Chapter 15

Transsexuals' Gendered Self-Presentations[1]

J. Edward Sumerau, Douglas P. Schrock, and Teri Jo Reese

In this chapter, we examine research on transsexuals from a dramaturgical perspective in order to show the continued usefulness of dramaturgy for making sense of gendered social lives. To this end, we organize our discussion around bodily, emotional, and discursive strategies of "identity work" (Snow and Anderson 1987) that transsexuals often engage in to signify to themselves and others the types of gendered beings they believe themselves to be. Further, we examine the ways that social conditions, such as the setting or the audience, affect transsexuals' accomplishment of gendered identity work. Rather than simply cataloguing previous research, it is thus our intention to use the case of transsexuals to elaborate strategies all social beings may engage in to present gendered selves. In so doing, we aim to reveal some of the implications that analyses of gendered self-presentations may have for dramaturgical and transsexual scholars alike.

First, a note on language is in order. "Transsexual" is a medical term to describe people who desire to live their lives as a member of the sex supposedly "opposite" from the one they were ascribed at birth. Those who desire such a change generally adopt the label "transsexual" to distinguish themselves from other members of the "transgender" community, such as "crossdressers" who occasionally dress as women to express femininity, "genderqueers" who often shun gender identities altogether, "transvestites" who use the supposedly "opposite" sex's clothing for erotic pleasure, "intersexuals" who possess physical characteristics that do not lend them to categorization as exclusively male or female, and "drag queens and kings" who often perform onstage as the supposedly "opposite sex." In this chapter, we focus exclusively on transsexual women (social beings labeled male at birth, but who desire to live as women) and transsexual men (social beings labeled female at birth, but who desire to live as men). Along with shedding light on the gendered self-presentations of transsexuals, examining the dramaturgical work of transwomen and transmen

---

1 This chapter is dedicated in loving memory of Teri Jo Reese.

may also reveal some ways in which self-presentations can simultaneously challenge and reproduce gender inequalities.

Bodily Strategies of Transsexual Identity Work

Following Goffman (1961, 1971, 1979, 1977), the body represents a primary site and prop for the presentation of selves and the incorporation of personhood. In relation to gendered identities, for example, Goffman (1977) notes that in all societies' human bodies—and interpretations of the body by authoritative figures—serve as canvases upon which sexual differentiation is created and maintained. Rather than a blank slate, however, Goffman (1977) noted that the social processes surrounding birth created opportunities for categorizing and arranging human beings into separate entities based upon genital variations. Similarly, Goffman (1961, 1971) noted that social beings move through the world with an appreciation for "territories of self" that define expectations for bodily spacing, contact, and use in social life, and that social beings thus develop a multitude of strategies in order to manipulate their bodies in ways that resist or conform to social norms. Building on these insights, Goffman (1977, 1979) argued that social beings do not simply possess a "gender." Rather, we all learn to costume, move, and interpret our bodies in ways that signify gendered selves to ourselves and others (see, e.g., Cahill 1986; Sumerau and Schrock 2011; Vaccaro et al. 2011).

Although people generally interpret such bodily signification as natural manifestations of "essentially" gendered selves (Goffman 1977; 1979), transsexuals' experiences reveal the amount of time and effort it takes for one to align his or her body with conventional notions of gender. After someone defines themselves as transsexual, for example, they must learn to disregard the gendered lessons they have thus far received, and embark upon a bodily project of transformation. Specifically, they must find ways to transform the routine mannerisms, movements, expressions, and fashion selections associated with their assigned gender into the physical manifestations of the gendered selves they believe themselves to be. Rather than simply announcing their preferred gender identity and changing a set of clothes, they must thus alter their entire social costume in order to "pass" (Goffman 1963)—or be interpreted by others—as the "supposedly opposite" sex. Similar to how children learn to fashion their bodies in masculine or feminine ways from the examples of their parents and teachers (see Cahill 1986), transsexuals must thus examine the gendered self-presentations of other women or men in order to convince fellow interactants of their preferred gender identities.

Importantly, the ability—or lack thereof—to pass has a tremendous impact upon the lives of transsexuals. If one is able to convince others of their desired

gender identity, for example, one may receive affirmation throughout their social activities, which may in turn strengthen their commitment to transition and provide a sense of "authenticity" to their new gender identity (Schrock and Boyd 2005). On the other hand, transsexuals that are unable to pass often face tremendous discrimination, prejudice, and harassment from other people. In a national study of transgender discrimination sponsored by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, for example, Grant and associates (2011) found that transsexuals generally experienced forms of implicit and explicit discrimination and harassment across a wide variety of settings. Specifically, they found that respondents reported "alarming rates" of harassment (78%), physical assault (35%), and sexual violence (12%) in schools and that over half of the respondents (53%) reported being verbally harassed or treated unfavorably in public arenas, such as retail stores, hospitals, government agencies, hotels, and restaurants. Further, their findings revealed that only one-fifth (21%) of respondents had managed to update their identities to demonstrate new gender identities, and that almost half of the respondents (46%) reported being uncomfortable seeking police or legal assistance. Although these statistics reveal the danger inherent in not being able to pass as "conventionally gendered" people, it is also important to note that in some cases transsexuals must be able to pass before they are allowed to gain access to medical treatments and interventions necessary for full bodily transition (see Schilt 2010). Rather than simply an expression of the self, transsexual's ability to pass as "conventionally gendered" people in their daily lives may have serious ramifications for the entirety of their social relations.

Not surprisingly, transsexuals have responded to the aforementioned dilemmas by cultivating bodily strategies for signifying their preferred gender identity. Although not all transsexuals engage in each of these strategies and many transmen and transwomen do not accomplish or intend to accomplish a complete bodily transformation, all such strategies reveal ways transsexuals mobilize the resources at their disposal to accomplish bodily strategies of identity work. Examining the public performances of male-to-female transsexuals, for example, Schrock and associates (2005) found that respondents spent tremendous amounts of time retraining their bodies to give the impression—via their movements, how they stood or walked, and even how they held a cigarette or drove a car—and sound like—via personal speeches where they practiced raising their voice, giving "feminine" inflections to their statements, and talking in a more hesitant fashion—women they had met and interacted with in their former lives. Further, their analysis revealed that transwomen often learned to decorate their bodies like women by, for example, wearing long skirts to help them remember to sit with their legs closed and holding cigarettes near the tips of their fingers so they wouldn't smudge their lipstick. Rather than simply wearing

skirts or lipstick, transwomen thus tied their bodily decoration—as well as their movements and manners of speech—to the presentation of feminine identities.

The accomplishment of gendered identity work via the manipulation of bodily appearance, however, does not only apply to transwomen. Examining the bodily strategies of transmen, for example, Dozier (2005) found that after taking hormones transmen were often treated as men even if they had breasts or other secondary sex characteristics because their voices and body hair suggested they were really "men." Similarly, respondents talked about the importance of, for example, growing a beard, developing—via hormones or otherwise—and showing a receding hairline, not using too many long sentences in conversations, making sure voices don't become higher pitched at the end of sentences, disregarding urges to touch people during conversations, and learning how to give "bone-crushing" handshakes to signify claims to "manhood." Further, Dozier (2005) noted that the bodily signification of manhood could allow transmen to pass even when there was considerable evidence of their prior gender identities. Discussing their experiences with transition, for example, one respondent recalled that when he was nine months pregnant with a beard his colleagues interpreted him as a fat guy, and another respondent recalled how co-workers interpreted a transman with "childbearing" hips as just a big guy unworthy of further examination.

Although not all transsexuals make use of medical technologies such as surgeries, hormones, and electrolysis, it is important to note that these bodily transformations may also be employed to signify specifically gendered selves. Examining the experiences of transsexual youth, for example, Ehrensaft (2007) found that many youths used hormonal cocktails to block their bodies from developing unwanted, secondary sexual characteristics in the first place. In a similar fashion, Schilt (2006) and Dozier (2005) both found that transmen often were given the benefit of the doubt concerning their gender identities following surgical or hormonal interventions. Specifically, their analyses revealed that the hair growth caused by hormonal treatments, the differences in bodily demeanor—such as standing or walking differently—caused by surgical procedures, and the comfort they felt within their own bodies after undergoing these procedures allowed them to signify masculine selves with more confidence, which others regularly affirmed during interpersonal interactions. In a similar fashion, Schrock and associates (2005) found that transwomen often sought to biologically alter their bodies in order to feel more fully female, and often accomplished this by adjusting fitness routines to focus on losing muscle mass and undergoing electrolysis to remove unsightly—read masculine—hair. In so doing, these transwomen felt they were more equipped to publicly signify womanhood. Although surgical procedures may leave residual scars and artifacts for transsexuals to deal with, Dozier's (2005) study found that many transsexuals selected medical interventions—regardless of risk factors—in

order to gain a sense of coherency between their bodily and cognitive self-images and transform interactional experiences into moments where they could find affirmation for their gender identities.

Importantly, the experiences of transsexuals are not uniform. Specifically, researchers have found that experiences of transition and bodily signification may vary along lines of race, gender, or body size. With regard to gender, for example, transmen often experience a sort of welcoming committee and passage into the boys club of patriarchal privilege, homo-social bonding, and career elevation (Dozier 2005; Schilt 2006) whereas transwomen are more likely to experience acts of violence, find themselves shunned from workplace interactions, and receive negative depictions in the media (Doan 2010; Schilt and Westbrook 2009). In a similar fashion, white transmen typically receive more space to move within interactions and an assumption of morality whereas black transmen often face being stigmatized as criminal (Dozier 2005). In addition, the aforementioned study sponsored by the National Center for Transgender Equality and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found that transsexual racial minorities experienced more discrimination and harassment in all social contexts when compared to whites (Grant et al. 2011). Further, researchers have found that tall transmen experienced preferential treatment—when compared to shorter transmen—in social and occupational settings. Although all transsexuals violate social rules requiring that one should possess an unchangeable gender identity (see Goffman 1977), these findings reveal that not all violations are treated equally upon the social stage, and that the bodily elements of transsexuals' gendered self-presentation may significantly affect the ways others interpret and respond to them.

Emotional Strategies of Transsexual Identity Work

Following Goffman (1959, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1971), much of social life involves attempting to signify "valued" selves and avoid negative emotions, such as embarrassment, shame, fear, and grief (see also Schwalbe 1993). Rather than naturally feeling the way we are "supposed" to, however, Hochschild (1979, 1983) argued that people engage in strategies of "emotion work" wherein they deliberatively change their emotions—both in terms of internal feelings and emotional displays—in order to conform to cultural notions of how one should feel in a given situation or "feeling rules," and that these strategies may involve cognitive, bodily, and behavioral processes. Building on these insights, Fields and associates (2006) argued that all social identities, situations, and contexts had specific "feeling rules" embedded within them, and that people could thus signify gendered identities, such as mom (see Hochschild 1990) or man

(see Vaccaro et al. 2011), by engaging in strategies of emotion work in order to signify conventionally gendered selves (see also Schwalbe et al. 2000).

Considering the levels of discrimination and harassment transsexuals may face on public stages (see Grant et al. 2011), it is not surprising that many often experience emotional dilemmas related to passing and dealing with authorities. In terms of passing, for example, transsexuals often report experiencing debilitating feelings of fear, anxiety, and discomfort concerning, for example, involuntary disclosure (Ekins 1997), hostile or overly personal interactional exchanges (Lewins 1995), possible failure to appear conventionally gendered (Gagne and Tewksbury 1998), and feeling like they are alone and unworthy (Schrock et al. 2004). Further, transsexuals may experience similar emotions as a result of aggressive facework or stigmatization at the hands of legal (Anderson 2010), medical (Mizock and Lewis 2008), and therapeutic (Samons 2009) authorities. Following Doan (2010), the combination of these emotional landmines may require the average transsexual to expend an extraordinary amount of emotional energy to navigate the gendered contours of various interactional orders.

In response to these emotional dilemmas, transsexuals engage in emotional identity work, which involves managing emotions in support of maintaining the presentation of their preferred gender identities. While such strategies may be undertaken in any setting, transsexuals often initially learn how to manage their negative emotions in safe, semi-private settings wherein transsexual identities are already affirmed, accepted, and understood. In an examination of one such setting focused on empowering female and transsexual women that had been victims of violence, for example, van Ingen (2011) found that transwomen were able to alleviate negative emotions experienced in relation to violent acts or the fear of violence by engaging in strenuous physical activities, such as boxing. Further, her analysis revealed that both female and transsexual women drew upon the collective time and activity spent with other women to affirm their sense of themselves as strong women and turn their justifiable anger into athletic and supportive social interactions. In a similar fashion, Schrock and associates (2004) found that transwomen in support groups often referred to their first group meeting as an emotional turning point. Within the safe space created by the support group, transwomen were able to bond with others experiencing similar emotional dilemmas, and mitigate feelings of shame, powerlessness, isolation, and fear by aligning themselves with culturally dominant gendered, sexual, and religious norms, joking and sharing stories. In so doing, the support group setting allowed transwomen to find relief for negative emotions and signify and affirm transsexual identities.

While interactions with supportive others in semi-private safe spaces may provide transsexuals with temporary relief from the negative emotions they feel and opportunities to affirm their gendered identities, transsexuals must

ultimately devise a whole new set of emotional strategies for navigating public stages. Examining how transwomen manage emotional dilemmas in public, for example, Schrock and associates (2007) found that respondents often prepared for public self-presentations by focusing on positive aspects of public domains, such as enjoyment, and giving themselves pep talks to mitigate fear. They also found that transwomen managed negative emotions during public interactions by responding to embarrassing moments with anger, responding to frightening moments—such as when a stranger harassed one respondent in her car—with deliberate, calculated acts capable of reducing possible violence or harm, and defining situations that could pose danger as non-threatening and waiting to see what would happen. In a similar fashion, Schilt (2006) and Dozier (2005) found that transmen often managed awkward moments—such as when another person referred to them as "mam"—by expressing anger or indifference, and managed embarrassing moments—such as instances when respondents could not figure out what to say to other men or women—by joking about their own awkwardness or emphasizing the fact that they were at least part of the conversation. While these examples reveal public emotional strategies transsexuals may employ, they also map onto conventionally gendered feeling rules (see Hochschild 1990) that call for women, on the one hand, to maintain their emotional composure and find ways to "politely" handle awkward situations while men are able respond to similar situations with anger, indifference, or humor (see also Fields et al. 2006). As such, the public emotional strategies of transsexuals simultaneously relieve negative emotions and signify masculine or feminine selves.

Alongside individual experiences with public and private emotion work, transsexuals may also draw upon shared emotional experiences in order to facilitate collective action and social change. Examining the gendered self-presentations of transsexual and genderqueer people, for example, Connell (2010) found that some transmen drew upon their "emotional legacies," or memories of past negative emotions related to gender non-conformity, to justify fighting presumably sexist policies and standing up for others that exhibited non-normative gendered self-presentations. In a similar fashion, Schrock and associates (2004) found that transgender activists drew upon the emotional experiences of transsexuals and crossdressers to facilitate social movement participation. Specifically, their analysis revealed that movement groups produced collective action "frames" (Goffman 1974) that resonated with the emotional experiences of transsexuals, and alongside these frames, recruited transsexuals to the cause by promising emotional resolutions to their individual and collective problems that would outlast support group sessions. In so doing, movement activists encouraged transsexuals to view their emotional dilemmas as the result of societal oppression, and express their righteous anger via political action. Rather than merely an element of personal identity, movement representatives thus defined the emotional dilemmas and

management strategies of transsexuals as central to their collective experience, identity, and the political pursuit of transgendered people.

While the strategies outlined thus far importantly allow transsexuals opportunities to manage negative emotions and come together in search of social change, they also facilitate gendered self-presentations that may reproduce inequitable gender practices embedded in the larger social world. In her analysis of female partners of transmen, for example, Pfeffer (2010) found that women with transmen partners often put their own educational and occupational goals on hold in order to manage the emotional and psychological needs of their partners. Further, her study revealed that many of these women expended significant emotional energy managing the emotional dilemmas, such as anxiety and fear, their partners faced in relation to bodily transition and interactions with medical authorities. In a similar fashion, Pfeffer (2012) found that women in relationships with transmen often downplayed their own emotional needs in order to make marital, relationship, and sexual decisions in pragmatic ways. Specifically, these women took on figuring out how to work around existing legal structures to maintain their families, acquire reproductive technologies, and gain legal parenting rights in the face of fear and anxiety regarding possible external attacks. Similar to other women saddled with the vast majority of the emotional and care work necessary for intimate relations (see, e.g., Fields et al. 2006; Hochschild 1990), these couples thus reproduced gender inequalities found in more "normative" relationships. While this does mean that transmen in such relationships may be effectively accomplishing masculine self-presentations, it also reveals the dangers of aligning one's emotional and gendered self-presentations with conventionally gendered norms.

Discursive Strategies of Transsexual Identity Work

Following Goffman (1959, 1967, 1974, 1981), much of social life relies upon the discursive construction and affirmation of shared meanings, patterns of interaction, and rules governing the collective lives of social beings. In relation to gender, for example, Goffman (1977, 1979) noted that every society appears to develop a series of statements or scripts separating behaviors into feminine and masculine domains, which could be drawn upon to justify, explain, or disapprove of the behaviors of women and men. Rather than a static distinction embedded within biological realities, Goffman (1977) thus defined "gender" as a contested series of social arrangements constructed, sustained and affirmed through institutional and interpersonal definitions of what it means to be a "woman" or a "man." Expanding on these insights, Schrock and Schwalbe (2009) argued that social beings may draw upon these cultural gender beliefs to discursively signify feminine and masculine selves, such as women's rugby

player (Ezzell 2009) or gay Christian man (Sumerau 2012), justify attempts to reject or claim gendered identities (see Reese 2012), *and* read the statements of others as evidence of their possession of gendered identities (see also Cahill 1986).

Culturally speaking, the identity "transsexual"—as well as the normative expectations for what the term means—emerged in the course of medical debates concerning sex-reassignment surgeries during the 1950's (see Billings and Urban 1982). Specifically, medical authorities at the time defined "transsexualism" as a medical disorder wherein a person feels and believes they were born into the wrong sexed body, and suggested the cause of this disorder rested within the combination of improper gender socialization and biological development. Building upon these debates, clinics in the 1970's and 1980's asserted that transsexuality was both a medical and psychological condition wherein one's anatomical sex (e.g., hormone levels, genitalia, and other secondary sexual characteristics) did not align with or match one's inner sense of gendered personhood (e.g., feeling like a man or woman), and suggested that the proper treatment for those "trapped" in the wrong body involved a series of psychological and medical interventions (see Schilt 2010). Importantly, these psychological and medical definitions also provided a narrative wherein social beings could demonstrate their transsexual condition to others—especially psychologists and doctors—in a coherent fashion (Schilt 2010). Rather than simply defining an identity, however, these discursive practices created a cultural context wherein transsexuals would have to learn how to tell the proper narrative (e.g., I've always felt like I was born into the wrong body) in order to claim transsexual identities or receive medical and psychological intervention.

Importantly, transsexuals have established many locations where people may learn how to tell these stories in a coherent fashion. Rather than simply relaying personal events, however, this process typically involves learning what it means to be a transsexual, and developing the metaphorical tools necessary for convincing others that one has the right to claim this identity. In his examination of transwomen in support groups, for example, Mason-Schrock (1996) found that support group members narratively constructed themselves as truly transsexual by mining their childhood memories for evidence (such as early cross-dressing or feelings of being in the wrong body) of the identity and sought to deny prior evidence (such as being good at sports or living conventionally masculine lives) that could be oppositional to their claims. Further, his analysis revealed that transwomen often learned how to tell these stories during support group interactions. Support group members often looked to other members to learn what events counted as good evidence, asked questions of new members in order to give them the opportunity to provide evidence, and affirmed the stories offered within the group by smiling, agreeing, or showing approval in other ways.

While we cannot overstate the importance of learning the proper origin story for many transsexuals, sexual stories and conversations also become important vehicles for signifying a transsexual identity. In an examination of transwomen's sexual stories, for example, Schrock and Reid (2006) found that participants signified transsexual identities and distanced themselves from transvestitism by suggesting that cross-dressing evoked feelings beyond eroticism and led them to gradually adopt a feminine appearance overall. Further, their analysis revealed that transwomen signified trans identities by suggesting they performed sexual acts in a "feminine" manner, and drew upon sexual stereotypes about women to define themselves as naturally submissive. Similarly, Dozier (2005) found that transmen often relied upon stereotypical depictions of masculine sexuality to explain "gay" sexual activity. Speaking to a transman about sexual relations with men, for example, a respondent noted that it was "okay for me to date men who were born men" because they wouldn't try to feminize him, and because the combination of hormones and transitioning had ignited his sex drive. Further, Schilt and Westbrook (2009) found that transmen often sought to signify heterosexual masculinity by sharing their sexual exploits and relationships in conversation with others. Importantly, each of these instances reveal ways that transsexuals—both transmen and transwomen—used sexual conversations and stories to signify gendered selves, and align with cultural notions of "supposedly" masculine (e.g., sex drives and sharing conquests) and feminine (e.g., submission) sexualities.

Discussion

Rather than attempting an exhaustive cataloguing of transsexual scholarship in this chapter, we have aimed to highlight lessons that most resonate with a dramaturgical approach to gendered identity work. Specifically, we examined how transsexuals, like most others, engage in bodily, emotional, and discursive strategies to signify the types of gendered beings they believe themselves to be. In doing so, we also revealed how social conditions, such as cultural discourses, assumptions regarding the body, and rules concerning the ways people should feel in a given situation, shaped transsexuals' dramaturgical work. Let us now explore how putting transsexual scholarship on a more dramaturgical footing may have implications for transsexual research, dramaturgy, and the importance of changing historical and cultural processes for presenting gendered selves.

In relation to dramaturgical scholarship, for example, our review suggests a number of ways that transsexual scholarship may reinvigorate dramaturgical approaches to gender. Although the experiences of transsexuals may appear extreme, they draw attention to the amount of dramaturgical work all of us do to signify ourselves as gendered beings, and avoid the discrimination, harassment,

and prejudice directed toward nonconformists. Although most of us take our gender identities for granted, transsexuals remind us that every social being must, as Goffman (1977) suggested, learn the proper, socially approved signs, symbols, manners of dress, methods of speech, and bodily expressions others may read as evidence of feminine or masculine selves (see also Cahill 1986). Further, transsexuals remind us of the sometimes brutal social sanctions that may await one who fails to pass as properly gendered, or chooses to reject gendered assumptions, beliefs, values, or norms. Rather than yet another unique case of gendered self-presentation, the identity work of transsexuals also importantly draws our attention to the micro-political reality of the gendered interaction order.

Our chapter also suggests a number of ways dramaturgical insights may enhance contemporary transsexual scholarship. Although recent research has extended focus beyond subcultural processes into the family (Connell 2010) and work (Schilt 2010), for example, this often occurs without explicitly engaging dramaturgy. By attending to the variety of ways people signify gendered selves, transsexual scholars may be able to maintain a focus on personal agency, social and cultural constraints and resources, and interactional processes regardless of the specific contexts being examined. In addition to trans-contextual processes, however, a dramaturgical understanding of the diversity of interaction orders and the co-present actors therein may help transsexual researchers to pay closer attention to how trans people may adjust identity work strategies in relation to, for example, hostile or friendly audiences. Rather than simply expanding the examination of transsexuals into more subfields, our review suggests a dramaturgical approach can help uncover more generic processes of gendered identity work.

Let us say more about the importance of audiences in the presentation of gendered selves. Rather than simply a collection of people awaiting the delivery of the next line, Goffman (1967) taught us that audiences actively respond and are thus co-producers of actors' self-presentations. As the case of transsexual identity work reveals, failure to deliver a convincing gender performance can lead to a wide variety of social conflicts, negative emotions, and interpersonal strife. Rather than simply a momentary embarrassment or a cause for shame, the experiences of transsexuals reveal that forgetting your lines or experiencing wardrobe malfunctions may become matters of life and death when the performers work upon a gendered stage. As a result, transsexuals direct our attention to both the importance of our gendered self-presentations, and the dangers posed every time we walk on a gendered stage.

Importantly, our examination of transsexual scholarship also offers insights for the advancement of critical dramaturgy. Whereas dramaturgical scholars typically focus on the ways people employ the resources at their disposal, our analysis of transsexual identity work reveals the importance of also

interrogating the nature and content of those resources (see also Schwalbe et al. 2000). Specifically, our review demonstrates that transsexuals often rely upon and reproduce conventional notions of gender to construct and signify their preferred gender identities. As a result, transsexuals may, like the transmen Pfeffer (2010) studied, unintentionally reproduce gender inequalities embedded in the larger social world, or lend credence to discourses promoting "essential" differences between women and men (see Mason-Schrock 1996; Schilt 2010). In a similar fashion, our review shows that transsexuals, like members of other subordinated groups, often draw upon normative conceptions of gender to resist or challenge stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice, and violence, and experience differential levels of oppression and privilege in relation to their locations within interlocking systems of race, class, sexuality, and age (see, e.g., Grant et al. 2011; Schilt 2010; Schrock et al. 2004). The combination of these insights thus reveals the importance of critically examining trans people's identity work in relation to societal patterns of oppression and privilege.

To this end, scholars may benefit from attending to political and subcultural changes surrounding transsexuality. This may involve comparing the different gendered self-presentations and life experiences of transsexuals over time. Prior to the 1990's, for example, transsexuals were almost entirely dependent upon medical and psychological authorities for treatment, care, and guidance in the adoption and presentation of transsexual selves (see Schilt 2010). During the 1990's, however, the transgender movement emerged, and transsexuals began to find acceptance and affirmation within support groups and movement organizations (see Schrock et al. 2004). Building upon these developments, the 2000's saw the establishment of transsexual organizations in educational, occupational, and health-related sectors, the inclusion of transsexuals into lesbian, gay and bisexual political and religious organizations, and the passage of some legal protections for transsexual people (in some cities and states). Despite these changes, transsexuals still face tensions within lesbian and gay dominated organizations (see Stone 2009), and continue to experience disproportionate levels of poverty, harassment, and violence when compared to other groups (see Grant et al. 2011). While it is thus clear that the social landscape wherein transsexuals construct gendered selves has dramatically changed in the past 30 years, we know less about how these changes may affect transsexuals' social lives, interactional realities, and gendered self-presentations.

Alongside shifting political and subcultural processes, it may also be important to pay attention to changing cultural depictions of transsexuality. Although transsexuals appeared in mainstream movies and television programs as early as the 1960's and 1970's respectively, they were often portrayed in stereotypical ways that, as Halberstam (2005) suggested, typically reinforced rather than subverted conventional notions of gender. In recent years, however, mainstream film and television productions have begun to showcase a wider

variety of transsexual experience. Films like *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) and *Transamerica* (2005), for example, offered empathetic portraits of the dangers transsexuals face when they fail to pass, the emotional complexities of navigating familial, romantic, and therapeutic relationships, and the similarities between transsexual and "normatively" gendered social realities. In a similar fashion, television programs like *Nip/Tuck* (2003–2010) and *Transgeneration* (2005) showcased some strategies transsexuals of differing ages, economic statuses, and races engaged in to medically and socially transform their gendered selves. Similar to the ways that the establishment of more trans-friendly organizations in the 2000's has provided younger transsexuals with greater access to narratives and resources (see Schilt 2010), the emergence of holistic portraits of transsexual experience may have important implications for the ways people signify gendered selves—transsexual or otherwise—and the ways others interpret transsexuality.

Finally, our review of transsexuals' gendered self-presentations suggests there may be much to learn about the dramaturgical underpinning of gender by remaining sensitive to the wide variety of identities and lifestyles that lie between female and male identifications. Dramaturgical, transsexual and gender scholars may all have much to learn by exploring the identity work of the increasing number of people who reject conventional notions of gender (see also Connell 2010). How do people attempt to signify selves in-between or transcending the gender binary? How do audiences interpret and respond to people who identify as neither male nor female in various social contexts? What are the personal, organizational, and public consequences for attempting to live beyond the binary? How might the experiences of gender queer people shed light upon the fragility or stability of gendered cultural categories? Dramaturgical scholars that understand the importance of the body, emotions, and discourse to identity work as well as the importance of audience interpretations and participation in interactions may be very well equipped to answer such questions.

References

Anderson, Laurel. 2010. "Punishing the Innocent: How the Classification of Male-to-Female Transgendered Individuals in Immigration Detention Constitutes Illegal Punishment Under the Fifth Amendment." *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law and Justice* 25: 1-31.

Billings, Dwight B. and Thomas Urban. 1982. "The Socio-Medical Construction of Transsexualism: An Interpretation and Critique." *Social Problems* 29: 266-82.

Bolin, Anne. 1988. *In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.

Cahill, Spencer E. 1986. "Language Practices and Self Definition: The Case of Gender Identity Acquisition." *The Sociological Quarterly* 27: 295-311.

Connell, Catherine. 2010. "Doing, Undoing, or Redoing Gender? Learning from the Workplace Experiences of Transpeople." *Gender & Society* 24: 31-55.

Doan, Petra L. 2010. "The Tyranny of Gendered Spaces: Living Beyond the Gender Dichotomy." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 17: 635-54.

Dozier, Raine. 2005. "Beards, Breasts, and Bodies: Doing Sex in a Gendered World." *Gender & Society* 19: 297-316.

Ehrensaft, Diane. 2007. "Raising Girlyboys: A Parent's Perspective." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 8: 269–302.

Ekins, Richard. 1997. Male Femaling: *A Grounded Theory Approach to Cross-Dressing and Sex-Changing*. London: Routledge.

Ezzell, Matthew B. 2009. "'Barbie Dolls' on the Pitch: Identity Work, Defensive Othering, and Inequality in Women's Rugby." *Social Problems* 56: 111-31.

Fields, Jessica, Martha Copp, and Sherryl Kleinman. 2006. "Symbolic Interactionism, Inequality, and Emotions." Pp. 155-78 in *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, edited by J.E. Stets and J.H. Turner. New York: Springer.

Gagné, Patricia and Richard Tewksbury. 1998. "Conformity Pressures and Gender Resistance Among Transgendered Individuals." *Social Problems* 45:82-102.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday.

——. 1961. *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situations of Mental Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday.

——. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

——. 1967. *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. New York: Anchor Books.

——. 1971. *Relations in Public: Microstudies of the Public Order*. Harper & Row.

——. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. London: Harper & Row.

——. 1977. "The Arrangement Between the Sexes." *Theory and Society* 4: 301-31.

——. 1979. *Gendered Advertisements*. New York: Macmillan.

——. 1981. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press.

Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, and Justin Tanis. 2011. *Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Halberstam, Judith M. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: NYU Press.

Hochschild, Arlie R. 1979. "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure." *American Journal of Sociology* 3: 551-75.

——. 1983. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkley: University of California Press.

——. 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*, (with Anne Machung). New York: Viking Penguin.

Lewins, Frank W. 1995. *Transsexualism in Society: Sociology of Male-to-Female Transsexuals*. South Melbourne, Australia: Macmillan Education.

Mason-Schrock, Douglas. 1996. "Transsexuals' Narrative Construction of the 'True Self'." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 59(3): 176-92.

Mizock, Lauren and Thomas K. Lewis. 2008. "Trauma in Transgender Populations: Risk, Resilience, and Clinical Care." *Journal of Emotional Care* 8: 335-54.

Pfeffer, Carla. A. 2010. "'Women's Work'? Women Partners of Transgender Men Doing Housework and Emotion Work." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72: 165-83.

——. 2012. "Normative Resistance and Inventive Pragmatism: Negotiating Structure and Agency in Transgender Families." *Gender & Society* 26: 574-602.

Reese, Teri Jo. 2012. "Gendered Identity Work: Motivations for Joining the Military." Unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Sociology, Florida State University.

Samons, Saundra L. 2009. "Can this marriage be saved? Addressing male-to-female Transgender Issues in Couples Therapy." *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 24: 152-62.

Schilt, Kristen. 2006. "Just one of the Guys? How Transmen make Gender Visible at Work." *Gender & Society* 20: 465-90.

——. 2010. *Just One of the Guys? Transgender Men and the Persistence of Gender Inequality*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Schilt, Kristen and Laurel Westbrook. 2009. "Doing Gender, Doing Heternormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality." *Gender & Society* 23: 440-64.

Schrock, Douglas, Daphne Holden, and Lori Reid. 2004. "Creating Emotional Resonance: Interpersonal Emotion Work and Motivational Framing in a Transgender Community." *Social Problems* 51: 61-81.

Schrock, Douglas, Lori Reid, and Emily M. Boyd. 2005. "Transsexuals' Embodiment of Womanhood." *Gender & Society* 19: 317-35.

Schrock, Douglas, and Emily Boyd. 2005. "Reflexive Transembodiment." In *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interactionism and the Sociology of the Body*, edited by Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

Schrock, Douglas, and Lori Reid. 2006. "Transsexuals' Sexual Stories." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 35:75-86.

Schrock, Douglas, Emily M. Boyd, and Margaret Leaf. 2009. "Emotion Work in the Public Performances of Male-to-Female Transsexuals." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 38(5): 702-12.

Schrock, Douglas and Michael Schwalbe. 2009. "Men, Masculinity, and Manhood Acts." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35: 277-95.

Schwalbe, Michael. 1993. "Goffman Against Postmodernism: Emotion and the Reality of the Self." *Symbolic Interaction* 16: 333-50.
Schwalbe, Michael, Sandra Godwin, Daphne Holden, Douglas Schrock, Shealy Thompson, and Michelle Wolkomir. 2000. "Generic Processes in the Reproduction of Inequality: An Interactionist Analysis." *Social Forces* 79: 419-52.
Snow, David A. and Leon Anderson. 1987. "Identity Work Among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities." *American Journal of Sociology* 92: 1336-71.
Stone, Amy L. 2009. "More than adding a T: American Lesbian and Gay Activists' Attitudes Towards Transgender Inclusion." *Sexualities*: 334-54.
Sumerau, J. Edward. 2012. "'That's what men are supposed to do': Compensatory Manhood Acts in an LGBT Christian Church." *Gender & Society* 26: 461-87.
Sumerau, J. Edward and Douglas P. Schrock. 2011. "'It's Important to Show Your Colors': Counter-Heteronormative Embodiment in a Metropolitan Community Church." In *Embodied Resistance: Challenging the Norms, Breaking the Rules*, edited by Christina Bobel and Samantha Kwan. Nashville, TN: University of Vanderbilt Press.
Vaccarro, Christian, Douglas P. Schrock, and Janice McCabe. 2011. "Managing Emotional Manhood: Fighting and Fostering Fear in Mixed Martial Arts. *Social Psychology Quarterly* 74: 414-37.
van Ingen, Cathy. 2011. "Spatialities of Anger: Emotional Geographies in a Boxing Program for Survivors of Violence." *Sociology of Sport Journal* 28: 171-88.

Chapter 16
Sadomasochistic Selves: Dramaturgical Dimensions of SM Play

Staci Newmahr

Practiced in public communities and private spaces throughout the world, consensual sadomasochism (SM) provides an interesting puzzle for dramaturgical sociology. Like many erotic performances, it is understood as being somehow outside of the mundane, perhaps even anti-mundane. SM is viewed as a means of stripping away the very trappings of everyday life that Goffman held as both the accumulation and explanation of the self (1959). It is often understood as accessing some rawer, purer "self," some aspect of personhood that most people hold sacred. A dramaturgical perspective on SM not only reveals the staging of the sadomasochistic self as such, but also challenges the ever-present paradigm of the erotic as somehow more authentic than other aspects of everyday life. This chapter, based on fieldwork among consensual SM participants (2002-2006 and 2010-2012), explores the presentations of sadomasochistic selves during the moment-to-moment actions during SM interaction ("scenes").

SM is a kind of social interaction that involves the mutually consensual and conscious use, among two or more people, of pain; power, perceptions about power, or any combination thereof, for psychological, emotional or sensory pleasure (Newmahr 2011). In the public SM community, SM scenes begin with a negotiation process, through which the person "bottoming" provides the person "topping" with relevant information about tastes, aversions, "limits" (things s/he will not do) and health issues. Negotiation may be as formal as a completing a detailed questionnaire or as casual as a list of limits as participants set up a space to play. Generally, as play partners become more familiar with each other, the formality and extent of negotiation decreases.

Most commonly in an SM scene, a top acts upon a bottom's body (e.g. punches, restrains, whips, spanks, chokes, pinches, uses a blade on, cuts). After the scene, participants usually engage in "aftercare," during which time the top is commonly understood to be responsible for ensuring that the bottom is, or returns to being, physically, psychologically and emotionally intact and comfortable.