rather part of a cultural construct that ensures individual development of femininity in females, and masculinity in males. When the sex/gender binary is challenged, as is the case for Linnea, then the role of gender performativity takes precedence over a biological compulsion towards one particular gender identification. The fact that a fissure between the sex/gender binary is often pathologised is explained by Butler (1993: 14 – 15) as the adherence to the law of the symbolic:

> And though the symbolic appears to be a force that cannot be contravened without psychosis, the symbolic ought to be rethought as a series of normativizing injunctions that secure the borders of sex through the threat of psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability. And further, that this 'law' can only remain a law to the extent that it compels the differentiated citations and approximations called 'feminine' and 'masculine.'

The symbolic is thus challenged under the threat of psychosis, which highlights the role religious and mental health institutions have played in certifying LGBTI individuals as mentally unstable. Under this threat, women who do not identify as recognizably feminine or even female are classified as delinquent. Butler stresses however that the law that compels sex/gender identification is reliant on feminine and masculine "approximations", performative repetitions of gender that confirm this sex/gender binary. The absence of these citations provides the scope for gender configurations that expose the power of the symbolic law. Linnea and other women living in the late twentieth century were forced by law to wear a minimum of three items of female clothing at any one time. The absurdity of such a regulation is amplified by the reality of clothing being divided strictly into female and male categories. Barrie (Borich 1999: 121 – 122) depicts the contrast between her feminine clothes, in contrast to Linnea's choices:

> I wonder what I am to understand about our bodies when I observe the two of us. I look at myself, my heavy eyeliner and mauve lipstick, the silk scarf tied around my throat that matches the leopard print of my gloves. Under my shirt I wear a satin underwire bra. I look at Linnea, noticing that the only items she buys outside of the men's department are her plain cotton and Lycra sports bras, the kind designed to hold the breasts still and out of the way.

Barrie's comparison reiterates her binary interpretation of their relationship.

At her brother's wedding, Barrie is overcome by fits of weeping. She reflects on her perceptions of marriage in her younger days, and concludes that she never glorified the idea of a wedding like other girls her age did in childhood. As a young woman, Barrie says she "laughed at

marriage, spat on marriage" (Borich 1999: 188). Years later, Barrie (Borich 1999: 190) cannot understand her uncontrollable tears, since she had never been sentimental about weddings:

> Weddings were a heterosexual thing, a custom from another country that had nothing to do with me, a thing that happened in history or in the movies but not in my life…The truth is that I'd avoided weddings for all these years, as if I were avoiding the memory of a near drowning, and so weddings had become strange to me.

Despite her avoidance of weddings as a young woman, Barrie (1999: 195) is overwhelmed by the significance of this legally sanctioned event; her distress is evident as she describes the minister presiding over the ceremony, with his message of the creation of Adam and Eve:

> Father Keena said that Adam and Eve were formed from one body of clay and I thought, yes, my muddy body longs for Linnea, our clay forms spin and glitter, and we are married.
>
> But we are not married, not in the eyes of this congregation, not in the eyes of Father Keena…

Barrie is preoccupied with the congregation's lack of approval. In their eyes, she and Linnea are still the invisible couple who have little or no space to negotiate identity in the realm of husbands and wives sanctioned and created by repetitions of the heteronormative law. Barrie (Borich 1999: 213) describes the uncomfortable atmosphere at Paulie's wedding, and how the "gays and lesbians" didn't dance at the reception: "'I feel like a big queer,' she [Linnea] said, 'and I want to dance with you here." When Barrie (Borich 1999: 215, 216) eventually agrees to dance with Linnea, she is visibly uncomfortable:

> Still, I grimaced a little as she led me out to the middle of the pack. I clung to her square-suited shoulders. I could feel her pulse through her fingertips

> It's a particular phenomenon, to be stared at not only by newcomers but also the ones who have known me my whole life, yet have never seen me before.

Her relatives do not see Barrie or Linnea as a "real" couple, but rather as an imitation of the "real", one man, one woman. Barrie's (Borich 1999: 181) wedding fantasies play into the idea of gender as masquerade, while the ceremony she imagines reinforces the fissure between real and imagined identity representations by means of costume and dress:

> I wanted our friends to dress up, in drag if they desired, or at least very, very fancy…I wanted Linnea to wear a new tuxedo. I wanted a dress made out of burnt amber lace. ..I wanted a lesbian polka band at the end, and I wanted everyone to polka with whomever they wanted, dykes with drag queens, biker babes with my mother. I wanted to lay our whole lives at my family's feet like a stream of crazy jewels, and I wanted them to laugh and be mesmerized.

Barrie's desire for her family's approval of her life with Linnea, her desire for her family to celebrate her and Linnea's love is combined with her desire to escape normative ideals related to wedding ceremonies.

Barrie and Linnea eventually get married in Las Vegas, an act that parodies all the traditional expectations of a wedding. Barrie (Borich 1999: 238 – 239) describes the setting of Las Vegas as contradictory to anything they would have expected for their wedding day:

> We never thought that our honeymoon entertainment would be front-row seats at a topless revue with a stage so bright it made the back of our eyes ache as chorus boys in leather loincloths snapped their fingers and tapped off tempo.

Significantly, their wedding takes place in a space which epitomises a different type of performance on stage, contrasting with the earnestness with which Barrie and Linnea commit to their marriage vows. When Barrie and Linnea visit, they experience the celebration of cross-dressing as a form of gender masquerade. Barrie (Borich 1999: 257) describes a club in Japan where women perform variations of both femininity and masculinity:

> The performers are called Takarasiennes, after Parisiennes, and the women of the troupe are selected to audition when they are still girls. They work their way up year by year…and eventually are sorted by height into intensive training in the male or female roles they will from then on maintain, even in their off-hours.

These "theatrical" performances constitute an interesting contrast to Linnea's performances as a masculine woman, discussed in the next section of this chapter.

drag king

Linnea, as a performer of masculine gender, is described by her partner as a drag king who seduces her with sweeping performances of masculinity. Butler (in Fuss 1991: 28) discusses drag as functional in its revelation of the myth of gender as an inner self:

> If gender is drag, and if it is an imitation that regularly produces the ideal it attempts to approximate, then gender is a performance that *produces* the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it *produces* on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (the array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth.

For this reason, Linnea's butch drag, such as her choice of masculine clothes, is not any less authentic than her "inner" identification as a masculine woman, or as a biological woman. Barrie (Borich 1999: 6 – 7) describes Linnea as a biological woman who identifies as masculine:

> When I call her my husband I mean that she's a woman I saw dressed seriously in a skirt and heels just once, early on…an inelegant drag queen. This is a woman who's happiest straddling a motorcycle…she will always be a woman who wears her hair short…. She's a woman who does not look like a man, yet is often mistaken for one….
>
> I mean Linnea is a woman who is a woman because she was born with a woman's body. The large breasts and tender nipples. The monthly swelling, cramps, and blood.

Barrie makes the distinction between biology and gender, but to her, Linnea is not a man in a woman's body. Linnea's masculine masquerade contradicts the expectation of her female biology, and this creates a gender identification that obliterates the link between gender as subsequent to sex.

When Barrie (1999: 124 – 125) describes their days of courtship, Linnea comes to her as a king to his bride:

> In fairy tales, it is common for a king to come upon his bride in disguise, masquerading as a beggar, a frog, a swan. The night I started falling for Linnea our clothes were costumes for a big night masquerade, but only harbingers of what we would come to wear on any Monday morning or Thursday afternoon.

This quote indicates the absence of the binary that separates gender performative from "being" a particular gender; therefore the "authenticity" of everyday gender is as relevant to gender identity as a conscious theatrical performance would be. Barrie explains that the "masquerade" of that

night was indicative of what they were to wear during their "normal" lives, which suggests that gender remains performative in a non-theatrical sense. According to Butler (in Fuss 1991: 21), drag amplifies and highlights the mundane performances of assumed heterosexuality: "Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself." Eves (2004: 489) maintains that drag allows for the subversion of heterosexual norms by exposing the repetitive nature of gender, hence its instability:

> Butch performances trouble the naturalization of heterosexuality in a more obvious way through their visibility, by disturbing the connection between biological sex and gender identity, but at the same time can be seen as reinforcing the heterosexual imaginary where they underscore the connection between masculine gender and desire for femininity. The butch accounts stressed the authenticity of their gender identities, using a repertoire of 'butch essentialism.'

This essentialism can be understood as the desire to defend gender identity that contradicts the heteronormative expectations, given the severe criticism and homophobic attacks against women who are perceived as falsely claiming male privilege. Butler (in Fuss 1991: 22) explains that the accusation against women and men in the LGBTI community of imitating heterosexuality creates the need to overcompensate using identification that affirms a subject's position as a legitimate member of his or her community:

> Reconsider then the homophobic charge that queens and butches and femmes are imitations of the heterosexual real. Here 'imitation' carries the meaning of 'derivative' or 'secondary,' a copy of an origin which is itself the ground of all copies, but which is itself a copy of nothing.

Despite this complication, queer's project remains anti-essentialist in that it seeks to avoid essentialist categories that simply invert power to "lesbian" identity. There is little value in simply inverting power so that lesbian sexuality is reinscribed as the origin, while heterosexuality is the copy (Butler in Fuss 1991: 17).

In her discussion of gender as performative, Butler (1988: 522) contends that expressions of gender are in fact dependant on the repetition of acts:

> Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.

Gender therefore has the potential to be applied in alternative ways that exploit its fluidity and the repetition of its acts to create gender that is as fluid as it is subversive. Butler (1988: 521) explains that gender is located in the body, and therefore it is through bodily acts and repetitions that gender is rendered a useful variable that can be employed in the creation of alternative queer identifications:

> As an intentionally organized materiality, the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention. In other words, the body is a historical situation, as Beauvoir has claimed, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation.

The body is capable of repeating history, through mundane repetition that unquestioningly re-enact norms such as female femininity and male masculinity. However, the body becomes powerful when it parodies, through butch or femme drag, for example, the historical situations

that have produced the historical restrictions of gender. Thus Linnea's butch performances are powerful in that she chooses to wear clothes that subvert her biological sex, while loving a woman who identifies as feminine. This connection between masculine gender, which is embodied in a female body, and the desire for femininity creates an erotic space which Barrie (Borich 1999: 129) describes as the binary pull between the sun and the moon:

> What I haven't told her yet is that I love her men's clothes because of how they make me feel, Queen Moon to her Sun King. I don't think it's commonly known that you don't have to be heterosexual to conjure such a feeling.

Barrie describes a binary sexual tension reserved for the heterosexual community, exposing the incongruence of reserving any gender dynamic for one sexual category only. There is however, even within the lesbian community, a censure of masculine identity in women. Barrie (1999: 155) relates her attraction to a masculine woman, which was frowned upon by the emerging lesbian feminist movement of the 1970s:

> I had admired a lesbian for her manliness. This sort of attraction was certainly not allowed in the lesbian separatist rule book, was not palatable to any noticeable faction of feminism in 1981…It was another, deeper, snap of awareness to realize it was not just boho experimentation, not just radical feminist politics, women loving women – as the lesbian songs said back then – simply for women-loving's sake that made me as queer as any bristle-haired separatist on that bus. It was sex, pure lust, which seemed more serious, more immutable, more worthy of gunplay.

Within the lesbian feminist movement, rules were invented about desire and attraction that prevented the expansion of subversive gender categories. Female masculinity is described as politically unfashionable, obviously because of its suggested links to patriarchal male power.

However, Barrie's femininity is not unproblematic simply because it complements her female body. It is significant that femme lesbians have often been viewed as a greater "threat" to heterosexuality because of the invisibility of their sexuality, i.e. a femme lesbian can oftentimes not be distinguished from a straight woman. In addition, femme lesbians often feel marginalised and invisible within the LGBTI community because they are often times not acknowledged as "real" lesbians. In her interviews with a number of femme women, Eves (2004: 490) found that femmes face a different kind of invisibility:

> Femme accounts are required to perform the additional task of asserting the fixity of (lesbian) desire in a culture that does not see them as 'real' lesbians, a suspicion that is still common in mainstream lesbian culture.

Similarly, Eves (2004: 492 – 493) finds that femme women are often perceived as a greater threat to society because they pass as heterosexual women:

> It was common for femmes to report that they were more visible when with a butch partner, and this is reflected in much of the literature on butch/femme (Hammidi and Kaiser, 1999)…Their invisibility and ability to pass in heteronormative spaces meant that the reaction to the revelation of their sexual identity was often met with great incomprehension, hostility and violence.
>
> *Maria* [interviewee]*: It threatens them* [the heterosexual community]. *It's not a political decision to be a lesbian but it certainly has a political effect. It's more unsettling when femmes come out because people's assumptions about you have been more secure, if you've got long hair and wear a skirt they assume you're a proper girl . . . it's as if you've been allowed in and then you're declaring yourself and they haven't had suspicions so then it's like, 'it could be anyone.'*

For these reasons, feminine women who identify as lesbian, gay, or queer, are not less subversive than their masculine counterparts, since the pivotal difference between them and straight women is that the femme's desire is focused on other women, either masculine or feminine, or any combination of the two. Barrie (1999: 127) describes a relationship she had with another feminine woman:

> I had never been involved with such a girlie-girl; all my women lovers had lived a few degrees closer to the guy side of the scale…But I didn't feel like a boy. Instead I was experimenting with stepping through the mirror, expansion through reflection, the double Doris at Sappho's lip-synch.

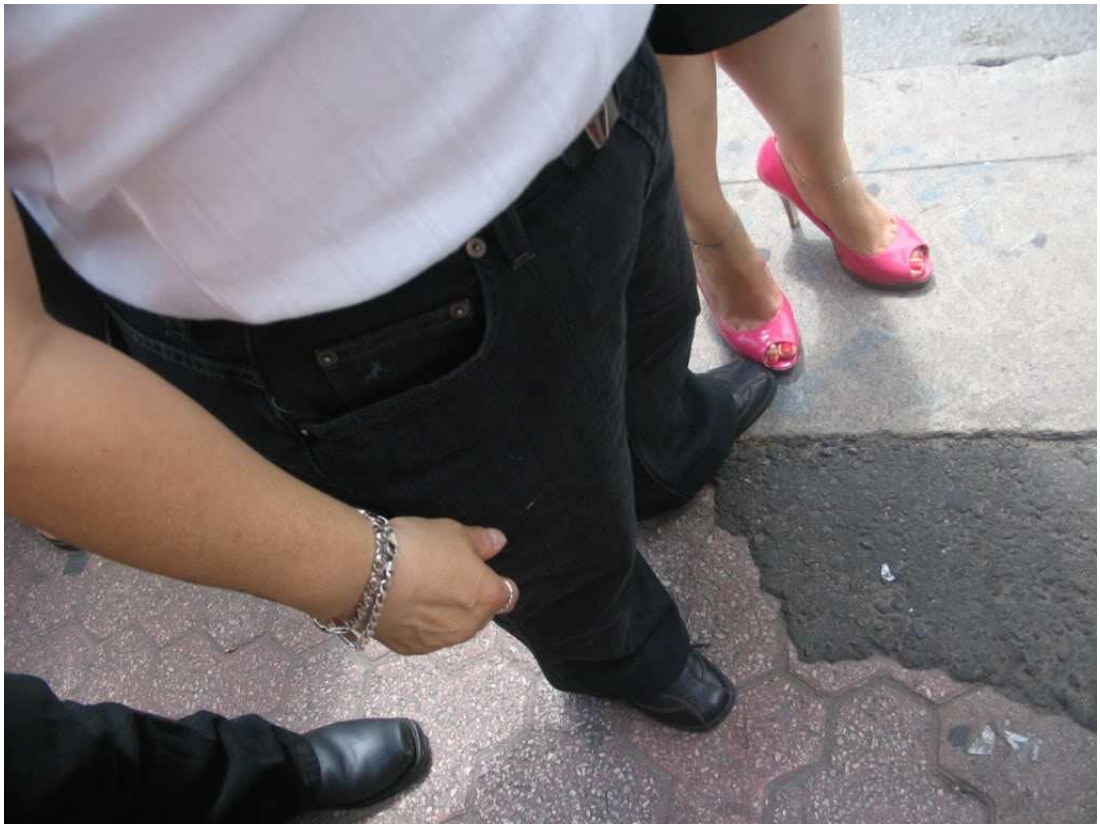
The mirror Barrie refers to could be the mirror of her own femininity, which is reminiscent of the 1970s lesbian feminist emphasis on women loving women, especially feminine women loving feminine women. Barrie (Borich 1999: 145 – 146) writes that she is now attracted to another type of woman:

> I am a woman who casts off the waltz of heterosexual womanhood yet still wears the markings of the female on her back and face. I am in love with another kind of woman who searches for a better word for her sort of womanhood. We love together in our world of distinct and opposite words for this and that, at once both deeply married and not married at all.

In this quote, Linnea is the woman who searches for a "better word" for her female masculinity. Barrie seems to find peace in their liminal state of being married and not being married at all. This quote highlights the need for language to describe LGBI experience with its increasingly complexity and broader scope for gender identities beyond binary structures.

Chapter Four

Stone Butch Blues by Leslie Feinberg



Gender fluidity has up to this point in the discussion been established as a necessary condition for the liberation of gender categories. The fluid movement of gender between male and female bodies, as well as gender categories that subvert binary expectations, are integral to an expansion of gender categories which become imaginable outside of the confines of heteronormativity. Subjects who rely on binary structures within gender identification, as illustrated in the analysis *My Lesbian Husband*, are restricted by the expectations of sex that precedes gender, or gender that obeys the demands of either masculinity or femininity. The punishment of alternative gender is a prominent theme in this chapter, thereby highlighting the prohibition of gender variation that challenges the confines of heteronormativity.

In her novel *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), Leslie Feinberg depicts the complexity of the gender expressions in the lives of lesbian, transgender and transsexual women and men. The characters in the novel inhabit radically subversive subject positions as they adopt configurations of gender and sex which contradict the normative logic of binary structures. Feinberg describes in harrowing detail the brutal acts of discrimination, harassment, and violence committed against individuals who identify as LGBTI, queer, and/or gender fluid.

The protagonist is Jess Goldberg, a working-class Jewish woman born into a post Second World War milieu. Jess begins the narrative with a detailed description of her childhood, and the intense discrimination and verbal abuse she experiences as a "masculine" female child. The beginning of Jess's narrative reveals the anxiety and confusion faced by a child who does not conform to the expectations of biological sex or heteronormative gender performance. From an early age, Jess experiences the dehumanisation of being labeled an "it", and some of her earliest memories are of being asked whether she is a girl or a boy. Just before she turns 16, Jess is raped at school by a group of boys, and consequently leaves school to work at a factory. Jess's childhood Otherness becomes the dominant theme in her life, and without support from her family, Jess is forced to become self-reliant. One night, she stumbles into a gay bar and begins her life as a "baby butch." Although she receives emotional and social support from other LGBTI individuals like herself, Jess now becomes immersed in the violence of bar raids, corrective rape, and assaults against butch women and feminine men. Jess is traumatised by the violence she witnesses in the police cells, as she witnesses the rapes and beatings of the butch women and drag queens that she befriends. Throughout the text, accounts of police brutality against the LGBTI community are

described. These perpetrations of violence are interpreted as attempts to control and punish gender difference which threatens the primacy of heterosexual identity. The gender-based violence depicted in this novel is institutionalised in that the perpetrators of the brutality are representatives of authority and the law. These acts of violence constrain identity categories throughout the novel, and force some butch women to identify as male in order to escape punishment. Jess is compelled to relocate a number of times when she loses her job at factories due to fear of discrimination, or increasingly violent attacks.

Jess's relationships with women highlight the dynamic between butch and femme lesbians, and an analysis of the interaction between Jess and her lovers disproves the theory that butch/femme is simply an imitation of heterosexual coupling. Using Butler's theory on the origin versus the imitation of gender categories, this dissertation explores how butch/femme is a "parodic redeployment" of heterosexual norms. Butch/femme mocks the primacy of heterosexual privilege by revealing the performative instability required to create any category. Therefore, butch/femme is subversive in its challenge of heteronormativity, and is not an unproblematic imitation of the masculine/feminine binary in many heterosexual relationships. Towards the end of the novel, Jess moves to New York and meets Ruth, a transsexual woman. Their friendship illustrates a number of pivotal issues concerning gender fluidity in the LGBTI community. Ruth challenges Jess's own expectations about women, and through her interaction with Ruth, Jess realises how irrelevant the rigid distinction between sex and gender categories becomes within the context of gender fluidity.

Despite the disturbing accounts of violence, and the reality of silence, fear, trauma, and isolation experienced by characters in *Stone Butch Blues*, Feinberg's narrative presents a powerful subversion of heteronormative gender categories. The arguments in this dissertation illustrate how the subversion of gender binaries creates a proliferation of gender identities that escape the confines of heteronormativity. *Stone Butch Blues* offers the reader an exploration of fluid gender performances, and demonstrates the subversive nature of gender that refuses to submit to the assumed link between sex and gender. As such, the bodies in the text are explored with sensitivity to the issues of queer identity. Feinberg's insight into alternative, fluid and subversive gender allows for the exploration of the multiplicity of gender performances.

Stone Butch Blues contains significant potential for the analysis of the subversion of gender binaries because of the vast range of gender identifications and configurations presented by the narrative. Feinberg specifically explores varieties of butch and femme, as well as transgender and transsexual identity. The narrative is set within a working-class milieu, which contributes to its significance as a text that removes masculinity from the white male heterosexual body (Halberstam 1998). Within this sociopolitical context, it is possible to explore gender identification beyond the binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual. The transgender and transsexual identities of some of the characters are especially useful in their radical questioning of the embodiment of gender within either a male or a female body. The social resistance to men and women who choose to identify with a gender that contradicts the expectations of their bodies creates a zone of conflict in which patriarchal heterosexuality, in the form of predominantly white heterosexual males, attempts to

control performances of gender variance through punishment, verbal abuse, and unthinkable violence against bodies that perform gender difference.

reading stone butch

Very few definitions within academic discourse are available for a gender category such as stone butch. An online source defines a butch lesbian as "a mannish lesbian. The term is sometimes associated with the partner who assumes the active or dominant role in a lesbian relationship" (Definition of.com). Even within this definition of a butch lesbian, there is a specific reference to a stereotypical gender expectation that is based on heteronormative sex and gender roles, i.e. a butch woman would be assumed as the "active or dominant" partner. Gayle Rubin defines butch in Halberstam's *Female* Masculinity (1993: 120): "Butch is the lesbian vernacular term for women who are more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones." Rita Laporte (in Halberstam, 1998: 122) aptly summarizes the complementary nature of butch/femme:

> The qualities, femininity and masculinity, are distributed in varying proportions in all Lesbians,…A butch is simply a Lesbian who finds herself attracted to and *complemented* by a Lesbian more feminine than she, whether this butch be very or only slightly more masculine than feminine (my emphasis).

Although the category "butch" is meant to subvert the expectations of the heterosexual man/woman binary, this subversive potential is severely limited when butch is perceived as a mere imitative representation of heterosexual masculinity.

In *Stone Butch Blues*, Feinberg captures the lives of more than one type of butch woman. She writes about stone butches as women who refuse to be touched by their lovers, and she describes butch women who are terrified of admitting their desire for other butch women. The diversity of desire in the text allows for the exploration of the gender performances that shape alternative gender identities. Feinberg depicts the lives of working-class femme women who struggle to survive in a world where they are often invisible as lesbians except when seen alongside their butches. The issue of butch lesbian identity as imitative of heterosexual masculinity is an essential argument in this research. If butch/femme is a parody of the heterosexual norm, then this dynamic has the power to illuminate the fallacy inherent in the assumption of heteronormative superiority. Butler (1990: 138) writes that gender fluidity is enabled by the obliteration of the real/origin binary:

> Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytical notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a 'figure' in that double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin…This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities.

When the fallacy of the origin is challenged and subverted, then this proliferation of gender expression becomes possible. It is imperative that gender remains fluid, especially within the context of LGBTI identity. When any gender category becomes essentialist, then the creation of gender beyond binaries is stunted, as one set of hegemonic controls is replaced by another.

In this deconstruction of *Stone Butch Blues*, performances of butch/femme present gender that parody normative expectations of sex. However, the danger of any category formation is that it then becomes a different type of norm and ceases to offer the freedom of representation that it sought to present when it was created. Butler (1993: 230) insists that even the expansive possibilities of queer must remain unfettered by attempts to restrict who or what is represented by queer:

> And if identity is a necessary error, then the assertion of 'queer' will be necessary as a term of affiliation, but it will not fully describe those it purports to represent. As a result, it will be necessary to affirm the contingency of the term: to let it be vanquished by those who are excluded by the term…That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term.

Similarly, it becomes necessary for words like "butch" or "femme" to remain unrestrained. Because butch is associated with masculinity, a butch woman is often discriminated against as an imitation man. During her childhood, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 13) realises that she is different, and that this difference is socially unacceptable:

> I didn't want to be different. I longed to be everything grownups wanted, so they would love me. I followed all their rules, tried my best to please. But there was something about me that made them knit their eyebrows and frown. Nobody ever offered a name for what was wrong with me. That's what made me afraid it was really bad. I only came to recognize its melody through this constant refrain: 'Is that a girl or a boy?'

What this quote suggests is that Jess's difference is not something she consciously chose; it was not a role she selected willingly. Jess speaks about her childhood gender performances as an inherent Otherness that was pathologised before she knew the words to describe her difference. Jess (Feinberg 1993: 13 – 14) explains how difference permeated her existence from an early age:

> My parents were enraged that life had cheated them. They were furious that marriage blocked their last opportunity to escape. Then I came along and was different. Now they were furious with me. I could hear it in the way they retold the story of my birth.

An identity of abjection then seems to become inevitable as Jess grows up with the belief that she is abnormal, freakish, and unacceptable to society.

Kristeva's abjection theory is useful in defining Jess's belief of her unacceptability to society. For Kristeva, abjection leads to self-objectification, where the lines between self and other become blurred, and the boundaries necessary for self-identification fall away, rendering any form of individuation impossible. Jess cannot distinguish between herself and the hate speech she is subjected to as a child. Therefore, Jess's identity is warped by the belief that she inhabits an unspeakable space defined by shame and humiliation. Butler (in Fuss 1991: 20) explains abjection as a process of overt and covert oppression:

> Here it becomes important to recognize that oppression works not merely through acts of overt prohibition, but covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of unviable (un)subjects – *abjects*, we might call them – who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law.

Jess's narrative demonstrates the importance society affords the biological division of gender, i.e. any individual must be either a girl or a boy, either masculine or feminine. The victimisation and violence Jess experiences as a child become the dominant theme in her life as she and other masculine-identified women live in constant fear of rape, physical assault and extreme humiliation. The perpetrators of the many examples of gender-based violence against Jess and her friends are in most cases not brought to justice since these attacks are viewed as necessary to force women into assuming the "correct" feminine dress codes and behaviour. This violence highlights the gender stereotypes that fuel the hatred towards women and men who do not fit the required expectations of gender and biology. Feinberg (1993: 41) describes the day Jess is raped on the school grounds by a group of boys: "Bobby unlaced his uniform pants and jammed his penis into my vagina. The pain traveled up to my belly, scaring the hell out of me. It felt like something ripped deep inside of me." The violation of Jess's body is significant as it echoes the violation against her gender performances, not only as a child and a teenager, but also later in her life. Before she finally leaves school, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 46) reflects on the extramural activities offered to boys and girls:

> I walked past the auto shop – that's the class I wanted. Instead they'd had me making popovers with lemon sauce in cooking class. How did Mrs. Noble think I could ever change this world by making popovers?

Even as a teenager, Jess is keenly aware of the gender roles that are forced upon all girls, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Feinberg explores class, nationality, race, and discrimination at different levels in this novel, which illustrates that gender does not exist in an interpretative vacuum but is always

contextualized and influenced by factors that exist beyond sexuality. Jess describes herself as "Jewish and working class…I fell into a lonely social abyss. The few friends I had in the school were from families who worked to make ends meet" (Feinberg 1993: 40) At school Jess refuses to obey the rule that forbids white and black children to mix in the cafeteria. Although issues of child labour and racial segregation are beyond the scope of this dissertation, Jess's narrative cannot be understood outside of the race, gender and class wars that she is confronted with throughout her life. She becomes doubly Other because of her gender identity which is complicated by the hardships of a working-class life. Unlike the heiress Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, who can afford the luxury to travel the world, write novels, and entertain friends in her home, Jess faces the brutal force of gender violence without any economic empowerment with which to provide either safety or escape for herself, her partners, or their friends. Butler (1990: 133) explains the function of Otherness in expelling subjects who identify as different:

> As Iris Young has suggested in her use of Kristeva to understand sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an 'expulsion' followed by a 'repulsion' that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation. [11]Young's appropriation of Kristeva shows how the operation of repulsion can consolidate 'identities' founded on the instituting of the 'Other' or a set of Others through exclusion and domination.

The devastating effect of gender-based violence on identity formation cannot be overemphasized, and the women in *Stone Butch Blues* are relegated to positions of extreme

[11] Iris Marion Young, "Abjection and Oppression: Unconcious Dynamics of Racism, Sexism, and Homophobia," paper presented at the Society of Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy Meetings, Northwestern University, 1988. The paper will be published at the proceedings of the 1988 meetings by the State University of New York Press. It will also be included as part of the larger chapter in her forthcoming *The Politics of Difference*. See Butler 1990: 169 (Footnote 64).

isolation, depression and in the case of Jess's African American transgender friend Ed, eventual suicide. Before Ed's death, Feinberg (1993: 178) narrates how Ed encourages Jess to read an extract from the article *The Souls of Black Folk* by W.E.B. du Bois:

> *It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder*.

Ed is relegated to the position of the abjected Other and it is impossible to imagine the extent of her isolation and inner conflict as a black transgender man within the context of a racist patriarchal society. Her suicide reveals the extent of despair to which gender and racial discrimination can lead. Ed exemplifies the unimaginable nature of subject positions that are refused by a heteronormative culture.

After Jess leaves her parents' home to begin her first job, she meets Big Al and Jackie, a butch/femme couple, at a gay bar in Buffalo. In her ignorance, Jess flirts with Jackie, but quickly realises her mistake. Al later becomes Jess's mentor: "She took me under her wing and taught me all the things she thought were most important for a baby butch like me to know before embarking on such a dangerous and painful journey" (Feinberg 1993: 29). As a "baby butch," which is a young butch lesbian, Jess is initiated into the culture of fear and violence prevalent in the LGBTI community. The bar is frequently raided by police, and during one such incident Al is raped. Through Jackie and Al, Jess learns about women who are "stone butch," women who do not allow themselves to be touched sexually by their partners. Feinberg's accounts of repeated

rapes of butch women, and the responses by their femme partners raise questions about the inaccessibility of their stone butch partners.

There is considerable contention about the nature of the stone butch woman. Halberstam has argued against Butler's opinion that the stone butch woman is a disempowered category. Halberstam (1998: 123) defines stone butch as an ideal platform for the exploration of gender binary subversion:

> Stone butch is a particularly appropriate place to begin a genealogy of butch variation because it is a profoundly enigmatic category: as we shall see, the 'stone' in stone butch refers to a kind of impenetrability and therefore oddly references the nonperformative aspects of this butch's sexual identity.

Halberstam (1998: 123) argues that it is this nonperformance that separates the stone butch's identity from that of a heterosexual man: "[C]ould we even imagine designating male sexual identities in terms of nonperformance?" Halberstam (1998: 124) provides a useful definition of the stone butch woman for the purposes of this analysis:

> The stone butch…is a dyke body placed somewhere on the boundary between female masculinity and transgender subjectivity and seems to provoke unwarranted outrage not only from a gender-conformist society that cannot comprehend stone butch gender or stone butch desire but also within the dyke subculture, where the stone butch tends to be read as frigid, dysphoric, misogynist, repressed, or simply pretranssexual.

As Jess matures into her role as a masculine woman, she is soon identified as a stone butch, and faces discrimination by both the straight and queer communities. Importantly, Halberstam explains that stone butch desire is often misunderstood as misogynist male desire, or a denial of

the woman's own sexuality. Halberstam (1998: 124) also explains that "[t]he stone butch complicates immensely the imitation hypothesis – or the idea that butches are bad copies of men" as a result of her complex untouchability. Therefore, the stone butch "presents a functional inconsistency or a productive contradiction between biological sex and social gender" (Halberstam 1998: 125. According to Halberstam (1998: 125), the stone butch radically challenges the expectations of sex and gender:

> [T]he stone butch manages the discordance between being a woman and experiencing herself as masculine by creating a sexual identity and a set of sexual practices that correspond to and accommodate the disjuncture.

Halberstam (1998: 126) consolidates the theory of stone butch with Butler's theory of gender as performativity is challenged by the stone butch:

> The stone butch again challenges this challenges even this complicated theory of performativity because her performance is embedded within a nonperformative: stone butchness, in other words, performs both female masculinity and a rejection of enforced anatomical femininity.

Pivotal to this argument is the fact that "gender is always a rough match between bodies and subjectivities" (Halberstam 1998: 126). For this reason, Halberstam (1998: 126) shows stone butch to be a radically liberating and subversive gender identity that in fact "makes female masculinity possible".

The category of stone butch also introduces the possibility of transgender subjectivity. Jess (Feinberg 1993: 95) describes her introduction to Rocco, the first openly transgender man she meets:

> Standing in the doorway was a mountain of a woman. She wore a black leather jacket unzipped. Her chest was flat, and it was clear she wasn't wearing a binder. Her jeans were slung low, unbelted. She carried her riding gloves and her helmet in one hand. Rocco. Her legend preceded her…
>
> Jan heard that Rocco had taken hormones and had breast surgery. Now she worked as a man on a construction gang. Jan said Rocco wasn't the only he-she who'd done that. It was a fantastic tale…No matter how painful it was to be a he-she, I wondered what kind of courage was required to leave the sex you'd always known, or to live so alone.

Given the acts of violence committed against women who identify as visibly masculine, theorists have questioned whether the decision to receive transsexual surgery is a choice driven primarily by the need for survival, as appears to be the motivation behind Jess's decision. However, as is evidenced by Halberstam's definitions of butch women, butch identity is not constructed only as a reaction to fear of social punishment. Instead, butch identities are complex constructs and a "courageous and imaginative way of dealing with the contradictory demands and impulses of being a butch in a woman's body" (Halberstam 1998: 129).

Butch women, and especially stone butches, have been critiqued by lesbian feminists as "the epitome of lesbian self hatred" (Julia Penelope in Halberstam 1998: 130), and therefore are labeled as an expression of abject sexuality. Audre Lorde has also commented on stone butchness in *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*. Lorde critiques the rigidity of butch/femme role playing for a woman of colour; sociopolitical context is imperative in an interpretation of the identity assumed by butch women: "Stoneness in *Zami*, as in *Stone Butch Blues*, often means a tough exterior developed in the face of oppression and repeated humiliations" (Halberstam 1998:

133). Similarly, butch-femme codes cannot be eliminated simply because they offend the often elitist attitudes of white European feminists. Cherríe Moraga (in Halberstam 1998: 121) contends that "the attack on butch-femme role playing made by white feminists also erased cultural and ethnic differences between women." For this reason, Moraga (in Halberstam1998: 122) argues that "the boundaries white feminists confine themselves to in describing sexuality are based in white-rooted interpretations of dominance, submission, power-exchange etc." The distinction between gender roles in different cultural contexts is important to the analysis of emerging queer gender variation because ignoring these differences, or trying to equalize all forms of sexual power exchange using the definition of equality as established by predominantly white feminists, would represent another version of essentialist supremacy.

Given the role of popular media, it is hardly surprising that the diversity of identities found within the LGBTI community is misunderstood, or invisible. Halberstam (1998: 77) explains the historical differences in LGBTI communities need to be reclaimed:

> Although work is being done to restore the historical fullness of various lesbian communities of this century, the damage has been done and tends to be irreversible in terms of the full effect of denying and ignoring differences between and within communities of women who are attracted to women.

Feinberg's text is at pains to reverse these stereotypes and she explores, by means of the variety of butch characters in her novel, the different interpretations and varieties of butch within the lesbian community. For example, when Jess is reunited with her friend Frankie, Jess is shocked and even repulsed to hear that Frankie's lover is also a butch. Feinberg (1993: 202) reveals

butch-on-butch as an unspoken taboo within the community as Jess struggles to overcome her own prejudice towards Frankie's choice of lover:

> The more I thought about the two of them being lovers, the more it upset me. I couldn't stop thinking about them kissing each other. It was like two guys. Well, two gay guys would be alright. But two butches? How could they be attracted to each other? Who was the femme in bed?

It is significant to note that Jess asks some of the same questions about Frankie and Johnny as the heterosexual community would ask of two women together: who is the woman in bed? Jess's prejudice reveals that even within the lesbian community, the butch/femme binary, which is useful as subversion and parody of heterosexuality, is in danger of becoming established as a norm that is challenged only at the risk of derision and even rejection from the community. Feinberg (1993: 274) presents an appeal to greater inclusivity with gender categories in Frankie's response to Jess:

> 'You and I have to hammer out a definition of butch that doesn't leave me out. I'm sick of hearing *butch* to mean sexual aggression or courage. If that's what butch means, what does it mean in reverse for femmes?'

An increase in the visibility of butch categories would contribute to an inverse decrease in stereotypical depictions of butch sexuality. Frankie stresses the urgent need for the category butch to include butch women who are allowed to love other butch women, without the assumption of aggressive or dominating masculinity for either partner. In other words, Frankie expresses the desire for butch to be removed from a stereotypical perception of masculinity, as masculinity is understood in its representation of heterosexual men. Gender fluidity would allow

women to freely move between contradictory modes of gender expression without being expected to adopt one unitary category.

Feinberg (1993: 213 – 214) is also aware of the role femmes play in defining their butches and she narrates Edna's perspective on the nuanced nature of butch identity:

> 'I don't think femmes ever see butches as one big group. After a while you see how many different ways there are for butches to be. You see them young and defiant, you see them change, you watch them harden up or be destroyed. Soft ones and bitter ones and troubled ones. You and Rocco were granite butches who couldn't soften your edges. It just wasn't in your nature.'

Edna expresses the possibility of butch multiplicity by identifying a number of butch categories. However, the freedom to negotiate gender expressions is more important than being assigned a specific category of butch. As suggested in Butler's theory in chapter one, a mere "proliferation" of gender categories is not sufficient; rather, gender needs to be freed from the repressive dependence on binary categories. Halberstam (1998: 77) explains that the limitations on categories of butch are also linked to attempts at pathologising alternative sexualities:

> [T]he psychoanalytic system is ultimately hostile to truly enriched understandings of female masculinity in particular because female sexual and gender behavior in general is already understood to be derivative of male identity.

For this reason, butch identities continue to be misunderstood simply as imitative of heterosexual male sexuality. A detailed analysis of the butch/femme dynamic illuminates some of the counter-arguments to this accusation.

performing butch/femme

The butch/femme relationships depicted in the text illustrate class and culture-specific desire amongst women, but this does not suggest an imitation of norms that subjugate or disempower women. Halberstam (1998: 121) explains that with the rise of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, "some women rejected butch-femme and its forms of sexual role playing as a gross mimicry of heterosexuality". Butler (1990: 137) also elaborates on the lesbian feminist rejection of butch/femme:

> Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag and cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch/femme lesbian identities.

In defence of this argument against butch/femme role playing, Butler (1990: 123) elucidates the complexity of butch-femme desire:

> As one lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that 'being a girl' contextualizes and resignifies 'masculinity' in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible 'female body.' It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object [and clearly there is not just one] of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body, nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay.

Therefore, the destabilisation of both sides of the masculine/feminine binary allows for alternative erotic interplay, where women have the freedom to adopt whichever "degree" of

masculinity or femininity suits them or their partners. Butch/femme interplay should for this reason be free from expectations of either side of a gendered binary, to allow for the multiplicity of genders found under the banner of queer. As Butler explains above, the "danger" of imitative performance is eliminated by the presence of the female body.

The nature of unstable and varying gender performances inherent in the butch-femme dynamic suggests that butch or femme performances can be adapted to the needs of the women performing either role. In *Stone Butch Blues*, the butch/femme dynamic is also challenged by the emergence of the lesbian feminist movement. Feinberg (1993: 214 – 215) comments on the emergence of the lesbian feminist movement when Edna, one of Jess's femme lovers, describes discrimination against femme lesbians:

> 'After the bar scene changed I stopped going. The butches I loved weren't there anymore. It was mostly university women. I started to feel embarrassed about showing up in a dress, with makeup on. It seems like everyone in the bar was wearing flannel shirts, jeans, and boots. That's not me. But there was not other place to go…
>
> I know I'm not a straight woman, and lesbians won't accept me as one of them. I don't know where to go to find the butches I love or other femmes. I feel completely misunderstood.'

In defiance of heteronormativity, certain gender expressions are rejected with the advent of lesbian feminism. As a result, some powerfully subversive forms of gender expression are excluded, such as the dynamic of butch/femme, which for many women was and still remains the gender identity of choice. Interestingly, Edna differentiates herself from the lesbian category, where she isn't accepted as a femme woman, although she isn't a straight woman either. Edna is

caught in the interpretation gap where lesbian and women have converged to exclude women who embrace neither heterosexual nor lesbian specificity. The invisibility that Edna experiences illustrates the limitation of any degree of sexual specificity.

This dissertation argues that a dichotomy based on the tension between a predominantly masculine identity and its feminine counterpart, such as butch/femme, should not be eliminated because of its seemingly imitative reliance on the heterosexual model. Halberstam (1998: 82) explains that the theory of inversion is partly responsible for the discrimination against female masculinity:

> Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behaviour in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification in which the stability of the terms 'male' and 'female' depended on the stability of the homosexual-heterosexual binary. When, some fifty years later, lesbian feminists came to reject inversion as an explanation for same-sex sexuality, they also rejected female masculinity as an overriding category of lesbian identification, putting in her place the women-identified woman, who is most often gender androgynous.

Rejecting the butch/femme binary suggests that this model imitates heterosexuality. As Butler (1990: 123) strongly argues, this is not the case:

> Clearly, this way of thinking about gendered exchanges of desire admits of much greater complexity, for the play of masculine and feminine, as well as the inversion of ground (sexed body) to figure (butch or femme identity) can constitute a highly complex and structured production of desire.

Butch/femme performances are able to parody and consequently highlight the weaknesses inherent in heterosexuality. As is evident in the text, many women in these butch/femme relationships are aware of the expectations within heterosexual relationships, and refuse to adopt the gender roles allocated to traditional heterosexual couples. As noted earlier, part of the appeal of a femme woman (as opposed to a purely feminine woman) is her tough exterior, a quality in direct opposition to the feminine expectation of softness, dependence and fragility.

The emergence of queer theory and identity in the 1990s now allows for the possibility of gender fluidity which does not rely on either the male/female or the masculine/feminine binaries. Any category becomes problematic when its alternative is rejected as an inferior Other. Masculine-identified women were able to express their alternative masculinity in the interplay with feminine women, or femmes, while femmes were able to express their desire of masculinity beyond the heterosexual male body. Jess (Feinberg 1993: 33) relates her first dance with a femme woman and the significance of this erotic interplay for her as a butch woman:

> Then I felt her body move closer and we kind of melted together. I discovered all the sweet surprises a femme can give a butch: her hand on the back of my neck, open on my shoulder, or balled up like a fist. The feel of her belly and thighs against mine. Her lips almost touching my ear.

The erotic interplay between Yvette and Jess is ignited by the femme difference in contrast to Jess's butch identity. The tension created by Yvette's feminine performances relies on the difference between butch and femme, not as an imitative category, but as a dynamic that exploits the attraction of opposite genders manifested in female bodies. On another occasion, Jess

(Feinberg 1993: 106) describes a flirtation with Milli, a femme woman who later becomes her lover:

> I have a few mental photographs I can see in my mind's eye. One of them is Milli, hands on her hips, looking me up and down as if the bike and I were one lean machine. Her body language, the gleam in her eyes, the tease in her smile, all combined into an erotic femme challenge. Milli set the action into motion with one irresistible smile…
>
> From that moment on I was her butch and she was my femme.

Jess is entranced by Milli's overtly feminine flirtations. Her masculinity is complemented by Milli's femme challenge. However, this tension is not dependent on Jess performing masculinity in terms of physical difference. Jess inhabits her female biology until sexual and verbal harassment force her to begin passing as a man. The femmes in *Stone Butch Blues* do not desire men. The erotic tension is created by the embodiment of masculinity in a female body. Therefore, the butch/femme dichotomy is integral to the expansion of gender fluidity as should not be discarded as an outmoded gender expression. Later in the text, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 122) describes a dance with her partner Theresa:

> I asked Theresa to dance. She took her time smoothing my collar and adjusting my tie before she led me to the dance floor. We moved beautifully together. Meg told me later we looked as good as Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire.

These scenes depict the desire created by butch/femme tension, which contrast markedly with mimetic assumptions. In this way, butch/femme identities in their complexity are subversive in that they provide an alternative to masculine/feminine heterosexual desire.

Butch/femme performances have recently been revived amongst LGBTI women, although the embodiment of these identities has often been increasingly parodic and more playful than the models seen in the 1950s. An arguably outdated model of butch/femme is still found in some conservative communities around the world, which suggests that queer identity and its new alternatives are starting to replace identities that are reliant on binaries, especially in urban areas. This in turn highlights the fact that no gender can be read outside of its cultural context. An urban interpretation of butch/femme amongst middle class women would be entirely different from the application of butch/femme amongst rural working class women.

Although butch/femme cannot be categorized as a simplistic form of identification, as has been proven by the variety of possible butch identities, the twenty-first century definition of queer offers a greater scope for gender configurations, to use Butler's phrase. Butler (1990: 126) explains Monique Wittig's theory of the masculine/feminine binary as one in which the binary becomes redundant:

> For Wittig, the task is not to prefer the feminine side of the binary to the masculine, but to displace the binary as such through a specifically lesbian disintegration of its constitutive categories.

Therefore, the displacement and subversion of binaries are important to the project of expanding the variety of gender expressions. Butler (1990: 121) also strongly opposes the belief in homosexual priority:

> This purification of homosexuality, a kind of lesbian modernism, is currently contested by numerous lesbian and gay discourses that understand lesbian and gay culture as

> embedded in the larger structures of heterosexuality even as they are positioned in subversive or resignificatory relationships to heterosexual cultural configurations.

Jess (Feinberg 1993: 87) shows insight into the plight of butch heterosexual women, and describes the difference between butch women who identify as gay and those who are married to men, noting that heterosexual women are subjected to a similar type of discrimination:

> 'Jeez, Duffy, it's not like they're getting off much easier by being married – they're still he-shes. They gotta deal with the same shit butches do. Imagine Laverne going into the ladies room at the movies. Or Ethel at a bridal shower. I don't think people who give them a rough time give a fuck who they sleep with. It's probably harder for them too.

The significance of Jess's observation about masculine women who identify as heterosexual, i.e. women who are married to men, is that women who identify as masculine are harassed and marginalised regardless of their sexual orientation. This echoes Butler's writing on the psychic aspects of heterosexuality within homosexuality, and vice versa.

Jeannette Winterson has been criticised by queer theorists for her idealization of lesbian identity above all other identity categories. When the protagonist in *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, (Winterson 1999: 125 – 126), Jeannette, is accused of "aping men", she defends herself vehemently:

> Now if I was aping men she'd have every reason to be disgusted. As far as I was concerned men were something you had around the place, not particularly interesting, but quite harmless. I had never shown the slightest feeling for them, and apart from never wearing a skirt, saw nothing else in common between us.

Jeannette (Winterson 1999: 126) also narrates her ignorance concerning gender politics:

> At that point I had no notion of sexual politics, but I knew that a homosexual is further away from a woman than a rhinoceros…There are shades of meaning, but a man is a man, wherever you find it.

Jeannette's judgement of homosexuals compared to lesbian women suggests that Winterson indirectly discriminates against the "Otherness" of the homosexual (supposedly gay men) in contrast to the acceptability of "real" women (i.e. feminine women) who identify as lesbians. Winterson focuses on the lesbian feminist movement which viewed lesbian women as "real women" who were not "mannish" or power orientated. Winterson's text thus advocates the rejection of any masculinity, especially female masculinity. There is great emphasis on lesbian identity as superior to heterosexuality, which is problematic. The entire text is limited in terms of gender configurations because of the restrictive niche created by this discrimination against women as masculine. In other words, women who do not fit the feminine stereotype are not only rejected as women, but also as lesbians.

Feinberg (1993: 139) depicts this discrimination against masculinity in women is represented in *Stone Butch Blues* by the women in the lesbian feminist group on campus that Theresa joins, which makes it even more difficult for the butches to retain visibility in public, since they are banished from the category "lesbian" because they are viewed as bad copies of men. Theresa brings home the theories she learns from the women's movement:

> 'When a woman tells me, "If I wanted a man I'd be with a real one," I tell her, 'I'm not with a fake man, I'm with a real butch.' I beamed with pride. 'But,' Theresa added, 'that doesn't mean that butches can't learn a thing or two from the women's movement about how to respect femmes.'

Theresa's insistence that a butch is not an imitation of a man is significant because this creates a distinction between "men" and "butches". Butches can only be a subversive category when the women who perform masculinity interrogate and challenge the stereotypical expectations of heterosexual masculinity. When Jess gets defensive about Theresa's comment, she elaborates on the responsibility of women respecting each other, whether they are masculine or feminine: "'The next time all you butches are sitting around talking at the bar, listen to how may times you hear the words *chicks* or *broads* or *hooters* or *headlights*' (Feinberg 1993: 139). The vulgarity with which butch women refer to their femmes is an issue that introduces the question of whether masculine women automatically adopt chauvinistic practices because of their gender orientation. Jess's response is significant in that she creates a distinction between the categories "women" and "femmes". This implies that women cannot be understood simplistically as one unified or homogenous group, but rather as a diverse category with many complex divisions and identities: "I'm not the one who says I'll never understand women. I say I'll never understand femmes' (Feinberg 1993: 139).

Similar to the fluidity of butch, femme identity should also be liberated from the restrictive expectations of heterosexual feminine performance. In other words, femmes are not simply straight women who date masculine women. Their difference is marked by their challenge of heteronormative values, even while in relationship with their butch partners. For this reason, Theresa's association with the lesbian feminist is useful to this analysis because it reveals how any category can defeat its own liberatory purpose. When the category "women", which has historically been understood as biological females who adopt femininity as their gender orientation, is removed from this rigid definition, then female orientation and femininity can be

understood for its complexity. Jess remarks that she is attracted to femmes, both male and female. The drag queens who frequent the gay clubs in Buffalo intrigue Jess with their seductive feminine charms. Therefore, Jess's desire is aroused by biological "men" who perform femininity as their gender: "It's funny – it doesn't matter whether it's women or men – it's always high femme that pulls me by the waist and makes me sweat" (Feinberg 1993: 274). Jess acknowledges the fact that biology is irrelevant; desire is not limited by the specificity of a body, but is created through the complexity of gender performances. Jess's statement radically challenges the notion that desire is predicated on biological sex; sex is subsumed by the desire for a particular gender identity, in Jess's case high femme. When the connection between sex and gender is disrupted, it becomes possible to explore transgender and transsexual identities, which offers considerable subversive potential for gender expansion.

beyond transgender

The inclusion of transgender and transsexual [trans] identities in *Stone Butch Blues* allows for the deconstruction of queer identity to range far beyond the "gay and lesbian" category which has limited alternative identity politics for the past decades. Halberstam (1998: 85) observes that some nuances in the history of the LGBI community have been lost:

> Indeed, the history of homosexuality and transsexuality was a shared history at the beginning of the [twentieth] century and only diverged in the 1940s, when surgery and hormonal treatments became available to, and demanded by, some cross-identifying subjects.

Although the butch/femme dynamic presents subversive potential for the questioning of heteronormative binaries, trans identities not only challenge gender roles, but pose a radical challenge to the biological categories "man" and "woman".

In Monique Wittig's critique of sex as the primary determiner of gender, Butler (1990: 115) finds that language is closely related to the naming of alternative sexuality:

> Language, for Wittig, is a set of acts, repeated over time, that produce reality-effects that are eventually misperceived as 'facts'… The 'naming' of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies in accord with principles of sexual difference…[Therefore] 'men' and 'women' are political categories, and not natural facts. [12]

According to Wittig's arguments, sex is not a natural category that inevitably produces a particular gender. Sex serves the purposes of assumed heteronormative ideals; in other words, without the "political" categories "man" and "woman", the continued domination of heteronormative dominance would be impossible. Significantly, Wittig argues that the performative of sex *creates* a reality in which biologically distinguishable bodies are necessary. This argument holds profound significance for trans people who have been excluded not only from the gay and lesbian community, but who have also been relegated to a category of people perceived as less than human. Butler (1990: 112) continues her explanation of Wittig's argument thus:

[12] Footnote 28. See Butler 1990: 166.

> In other words, there is no reason to divide up human bodies into male and female sexes except that such a division suits the economic needs of heterosexuality and lends a naturalistic gloss to the institution of heterosexuality. Hence, for Wittig, there is no distinction between sex and gender; the category of 'sex' is itself a *gendered* category, fully politically invested, naturalized but not natural.

Wittig's argument is central to some aspects of trans identity: the rigid distinction between male and female creates a social reality in which an individual who does not conform to the biology of either male or female is marginalised as an abject other, and punishment in the form of social stigmatization and isolation usually follows. Butler (1990: 114) explains that the fact that "penis, vagina, breasts, and so forth, are *named* sexual parts is both a restriction of the erogenous body to those parts and a fragmentation of the body as a whole". These arguments show how not only gender binaries but also the limits of sex restrict the proliferation of gender identity. Butler (1990: 116) argues that:

> Discourse becomes oppressive when it requires that the speaking subject, in order to speak, participate in the very terms of that oppression – that is, take for granted the speaking subject's own impossibility or unintelligibility.

The oppressive nature of discourse is complicated by the silencing of queer voices that do not fit the "gay and lesbian" categories. Discourse that excludes any sexual orientation is oppressive in that the difference is "impossible" i.e. transgender and transsexual identities are often invisible because of their assumed impossibility. Wittig writes that "[w]omen, lesbians, and gay men…cannot assume the position of the speaking subject" (Butler 1990: 116). Evident in this quote is the absence of the bisexual, transgender, transsexual and intersex voices. Although

Wittig makes some pertinent arguments in Butler's discussion, there is still an interpretational gap in terms of which voices within discourse are heard and which still exist within the margins of identity politics. Wittig's theories, as elucidated by Butler, are particularly useful in the analysis of *Stone Butch Blues*. Butler explains that Wittig "understands discursive categories like 'sex' as abstractions forcibly imposed upon the social field, ones that produce a second-order or reified reality" (Butler 1990: 114).

Jess (Feinberg 1993: 136) initially identifies as a butch lesbian, but as the novel progresses, she experiences more brutality, job loss, and discrimination as an openly masculine woman:

> I lay on a precinct cell floor, alone in a strange city, my mouth pressed against the cold concrete. I wondered if I was close to death because I seemed to be drifting away from the world.

In another incident, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 141) is accosted by two men on the street:

> 'Hey, bulldagger,' the dark-haired man called to me. His friend laughed.
>
> The blond man squeezed his crotch. 'I got some work here for you, bulldagger. It's a big job, you think you can handle it?' I pushed past their laughter.

The verbal and physical abuse directed at Jess and the other butch women in the novel is different from the discrimination against femme women. Since femmes can "pass" as straight women more easily, they are often less harassed and only face abuse when they are seen with their partners in public, although this brings its own invisibility, as Theresa (Feinberg 1993: 151) explains:

> ‘If I’m not with a butch everyone just assumes I’m straight. It’s like I’m passing too, against my will. I’m sick of the world thinking I’m straight. I’ve worked hard to be discriminated against as a lesbian.’

When Theresa and Jess move in together, Theresa handles the negotiations with the landlord to avoid possible conflict and discrimination. Butch women of the working class are caught in a double bind – they work in a male-dominated industry while being constantly harassed because of their identification as masculine. Jess’s detailed description of life as a factory worker illuminates the tension created by heterosexual men who are threatened by the presence of masculine women in their territory.

Before Jess (Feinberg 1993: 143) begins hormone treatment, she has a dream in which she is a man:

> ‘In the dream I had a beard and my chest was flat. It made me so happy. It was like a part of me that I can’t explain, you know?
>
> But in the dream it wasn’t about being gay. It was about being a man or a woman. Do you know what I mean? I always feel like I have to prove I’m like other women, but in the dream it didn’t feel that way. I’m not even sure I felt like a woman.’

Jess expresses the heteronormative expectations of having to “be” like other women, which translates into the expectations of society to be appropriately feminine in her gender performances. In this sense, “being” a woman is understood as the rigid interpretation of an essence of femininity. When this essence or inner “woman” is absent, then a subject is relegated to the category of other. Jess explains that for her, the dream was not about being gay. Jess is pressured into performing the role of a woman, of the social expectations of femininity,

especially in terms of dress, grooming and behaviour. Here the important distinction between gender as "being", and gender as performance becomes evident. Gender as "being" suggests an intrinsic state that matches an individual's biology, while performance allows for the complexity of shifts in gender between what is considered masculine and feminine. When Theresa asks Jess whether she felt like a man in her dream, Jess's reply is enigmatic: "'No. That's the strange part. I didn't feel like a woman or a man, and I liked how I was different'" (Feinberg 1993: 143). Jess's dream allows her to imagine a place where she is bound to neither the biological expectation of either "being" a man or a woman. Instead she feels "different". This text illustrates that even in the LGBTI community, too much weight is placed on "being" one or the other, either butch or femme, male or female. Interestingly, Jess does not express her decision as one driven by an intrinsic need to pass as or to "be" a man, which is how transgender or transsexual identity is often interpreted.

In a pivotal moment before her hormone treatment begins, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 143) and three of her butch friends attempt to masquerade as women to find jobs in the economic depression following America's war on Vietnam: "'We either got to change how we look or we're gonna starve to death! Katie got some wigs and some makeup. There's a few jobs, like in department stores.'" Jess and the other butch women depend on jobs in factories, and as a result of the economic crisis they are unable to apply for work in female-orientated industry, given their masculine appearance. Frustrated by the failure of wigs and makeup to hide their masculinity, Jess and her friends discuss the possibility of hormone therapy. Jess asks: "I can't help thinking maybe I'd be safe, you know?" (Feinberg 1993: 144). Although Jess and Grant both admit to considering hormone therapy, there is a stigma attached to this decision even within the LGBTI

community. Jess refers to the decision as a crossroads, one which her friend Ed had already taken. However, there is little information available, and Jess agonizes over her uncertainty about the effects of therapy: "'What happens? Does it just last for a little while? I mean can you go back to being a butch later, when it's safe to come out?'" (Feinberg 1993: 145). The lack of information available about transsexuality, as well as the stigma attached to the process of transition is evident when Jess (Feinberg 1993: 158 – 159) begins to research the possibility of hormone therapy:

> Grant whistled low. 'How do you know you're not a transsexual? Maybe you should go to the program and find out.'
>
> I shook my head. 'I've seen about it on T.V. I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel trapped.'

It is evident that Jess considers this biological option in response to the constant threats to her life that she is faced with at work and on the streets.

It is significant to note that Jess's social class influences her decision to "transition", as opposed to that of Stephen Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, a wealthy heiress and author, who lives in relative safety in comparison to Jess and her companions. The butch women in Feinberg's novel choose breast reduction and hormone therapy as a last resort for survival. The violence of the attacks on Jess, Big Al and the other butch women alerts the reader to the urgency of passing for these women. Their gender performance is not so much playful or ironic as a means to stay alive. This novel is a stark reminder that the performance of gender is to women of the working class not a luxury to be performed merely for the sake of erotic dualism with their femme partners. Their gender performance is not hinged only on individual identity

politics, but points to the survival and dignity of any entire class of women who identify as masculine. At the height of this crisis, Jess (1993: 146) confesses to Theresa her desperation to pass as a man, in order to escape the fear she is subjected to daily:

> 'Honey, I can't survive as a he-she much longer. I can't keep taking the system head-on this way. I'm not gonna make it.' Theresa held me tighter. She didn't say a word. 'We were talking about maybe starting on hormones, male hormones. I was thinking I might try to pass as a guy.'

Jess's decision to begin with male hormone therapy coincides with Theresa's involvement with the Women's Liberation Movement, and this tension creates conflict. Theresa insists that: "I can't go out with you in the world and pretend that you're a man. I can't pass as a straight woman and be happy" (Feinberg 1993: 152). Ironically, Theresa believes that a life with a passing man would be more isolated than their lives as a butch/femme couple. Theresa refuses to become the "scared couple" who pretends to be heterosexual. Theresa's perception is that when Jess passes as a man, she will be pretending to be a man. Theresa distinguishes between being a femme woman and a straight woman and insists that she cannot pass as straight to complement Jess's increased masculinity, even if Jess's desire to pass is for the sake of survival. Theresa is attracted to Jess's gender as a masculine woman, but she cannot accept Jess as a passing man, and she vehemently opposes Jess's decision. Her opinion strongly echoes the lesbian feminist sentiments about women as "real" women: "I'm a woman, Jess. I love you because you're a woman" (Feinberg 1993: 148). Theresa's plea suggests that Jess will change intrinsically once she has become biologically male to a greater degree, because of the belief that biology precedes the male or masculine stereotype. Her fear is that she will become "some man's wife, even if that man is a woman" (Feinberg 1993: 148). Theresa therefore connects the idea of Jess's

increasingly male biology (breast reduction, a deeper voice, facial hair) with a correlating male persona or mentality, the development of the male chauvinist that lesbian feminists are particularly wary of. This belief is the result of the socially conditioned link between biology/sex and gender. For Theresa, Jess's butchness is acceptable, because it falls within the boundaries of lesbian identity, i.e. a "butch lesbian".

Transgender practices strongly challenge the heterosexual/homosexual binary in that lesbians, or women, explore ways to increase their biological maleness. For this reason, there has been a marked reaction by lesbian feminists to transgender men. They are accused of being chauvinists who adopt outmoded heterosexual male mentalities about women and relationships. In defence of this theory, Judith Halberstam (1998: 2) explains that the traditional definition of masculinity "inevitably conjures up notions of power and legitimacy and privilege". A thorough examination of *Stone Butch Blues* confirms that this stereotype cannot be applied glibly to all men and women who identify as masculine, transgender or transsexual. Too often, masculinity is defined in terms of male, white, middle-class privilege, which creates the misperception that masculinity is automatically accompanied by privilege. Halberstam (1998:2) writes that masculinity "becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body". When masculinity can be analysed from the perspective of female working-class bodies, both black and white, then it becomes possible to understand the scope of gender that embraces masculinity as a category outside of the patriarchal abuse suffered by women, children, people of colour and the LGBTI community at large. When a comparison is drawn between the white male perpetrators of the rapes and physical/verbal assaults on the masculine women in the text, then it becomes impossible to categorise these subjects together, despite the fact that the men and the women

identify as masculine, and that for some women there are physical similarities to the men. As stated earlier, gender moves beyond the boundaries of the body, and gender performance becomes more significant than the presence or absence of female breasts, facial hair, or well-defined muscles.

The subversive possibilities in *Stone Butch Blues* are considerable given the range of masculinities and femininities presented by the characters. It becomes possible to subvert the boundaries of masculinity when this gender category is removed from the realm of biological men. After the hormones begin changing Jess's biology, she is able pass as a man, and describes her complicated first date with Annie, a heterosexual woman who is unaware of Jess's past. Annie is surprised to realise that Jess does not fit the heteronormative masculine stereotype, and clearly expects Jess to behave like a typical heterosexual man. Jess (Feinberg 1993: 187) narrates the challenges of dating a heterosexual woman as a transgender man:

> I set a small canvas bag I'd brought on the floor near the couch, out of sight. Maybe bringing a dildo had been too optimistic. Then again, being caught without one could present its own crisis.

The disembodied dildo in the canvas bag suggests that Jess's masculinity is unattached and fluid. She performs a masculine sexuality as separate from the nurturing role witnessed in the kitchen with Annie's sick daughter. Being "caught" without the phallic masquerade that is the dildo would expose Jess's masquerade as a man, which is necessary for the success of the date and a potential relationship with Annie. The crisis Jess refers to again points to survival – Annie is connected to Jess's male colleagues at the factory, and exposure could mean losing her job. Thus Jess's performance as a transgender man, even with its subversive possibilities, within the

context of interaction with a heterosexual woman, is more complicated than her performances as a butch woman with a femme.

Feinberg presents Jess's performance on her first date with Annie, who is a survivor of domestic violence, in contrast to what Annie would expect from the heterosexual males in Annie's social milieu. Jess is attentive to Annie's needs, and pays attention to her young daughter Kathy. Feinberg's (1993: 189) detailed narration of their foreplay highlights the challenges of transgender identity during sex:

> She turned and looked at me for a long moment before offering me her mouth. We kissed deeply, but carefully. Slowly we began to move against each other. I could feel how she offered her body to a man as a test. I was gentle. I was slow….She pressed her pelvis against mine and looked at me quizzically. We both knew I didn't have a hard-on.

The absence of a penis challenges Jess's masculine performance, although the absence does not make sex impossible. After Jess secretly straps on the dildo in the bathroom, she performs masculine sexuality as expected by Annie, after which Jess swops her dildo for the sock again in the bathroom. Jess's anxiety is evident when Annie comes into the bathroom just after Jess (Feinberg 1993: 192) has made the transition:

> She put her hand gently between my thighs and squeezed the sock. 'I got a lot of pleasure out of this tonight,' she said. 'It was like magic.' My body tensed, and she withdrew her hand.
>
> I stroked her hair. 'All magic is illusion,' I admitted.

Jess's reference to illusion is significant in that she illuminates the fissure between what is "real" or the original, which in this instance would be a biological penis, compared to the "illusion" of

the dildo. Annie describes the pleasure provided by the imitation as magic, which highlights the fallacy of the real as opposed to the imitation. When applied to gender fluidity, Jess's phallic masquerade is symbolic of the redundancy of the argument of a biological man as "real", and a transgender man as "fake".

Jess is accidentally exposed during a union meeting at the factory where she works by her previous manager Duffy, who knew her as a butch woman. Feinberg (1993: 206) emphasizes that the mistake is simply Duffy's use of the "wrong" pronoun:

> 'If we had more like Jess, we'd win it hands down. I trust Jess. She's proved she's for the union 100 percent.'
>
> Everything happened in slow motion. When I heard Duffy say *she* I turned in horror, my jaw dropped. Frankie slapped her forehead with her palm and shook her head. The guys looked from Duffy to me, and back again.

As a result of Duffy's slip, Jess loses her job. Although Jess (Feinberg 1993: 221 – 222) is able to pass as a man while on hormone treatment, she is conflicted about her identity as a seemingly "heterosexual" man, which makes her invisible to the queer community.

> I drew one cc of hormones into a syringe, lifted it above my naked thigh – and then paused. My arm felt restrained by an unseeing hand…
>
> I stood up and looked in the bathroom mirror. The depth of sadness in my eyes frightened me.…As much as I loved my beard as part of my body, I felt trapped behind it. What I saw reflected in the mirror was not a man, but I couldn't recognize the he-she. My face no longer revealed the contrasts of my gender. I could see my passing self, but even I could no longer see the more complicated me beneath my surface.

Jess feels socially trapped because, as a passing man, she is forced into a single interpretation of gender, i.e. the assumption of heterosexual masculinity. In terms of gender identity, Jess (Feinberg 1993:222) feels restricted by the rigidity of one gender; one side of the binary is insufficient to express the complexity of her gender, her self-named "he-she" identity as a masculine woman:

> But who was I now – woman or man? I fought long and hard to be included as a woman among women, but I always felt so excluded by my differences. I hadn't just believed that passing would hide me. I hoped that it would allow me to express the part of myself that didn't seem to be a woman. I didn't get to explore being a he-she, though. I simply became a he – a man without a past.

Jess's anguish highlights the need for gender that does not hinge on either the biological or the gender binaries that restrict gender identification. If gender were librated from the stricture of either masculine or feminine, and either male or female, then gender identity could fluidly move between representations within these binaries without being restricted to one or the other. The possibility of transgender drag, with its performative fluidity, would in Jess's case be less restrictive than a full transition to a man. Butler (1990: 1353 – 136) explains the multiplicity of gender thus:

> The construction of coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender – indeed, where none of these dimensions of significant corporeality express or reflect one another.

These discontinuities should allow for the fluid movement between gender performances without the restrictions of sex or gender expectations.

This dissertation suggests that Jess is stifled by the woman/man binary because society expects the adoption of either one or the other biology. Even though there is greater tolerance shown to LGBTI individuals in the twenty-first century, queer identity is still expected to hinge upon clearly identifiable male or female bodies. For this reason, trans identity expressions offer enormous subversive potential as they radically obliterate the connection between the body and gender. Jess feels invisible as a passing man because as simply a man, she cannot express her identity as a "he-she", i.e. a woman with the complexity of both masculine and feminine aspects, both in terms of performance and biology. Interestingly, Jess does not define her femininity by her breasts, and after she decides to stop hormone therapy, still refers to her breast reduction surgery as "a gift to myself, a coming home to my body" (Feinberg 1993: 224). Female breasts, elevated to be the quintessential element of femininity, are to Jess a hindrance. In retrospect, Jess reflects that "I didn't regret the decision to take hormones. I wouldn't have survived much longer without passing" (Feinberg 1993: 224). Tragically, the effect of transphobia is clearly apparent as Jess's (Feinberg 1993: 224) body adjusts to the absence of the injected male hormones:

> I knew I was changing when people began to gawk at me again. It had taken a year. My hips strained the seams of men's pants. My beard grew wispy and fine from electrolysis. My face looked softer. Once my voice was hormone-lowered, however, it stayed there. And my chest was still flat. I was blending gender characteristics, and I wasn't the only one who noticed.

The "blending" of biological characteristics is significant because it creates an interpretive space in which Jess negotiates the gap between a male and a female body. Interestingly, Jess embraces her difference with greater insight that any of the people around her. She is aware of the subversive potential inherent in a body that subscribes to neither male nor female essentialism. Unfortunately, Jess's body now attracts unwanted attention and abuse from society. In an echo of her childhood otherness, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 224) again becomes an unimaginable "it":

> 'How the hell should I know what it is?' the man behind the counter remarked to a customer as I walked away. The pronoun echoed in my ears. I had gone back to being an *it*.

Although Jess is now again subjected to violence and verbal assaults, she makes an enormous leap in the expression of her own gender fluidity. Having performed masculinity within a female body, as well as a transitioning male body, Jess has negotiated gender that rejects the proscriptions of anatomical sex by embracing an alternative masculinity that transcends the norms of sex.

Stone Butch Blues presents a radically subversive narrative in which the protagonist is empowered by her gender performances, even while being punished by the proponents of heteronormativity. One of the most significant themes throughout the novel is what Halberstam (1998: 15) calls the "bathroom issue" or the binary division of bathrooms into strictly male and female:

> The continued refusal in Western society to admit ambiguously gendered bodies into functional social relations (evidenced, for example, by our continued use of either/or

> bathrooms, either women or men), is, I will claim, sustained by a conservative and protectionist attitude by men in general toward masculinity.

Jess and the other butch women are unable to use either the women's or the men's bathroom without fear of discrimination. Jess (Feinberg 1993: 59) describes one such incident when she walks into a women's bathroom, before beginning hormone therapy:

> Two women were freshening their makeup in front of the mirror. One glanced at the other and finished applying her lipstick. 'Is that a man or a woman?' she said to her friend as I passed them.
>
> The other turned to me. 'This is the women's bathroom,' she informed me.
>
> I nodded. 'I know.'
>
> I locked the stall door behind me. Their laughter cut me to the bone. 'You don't really know if that's a man or not,' one woman said to the other. 'We should call security and make sure.'

Their laughter makes it clear that the women taunt Jess and are aware of the fact that she is a woman. These humiliating situations and the sense of displacement experienced by butch women are created by the expectation of any given individual being identifiable as either a man or a woman, which, as Butler explains earlier, is a politically motivated attempt to maintain heteronormative supremacy.

Jess (Feinberg 1993: 172) is allowed access to the male bathroom when she begins to pass as a biological male, although her anxiety about entering this male-only space is still visible:

> It was time for the most important test of all: the men's room. I walked around a department store until I couldn't stand it any longer. I paced outside the men's room.

> What would happen if I walked in? I'd have to find out sooner or later. I pushed open the door. Two men stood in front of the urinals. They glanced at me and looked away. Nothing happened.

Although Jess passes relatively easily as a man, she is uncomfortable with an identity of assumed heterosexuality. Within the context of gender variance, it is important to challenge the assumption that a marked distinction between the inner and outer aspects of gender identity exists. Butler argues against the notion of a "true" gender, i.e. being a "real" man as opposed to being a woman who performs masculinity, or a biological woman who "masquerades" as a transgender man. Butler (1990: 137) argues that drag, which is the presentation of a gender opposite to a biological sex, questions the idea of gender that corresponds to sex as "real":

> I would suggest as well that drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity.

Butler insists that gender is an unstable category that shifts with the fluidity of performances in a variety of social milieu.

After she stops taking male hormones, Jess (Feinberg 1993: 248) moves to New York city and meets Ruth:

> I could tell that womanhood had not come easily to her. It wasn't just her large Adam's apple or her broad, big-boned hands. It was the way she dropped her eyes and rushed away when I spoke to her.

Ruth is the first transsexual woman that Jess meets. Jess remarks that: "The shades of gender in her voice were intricate, like mine" (Feinberg 1993: 249). By the time Jess meets Ruth, she is not

surprised at Ruth's gender expression. Jess has integrated expectations of gender fluidity into her own identity; therefore, she embraces Ruth's identification and develops a strong affection for her. Ruth signifies gender fluidity that transcends the reality of the male body in her performance of femininity. When Jess laments the absence of words to describe gender fluidity, Ruth rejects the need for repressive categorisation, "'I don't need another label,' she sighed. 'I just am what I am. I call myself Ruth Anne; my mother is Ruth Anne; my grandmother was Anne. That's who I am. That's where I came from" (Feinberg 1993: 254). Ruth shows extraordinary insight into the liberatory potential of transgender and transsexual identity. When Jess asks whether Ruth knew if she was a man or a woman, Ruth relies: "'No…That's why I know so much about you" (Feinberg 1993: 254). Her reply suggests that Jess's indefinable sex allows Ruth to define Jess firstly as a human being, beyond the confines of biological sexuality. Jess replies that she didn't want Ruth to think she was a man: "'I wanted you to see how much more complicated I am. I wanted you to like what you saw" (Feinberg 1993: 254). Again, Jess describes masculine identity as repressive in its unquestioning assumption of heteronormative male identity. In an echo of the anxiety Jess experienced when she began passing as a man, her argument expresses the subversive potential underpinning a gender identity that is not fixed to any specific identification with sex or gender binaries.

During Jess's time in New York, she and Ruth form a strong bond, especially after Ruth nurses Jess after a near-fatal attack by a gang of men, which leaves Jess with a broken jaw. A romantic friendship develops between them, even though Ruth is physically larger than Jess, which challenges Jess's own assumptions about her attraction to femme women. Ruth represents a significant challenge to Jess's expectations of femininity, and her attraction to Ruth radically

inverts both the expectations of gender and sex in terms of the erotic interplay. Together, Jess and Ruth mourn the loss of personal freedom and dignity in a world that encourages people to hate those who are different (Feinberg 1993: 255). When Jess relates her desire to change the world, Ruth reminds her that change will begin with fighting for the right to existence: "'Well, I've seen people risk their lives for the right to sit at a lunch counter. If you and I aren't going to fight for the right to live, then the kids coming up will have to do it" (Feinberg 1993: 255 – 256). Ruth's words recapture the decision Jess made as a teenager at school, the day she broke the rules of segregation to sit with her black friends at lunch. Gender difference is indicative of the need for an ongoing integration of the unique shades of gender, sex, and race. For as long as any type of difference is marginalised, the individuals who embody uniquely subversive identities will suffer on the outskirts of identification, subject to the dehumanizing effects of voicelessness, and often times the brutality of physical and emotional violence.

As has been illustrated by the characters in *Stone Butch Blues*, performances of masculinity are not situated only in male bodies, and even performances of minority masculinity cannot be restricted to identity category such as "butch lesbian". Butler (1990: 141) explains that the theory of sex as "essential" constitutes an attempt to disguise the performative nature of gender:

> That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of a strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.

Therefore, trans identity in its multiplicity of expressions creates a space in which individuals can perform gender that contradicts their bodies, and this allows for a far-reaching expansion of gender identities that rejects the imperatives of sex and gender. Unfortunately, trans identity remains veiled under the stigma associated with otherness, which is often a direct result of ignorance, and representation by the media, although important work is being done by advocacy groups to enlighten communities about the reality of gender variation.

The LGBTI community is faced with continued onslaughts of gender-based violence, as well as individuals subjected to the isolation and invisibility often associated with any form of gender difference. Butler (1990: 140) accurately observes that: “Discrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right”. Gender difference in the LGBTI communities will remain unspeakable and punishable for as long as these differences are excluded from academic discourse, marginalised by discriminatory social practices, and pathologised by political and religious fundamentalism. The creation of language will play a pivotal role in the destigmatization of gender difference, because as Butler (1990: 116) explains: “The power of language to work on bodies is both the cause of sexual oppression and the way beyond that oppression”. For example, previously derogatory terms are being reclaimed as part of the empowering discourse by the queer community. One of the most imperative goals of queer politics is the liberation of the queer individual from the tyranny of fear, discrimination and loneliness created by the otherness of gender. Jess describes how she “quickly…discovered that passing didn’t just mean slipping below the surface, it meant being buried alive” (Feinberg 1993: 173). She narrates that: “The loneliness became more and more unbearable. I ached to be touched. I feared I was disappearing

and I'd cease to exist if someone didn't touch me" (1993: 185). There is an urgent need for heightened awareness surrounding issues of gender difference, both within academic discourse and beyond, within sociopolitical contexts outside of the relatively sheltered realm of academia.

Conclusion

The creative potential of discourse is exemplified in its resistance to the stultifying effects of heteronormative discourse. This type of discourse challenges the norms of sex and gender through an investigation of alternative gender expressions. The category of sex, with its dependence on male and female anatomy, as well as gender's redundant focus on masculine and feminine necessitate a revision of both these categories. The subversion of sex and gender with identity categories allow for the creation of new gender expressions, the most significant within this theoretical discussion being queer identity. While heteronormative discourse requires a rigid adoption of male/female and masculine/feminine attributes, queer theory generates space of identification where subjects perform any combination of male/female, masculine/feminine, as well as identification that extends the scope of these binaries. For example, transgender identity, as illustrated by the textual analysis above, locates masculinity in female bodies, and even the degree of biological "femaleness" alters according to individual expressions. Whereas traditional discourse mimics the patterns of identification found throughout history, queer discourse throws any expectations of gender and sex into chaos with its subversive, parodic gender identities. The function of drag, for instance, is crucial to the exposure and ridicule of heteronormative priority. The analysis of masculine female drag proves its performative power, especially when physical appearance is manipulated in the performance of an ordinary subversive. Queer discourse overturns the accusation of heterosexual imitation by inverting the binary assumption of Otherness, thus liberating marginalised categories such as butch/femme.

This dissertation illustrates how the law shames and punishes those who do not adhere to the normative expectations of sex and gender. However, queer identification is not only restricted by

the law. Within the queer community, gender variance is discriminated against as new essentialist gender identities replace those imposed upon queer subjects by repressive discourses. Therefore, masculine women are still marginalised as imitations of men. Transgender and transsexual identities are often invisible to the broader LGBTI community, or are stereotyped as unimaginable expressions which are frequently excluded from representation by the queer community. This internalised homophobia restricts the expansion of queer identities, and maintains the alterity of queer as an identity category. Gender becomes performatively fluid only when its historical exclusion from sexuality as a whole functions as the starting position for its reinterpretation. The fact that the identification of queer is forbidden by the law in fact *enables* its visibility, and the prohibitions under which LGBTI individuals are punished can become subversive strategies reclaimed for the liberation of queer.

The texts in this dissertation offer divergent focal points on the spectrum of queer theory. *Trumpet* asserts the legitimacy of female masculinity in the performance of transgender identity, The insidious potential inherent in the life of Joss Moody hinges on the invisibility with which he performs masculinity. While *My Lesbian Husband* expresses a misguided attempt to view lesbian commitment in terms of heterosexual marriage, *Stone Butch Blues* moves beyond the anxieties in *My Lesbian Husband* to establish new identity categories which not only question the norms of sex and gender, but also radically invert the expectations of established forms of queer identity, such as the stone butch. The subversive potential of drag in *Trumpet* explores the notion of female masculinity as an authentic category. Similarly, *Stone Butch Blues* depicts the multiplicity of masculine expressions within female bodies, thus illustrating the complex and nuanced nature of butch identity. In contrast to the expansion of butch representation, Borich's narrative

demonstrates limited insight into the complexities of gender beyond a masculine/feminine binary. *My Lesbian Husband* establishes the limitations and inadequacy of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and the anxieties created by those limitations. The exploration of butch/femme sexuality in *Stone Butch Blues* suggests that this dynamic is liberating because Jess and her partners engage with forms of masculinity and femininity that do not uncritically imitate the heteronormative ideal. In contrast to this, Borich frames her narrative with heterosexuality normativity, and therefore the butch/femme dynamic presents less of a subversive challenge. All three texts depict to varying degrees the power of the law to punish and shame queer gender. *Stone Butch Blues* contextualises differences of class and race with gender variation, demonstrating how queer identity contributes to the abjection of subjects who are marginalised by ethnicity and class. *Trumpet* also presents the complexity of racial segregation within the context of gender difference, while *My Lesbian Husband* describes a more sheltered sociocultural position. Gender performances in all three texts highlight the fluidity of gender categories, and the generative potential inherent in gender that is extricated from the expectations of sex and gender.

Queer identity remains a contested arena in which binary constructs limit the expansion of LGBTI identity categories. The analysis of these texts suggested that gender identity within the LGBTI community is a human rights issue that requires further investigation within academia, and also by organizations that oppose homophobia and transphobia as a violation of the human right to freedom of expression. More research is needed into the absence of language to adequately express the identities in the LGBTI community. The value of queer theory is that it exposes the stigmatization with which many LGBTI individuals are treated, and it suggests ways

in which to transform marginalised subject positions. Significantly more studies are needed within the field of queer theory, specifically in terms of gender–related health issues. Corrective rape also needs to be given more attention in academic studies, especially within the context of African cultural traditions. The influence of patriarchal institutions also requires detailed research, since the majority of Christian churches around the world continue to propagate prejudice against the LGBTI community. Future research will include an investigation of the effects of gender-based violence against the queer community, and the impact of this violence on the queer psyche. Queer offers the empowerment of a category that was previously unspeakable in its invisibility. The LGBTI community should embrace the possibilities inherent in queer subversion in order to move from the margins of subject positions which are proudly queer.

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Abstract

This dissertation explores queer identity construction using theories of gender fluidity and performance. The research suggests that binary structures such as masculine/feminine, male/female, and heterosexual/homosexual, restrict the expansion of queer gender identities. A deconstructive theoretical framework based predominantly on the philosophy of Judith Butler is applied to a selection of contemporary lesbian novels. The textual analysis of lesbian, transgender and transsexual characters focuses on the ways in which binary structures are challenged by the multiplicity of gender expressions depicted within a variety of sociopolitical contexts. The reality of gender-based violence is investigated as a significant consequence of hegemonic power structures. The charge against butch/femme identity as imitative of heterosexual norms is challenged by demonstrating how such a category functions as a parodic subversion of heteronormative ideals. Female masculinity is also presented as a powerful identity category that inverts expectations of dominant masculinity, while allowing for an interrogation of the connection between sex and gender. From the arguments presented in this dissertation, what emerges very clearly is that queer gender identities empower the LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex) community when identity is freed from the constraints of heteronormative discourse.

Key terms

- Queer
- Gender identity
- Lesbian and gay
- LGBTI
- Gender-based violence
- Gender performance
- Judith Butler
- Female masculinity
- Butch/femme
- Binary
- Masculine/feminine