LEARNING TO BECOME A WOMAN IN A COLLECTIVE TRANSCAPE: A LOOK INSIDE TRANSY HOUSE

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2006

UMI Number: 3213241

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

LEARNING TO BECOME A WOMAN IN A TRANSCAPE:
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by

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This dissertations looks at how a communal living environment for trans women interacts with the (re)building of an identity. Specifically, I explore how the occupants of Transy House, a domestic collective in Brooklyn, New York, use and are influenced by the social and physical environments to create, express and support their gender and sexuality.

Currently, there is very little space within the physical geography where trans persons can safely be who they are without fear of homophobic or transphobic violence. And yet, territorial proprietership is critical to supporting, validating, and fortifying identities. Transy House, therefore, represents a usurping of place (i.e. power) by trans individuals that is significant to the evolvement of the self and the building of a collective empowerment.

From this research five main themes emerged: 1) Transy House has created a transcape with the potential to become a powerful site of resistance; 2) through socialization with other trans residents, trans women learn about gender and sexuality while they perpetuate the gender binary; 3) individual identities are displayed, supported and protected in the physical environment of personal spaces; 4) the collective identity is expressed and reinforced in the landscape of the public spaces; and 5) within the

tumultuous social environment and the poor physical condition of Transy House, many trans women continue to find refuge in this trans-dominated space.

The findings are significant to creating a richer and more comprehensive understanding of identity. In particular, they offer a unique socio-environmental framework for which to explore post-transition trans identity development. Additionally, this research expands existing person-place literatures and opens new doors to understanding how groups interact with their environments. Moreover, the findings have the potential to impact current legislation by providing the impetus to expand policies that protect trans individuals from bias and discrimination in work and housing.

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Rowen Belle Fisher and to all of the residents of Transy House

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all of my committee members: Setha Low for her encouragement and loyalty throughout all of my years at the Graduate Center, David Chapin for help getting me into the program as well as his unique insight and support, Bill Cross for understanding marginality.

I would also like to thank my outside readers, Darryl Hill and Nicole Gagne. Darryl's help starting up and then taking over the wonderful TransNYC group as well as his knowledge of trans literature and Nicole's time, effort, precision, and perspective. Both have helped to make this a more complete study.

My sincere grattitude goes to Judith Kubran, for your knowledge the of policies, procedures and protocalls to make it through graduate school. In addition, your words of encouragement while listening to my sometimes frustrated venting gave me the courage to continue.

A special thank you is for Pamela Perkins who reached out to me as a support and dissertation coach. Her strict deadlines and thorough editing enabled me to achieve the success that this document demands. This dissertation would never have been finished in such a timely manner if it was not for her. This legacy will be continued to my students.

Thank you Franz Fuerst for your translation of the German video.

Beth Harris, Joe Ugoretz, and Julie Ugoretz, your love, assistance, and yes, even doubt, helped keep me focused and determined to complete in a timely fashion.

I also sincerely appreciate Arielle Goldberg, my writing partner, second set of eyes, and sounding board, for her confidence in my ability to complete this.

Mom, thank you for your love and support.

Dad, thank you for being back in my life again.

My dear, sweet, daughter Rowen' smile, laughter, and hugs renewed my energy even on the most difficult of days.

Lastly, my love and appreciation goes to Lisa Fisher, my life partner. Her motivation, words of encouragement, emotional support enabled me to keep working to achieve my goals. Additionally, her true partnership in parenting Rowen and housework gave me the time I needed to complete this dissertation.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This dissertation is a phenomenological case study that explores the role a communal home[1] for trans[2] women plays in the development, expression, and validation of gender and sexuality in women of trans experience. Transy House, a dwelling located in Brooklyn, New York, is the focus of my research. It is with the trust and assistance of the residents that I was able to explore how their emerging self definitions are defined and played out within the physical context of the dwelling.

The distinct setting of a communal domestic environment for trans women also creates an opportunity to look at social influences impacting the development and expression of newly created identities. This study does not attempt to depict a universal experience for trans women living in communal environments nor does it try to identify a single "trans identity". Rather, I examine themes that may be ubiquitous to the development and expression of gender and sexuality within the domestic context. The uniqueness of a communal living space for trans women will only add a noteworthy perspective to the plethora of identity research.

The basis for this study came from the results of previous exploratory research I conducted with ten gender-variant individuals (Felsenthal, 2004). There, I documented

[1] I will use Noreen Cornfield's definition of a secular urban commune to apply to the communes described here. Cornfield describes a commune as "a household that is described by its members as a "commune" or "collective" and to which they have a given name." "[They] had to have a moral aim beyond mere convenience. A norm of sharing was an essential component of this aim." (1983:115).

[2] For this study I will use the term trans as an umbrella term covering identities such as trans, transexual, gender-variant, gender-queer, and queer.

the participants' experiences in public spaces within the context of New York City. All of the participants in the study experienced frequent, often daily, harassment as well as the implied negative bias of disparaging looks while in public space. Their encounters with passerbys included both verbal abuse and physical assault. One gender-variant participant described the experience while in public.

> At one point we were getting followed around by men that were talking shit. It's like being a dog and making circles, looking to see who's following you.

The surveillance this participant felt was oppressive and generated feelings analogous to being an animal. To counter these adversarial experiences in public space, participants created many sites of resistance that helped to empower and (re)build their individual and collective identities.

The home played a critical role in constituting the trans identity. Participants used the home to blur the boundaries between public and private space a practice which mirrored their gender identities that defied static male/female formulas. For all ten gender-variant individuals the home served as a multifunctional platform for working, socializing and networking, in addition to providing a place for domestic activity (e.g. sleeping, eating and relaxing) and retreat. The dwelling thus contributed to supporting and grounding the various selves (e.g. as worker, friend, activist, … etc.) for each of the participants. It was within this environment that residents found empowerment both as individuals and collectively to (re)build and develop their identity.

The home was also a place for participants to create self-sufficiency and economic stability. All of the participants in that study either worked from home, were independent contractors who worked at temporary job sites using the home as a mainstay for business,

or they used their home as a secondary office. Countering discrimination faced in public places, including the workplace, gender-variant individuals used the home as a site for both professional growth and economic stability. For some, home was the only place where they felt they can conduct a business without facing prejudice. Several remarked that working in the safety of their house allowed them to escape the life of working the streets, a common trade for trans people.

Additionally, most of the participants revealed that they used the home for most of their socialization and socio-political networking. Similar to lesbian domestic collectives (Elwood, 2000) and the black woman's "homeplace" (hooks, 1990), the homes of people who are gender-variant are social settings for informal gatherings with friends and family, and, more importantly, sites for political strategizing, social activism, and community empowerment. The home is one place that trans individuals work together to renew themselves, build strength, support and alliances for their transgressive identities. Some participants emphasized how a transliberation movement can be started from one's house.

In a society where trans individuals have limited social control or spatial domination, they are able to create a secure transcape within the confines of their own homes. It is within the boundaries of the house that residents established their own social rules and norms for behavior and presentation. As one participant in the study stated: "If you stay in your space, *your* space, you control other people […] most people play my game, I don't play theirs." (Felsenthal, 2004). For minority groups, maintaining control over a physical space is a critical strategy used for resistance and empowerment (Sharp,

et.al., 2000). Claiming space is also a critical tool in the validation and expression of one's identity (Proshansky, 1983)

The trans interpretation of home is two-fold; it serves as a refuge from the precarious atmosphere experienced in public space while, at the same time, it can be a counter public for individual and collective growth and transgression. Seeing how significant the home became in the lives of people who defied society's gender categories, I was curious to explore, on a deeper level, how the home is used specifically for identity development and expression in individuals whose identities were undergoing radical transformations as well as public contestations. I wanted to know if trans women make a conscious effort to create a gender-specific space that could help validate and support this newly expressed identity (e.g. because I painted the walls pink and light incense, whenever I enter this space I feel more feminine). Also, I was curious about the social factors that influenced trans identity. How would living with other trans women help or even hinder their own gender identity development and expression? It is with these curiosities and questions that the research unfolds.

Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is two fold: 1) to provide a brief overview of gender paradigms for identity development and expression, and 2) to give the reader a general understanding of the role of the home on identity as it may relate to the trans experience. It is my hope, in this dissertation, to weave together the genderal constructs for identity and the elements of environmental influence to create a more complete understanding of the self. Though there has been a fairly substantial amount of work

published on trans identity, the author has found nothing written on the role of the home on individuals who are trans or on collective living arrangements for trans people. For this reason, I am exploring the topics here.

Gender Identity

Our society constructed sex, sexuality[3] and gender categories based on oppositional binaries, such as male/female, straight/gay, normal/deviant, that were to add structure and "normalcy" to our society. Now, because of political and social activism, advances in medical technology, and changes in cultural and religious convention, these socially prescribed constructs are being challenged by becoming more fluid, less defined and it is easier and more acceptable to question or even change who one is. This can include the act of "coming out" as gay or lesbian, "transitioning" to the other gender (either operatively, hormonally/chemically or by crossdressing), or by denying, thereby defying, all classification systems (e.g. the androgynous presentation). One may now self identify as: trans, transsexual, transvestite, gender bender, intersexed, drag, butch, queer, androgynous, gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual, or polymorphous, to name a few. Therefore, the reductionist and restrictive binary taxonomies do not apply to the many people who perceive that they live in a gender fluid society, although many people still adhere to the male/female dichotomy.

[3] Sexuality, as defined by Nanda (2000), is understood as "erotic desires, sexual practices, or sexual orientation". Society establish heterosexuality, intimate relations between a man and a woman, as the norm. However, bisexuality, sexual attraction toward men and women; homosexuality, attraction toward individuals of the same gender; and polyamorous, sexual attraction toward individuals presenting in any and all gender displays (e.g. androgynous) are also common practices.

The trans/transexual identity

Trans identities are complicated. According to the Diagnostical and Statistical Manual, edition four (DSM IV), transexuality is a Gender Identity Disorder that is defined as: a) a strong and persistent cross-gender identification; b) a persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex; c) no concurrence with a physical intersex condition; and d) clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Therefore, according to the APA, an individual who feels she was born into the wrong body is considered to have a mental disorder. Interestingly, to correct this mental disorder, one has sex reassignment surgery or obtains hormones to change their body. However, in order to have surgical procedures, one must be clinically diagnosed with GID.

Individuals who consider themselves trans, feel that the sexed body they were born into does not match how they feel. They are then socialized into performing as their born gender. For most people who are trans, “gender is an innate feeling of who you are which comes out as you free yourself from social pressure” (Rusty).

A child who is biologically male may start using a female name, preferring girl’s clothes, and will often perform feminine-typical play (i.e. playing house and performing as the role of the wife and mother). Gender “transgressive” play may start as early as three, however, for many children these behaviors are discouraged. It isn’t until a trans individual reaches adolescence or adulthood that her “true self” is realized and expressed, if at all.

Gender and sexuality, though often confused and used interchangeably or in strong connection with each other, are mutually exclusive terms and performances. Gender identity is who one identifies as, male, female or an alternative gender, whereas sexuality is who one is attracted to. Though an individual's gender identity may change from male to female, her sexual preference often remains consistent with whom she was attracted to before her transition. For many male to female trans people, their original sexuality is gay (homosexual), yet after their gender transition, their sexuality becomes heterosexual.

Past understandings of gender

Historically, in Western Society[4], sex has been referred to as biological – a chromosomal difference separate from culture or discourse. It has been defined by one's XY or XX chromosomes as well as by bodily differences such as genital constructs and hair growth variations. However, gender is considered, according to the seminal work of psychologist Robert Stoller, an "overall sense of being male or female" and is present in a child's first year of life (Stoller,1968). According to his theory, it is an internal experience that occurs within the individual's psyche. An infant is born into a sexed society where heteronormative gender roles and behaviors are strictly taught and enforced. Thus, the social construction of gender is more rigidly defined by behavior as well as self-identification as either male or female/masculine or feminine.

John Money's research on the construction of gender in intersex individuals provided much of the groundwork for trans research. He found that once doctors declare

[4] I specifically state in Western Society sex has only been a male/female framework that is associated to one's biology, because in other cultures there is room for a third gender. For example, hermaphrodites and trans people for Native Americans are two-spirited and in India they are hijras.

the sexual identity of an intersex child (usually after several reconstructive surgeries), the child's gender development and expression will most likely be dictated by social influences (1994). In other words, if both the parents and the child's social circle treat the child like a boy, then the child will "learn" to become and behave as a boy.

Today, Money's theories, though have been largely discredited in favor of more biological determinist understandings of transism. Most researchers now posit, though there has been no proven conclusions, that individuals who are trans have either neurological variations or hormonal differences (post or prenatal).

Performativity

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* (1977) compliments Money's findings on gender development. Bourdieu posits that one's enactments, when played out repeatedly, become internalized and normalized. Once the process is internalized in the collective, it then becomes a societal norm. Due to the consequences of defying prescriptions for femininity and masculinity, individuals, therefore, continue to present in female or male-typical ways. The proliferation of a binary gender system and the acts performed to fortify it (e.g. violence against trans individuals) is the social habitus for gender norms in our society.

Judith Butler (1999) describes her understanding of gender with her well-known concept of performativity. Like Bourdieu, Butler asserts that gender is a behavior which is performed repeatedly, however, like a theatrical performance, one adapts and regulates one's presentation according to the audience and the type of physical environment one is in. The idea of consciously performing one's gender, even within the confines of socially prescribed rules, is appealing because it gives back agency to the individual so she can

express her identity as she chooses. When applying Butler's concept to the trans woman's self expression, she will perform a more feminine presentation while in front of a mainstream audience because that is what she perceives the audience expects of her. This is a conscious effort to blend into society and to aviod potential harassment from a transphobic society.

Gender, as a repetitive performance internalized and expressed as a conscious, desired display, is particularly useful when understanding trans expressions for identity. Results from my previous research (Felsenthal, 2004) on the trans experience in public space, indicated that participants made conscious efforts to either down play their gender performance to blend in and not be noticed, or they exaggerated their gender presentation proudly proclaiming their transgressive identities when they were in safe environments (e.g. the home, gender conferences, trans bars, and s/m scenes).

Additionally, Kessler and McKenna (2000) write under the premise that people who are transexual do not change their gender identity, but correct a "gender mistake", they posit that gender is a social construction occurring through one's interactions. In their article entitled, *Gender Construction In Everyday Life: Transsexualism (Abridged)* Kessler and McKenna discuss four gender attributions that transsexual individuals choose, create, learn, and practice: 1) *general talk,* gender-specific speech skills such as: voice intonations, pitch, vocabulary (e.g. robe rather than housecoat) 2) *public physical appearance,* techniques for altering dress (e.g. using a scarf to cover the Adam's apple) and behavior 3) *the private body,* decisions about who to reveal one's body to, 4) *talk about the personal past*, altering one's background to conceal one's original identity. For people who are transexual, according to Kessler and McKenna, managing their gender is

a deliberate and conscious process that creates and proliferates the reality of only two natural genders.

Performativity, therefore, is a conscious and deliberate production of gender that is enacted for and by one's audience. Each dynamic exchange between a trans individual and her onlooker will be internalized and thereafter repeated and adapted for future presentations. Though, because of the performative nature of this theory, one has the potential to create new and varied genders, however, most person's daily performances work to support and propagate this society's gender binary. This can be a self-defense mechanism against a society that does not accept gender transgressions or challenges.

Social construction

Looking at the production of gender using a social-constructionist perspective (Bandura, 1969; Deaux and LaFrance, 1998), one's femininity or masculinity is a result of one internalizing cultural norms and expectations for gender presentation. The infant is born into a sexed society where heteronormative gender roles are strictly taught and protected. Individuals, therefore, learn their gender through observation, socialization, modeling, and reinforcements used in rituals, social practices, and representational symbols (clothing etc.). Even what might be considered natural expression is culturally determined and embedded in society's symbolic meanings and are subject to interpretation. It is, therefore, limited by the gender prescriptions society sets.

Deaux and Major (1987) originally proposed a context-driven model of gender that focused mostly on dyadic interactions between an individual and another person. However, this model was later expanded (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998), to include more

macro-level social influences: “Social structures, social roles, power, status, and culture […] must be considered for a fully-drawn picture of gender.” (1998:788) This enhanced model is significant when understanding the subordinate or subjugated individual’s performances and social interactions. Because of her position within the social framework, a trans woman may adapt her look and behavior according to the stereotypical associations attached to being trans (e.g. becoming a sex worker).

The social constructionist perspective, therefore, consists of cognitive processes for observing, evaluating, and imitating patterned behaviors and presentations for men and women. Thus, one’s femininity or masculinity is a byproduct of cultural norms which are, sometimes falsely, created and exhibited in the media, through familial relations, and through our economic and political powers. Grounding and enhancing performativity, social constructionism also supports and fortifies the dichotomous model for gender.

Environmental construction

Gender and sexuality are (re)produced, fortified and validated in the landscapes of the physical environment. The physical environment consists of architectural constructs such as shape and size of rooms as well as materials used for design elements such as wood floors or brick walls. Also included in the physical environment are the objects occupying the space such as photographs or flowers. Seeing the physical environment through a gendered lens requires an understanding that both design elements and each individual object take on both real qualities (e.g. the physicality such as a table or door) and social constructions (e.g. cultural meanings and individual projections).

Initially, a gendered environment is displayed in colors, décor and representational objects. For example, when a girl is born her room may be blanketed in pink and ornamented with dolls and ribbons. The media is a key player in perpetuating these constructs with particular emphasis in store advertisements in catalogs on T.V. and on websites that sell items for children's rooms clearly demonstrate the gender-specific environments. As an example of this targeted advertising, below are two photographs taken from the Pottery Barn website. The significant contrast between how a typical girl's room and boy's room are depicted is clearly illustrated. The soft lines, fine lines of the head and foot board that flanks the dust ruffle on the bed; the softly draped, pink, sheer curtains; and the pink walls that are highlighted by the white furniture are all feminine-typical décor. This is in stark contrast to the hard lines and dark hues of browns and blues that are seen in the boy's room, not to mention the train motif.

Figure 1: Advertisements for typical girl's and boy's rooms

Sanders (1996) furthers this gendered space idea, in his article about "male space". He explores the gendering of specific architectural elements. Sanders asserts that certain materials evoke more feminine landscapes (e.g. ornamentation) or more "manly"

environments. A masculine environment, he posits, can be described as having wood and steel (which is also illustrated in the photographs above):

> Wood conjures up a vision of reindustrialized, predomesticated masculine wilderness, while steel invokes a picture of working-class laborers shaping molten metals in foundries. (pp 78)

Although there is no empirical evidence supporting Sanders' suppositions about gendered space, they do support the attitudes and beliefs of many interior designers. I have been teaching environmental psychology in the New York School of Interior Design for over three years and each semester I ask my students, "What makes a space feminine or masculine?". The students' responses are always the same focusing on color themes (i.e. pinks and reds for women), materials (i.e. dark woods for men and fabrics for women), and even lighting (i.e. softer for women).

Though gender is expressed in a multitude of ways, the "natural attitude" of gender in our society has spurred us to construct a gender system that consists only of males and females, not allowing for a third, fourth, or Nth gender. These two genders are considered mutually exclusive and polar opposites or, according to common belief, are unchanging. This model is fortified and institutionalized through many regulatory processes such as: medical intervention, psychological diagnoses, governmental regulation, media interpretation, individual biases, and citizen policing (Felsenthal, 2004).

The various aforementioned paradigms for gender and sexuality are used to ground the findings here. Like Butler, I believe that individuals are active agents in their gender and sexuality expressions, therefore, the trans participants consciously decided

how to portray their true self both with behavioral and cosmetic (e.g. dress, make-up, etc.) displays as well as through alterations to the physical environments that they live. It is at the intersection of the environment and and social-constructionist/performativity that I find gender and sexuality problematized, developed and expressed.

Environment and Identity

> "[T]he subjective sense of self is defined and expressed not simply by one's relationship to other people, but also by one's relationships to the various physical settings that define and structure day-to-day life." (Proshansky *e. al*, 1983)

Proshansky's place identity paradigm, as described in the above quotation, offers a link between defining the self and understanding one's lived experience in the context of the physical environment (Proshansky, 1978). Place-identity, Proshansky posits, is a "sub-structure" of self identity and is a key element for its construction. It is within the physical landscape that one experiences life and creates memories – environmental schema[5] (Proshansky, 1978). The physical environment, therefore, is critical in satisfying biological, physical, social, and cultural needs and creates the framework for one's identity.

Douglas Mason-Schrock's study on transexual narratives (1996) describes the institutionalization of gender within various sub contexts. In the parent's home, for example, the trans participants explained, they were often punished or even sent to a psychologist for cross-dressing behaviors when they were young. These findings parallel those of Darryl Hill's empirical study on 18 trans individuals: "Parental prohibition of

[5] According to Proshansky, environmental schema, like cognitive schema, are contextual memories specifically associated with the physical landscape, that helps one to define an existing situation and better comprehend future events.

crossgender impulses and control of gender expression were fairly common […]" (Hill, 2003: 132). As trans children grow, this negative reaction to atypical gender behavior continues in the schools. Oftentimes the teacher discourages the child from "inappropriate" behaviors and the children themselves participate in gender segregated play. A male-born participant in Mason-Schrock's study was discouraged from playing jump rope with the girls at school because that kind of play was not appropriate for boys (Schrock, 1996). For adults, gender norms proliferate in the workplace and on public settings. In this setting, for example, trans individuals are pressured to socialize with same gender colleagues as well as perform in a more "masculine" fashion.

The home

As Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine eloquently state: "Home is a word that positively drips with associations." (1995). Homes, for example, are the first places in which we live. They provide the backdrop for domestic activity, and yet they are also a place with strong personal and social associations. The home has countless connections to people, place, and the past (Dovey, 1985). It can be a place for autonomy, control and personal freedom, though, for a woman who has experienced domestic violence, it can be a place of trepidation. For people of color, or for individuals who are gender-variant, the home can also act as a "safe haven" from an oppressive and hostile society.

The home, of all environmental contexts, is also the place that most significantly represents and relates to the individual's self-identity. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that the house is a direct symbol for the body with the interior space signifying maternity and the womb, and the exterior façade representing the individual's public presentation.

Claire Cooper-Marcus' (1974) "House as Symbol of Self" article asserts that one's identity, at both a conscious and subconscious level, is a universal experience that is manifested in one's home. The interior of the house, therefore, mirrors the person's psyche and the outside signifies one's social performance. The house, according to Cooper is a ubiquitous prototype of one's self image.

Sadalla et. al.'s (1987) empirical research that correlates descriptors for the house and self identifying descriptors for its owner supports the idea that the house is a symbolic representation of the self. In this study researchers asked subjects to view photographs of houses and then requested that they describe the owners of the houses using various personality and identity traits. The responses were then recorded and compared to the owner's self-reported personality and identity traits. Similar descriptors were used by both the subject viewers and the owners themselves indicating a concordance between the "identity" of the house and the identity of its owner.

Similarly, Twigger-Ross and Uzell (1996) conducted a study using Breakwell's model on the identity process that looked at how one's level of emotional attachment to their house relates to the development and maintenance of identity. The researchers found that the residential environment in which one lives significantly influences the self in all four identity determinants from Breakwell's model: *distinctiveness*, how one defines one self (e.g. city girl); *continuity*, dynamic, yet continuous relationship with environment one moves from; *self-esteem*, places generate feelings of comfort and pride; and *self-efficacy*, manageability of the environment facilitates improved feelings of ability and achievement. The results from this study, the researchers asserted, supported the idea that

place, particularly the home environment, was critical for one's identity development and maintenance.

Interestingly, a psychiatrist, Paul Hamburg, (1988) wrote a case study that explored the links of one woman's psychological growth to her self-described changes in her experience of home. The woman was diagnosed with depression and had narcissistic tendencies. She entered therapy after a difficult divorce. Hamburg writes: "Her images of rooms and spaces have provided a useful mirror for documenting steps in her struggle toward authenticity." (122) Through this one person's narrative about dwellings, Hamburg was able to more fully understand its potential meanings and metaphors such as safety, containment, the body, the psychic inner world as well as temporal disruptions.

The home and gender (roles) and (hetero)sexuality

Past literature

Because the home is a representational symbol of the individual, and the individual is, partly, a product of their social environment, one can assume then that the home will also be representative of the genderal milieu of the culture. For example, throughout the 20th century and even, somewhat continuing today, the private realm for women/public realm for men distinction has been strictly enforced. In the early 1900s, women were expected to remain in the home to preserve their piety and if they were seen in public alone they were deemed un-respectable or to have sexual intentions (Frank & Paxon, 1989).

The home also played a more significant role for women in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Though societal expectations bound them to their residence, women used this space to create ties to the social institutions the public space. For example, as Walker

presented in her chapter “Home and Away: The feminist remapping of public and private space in Victorian London” (2001), women “made the home a political space in which social initiatives germinated and developed.”(pp 298). The home, therefore, became a place of control and power, rather than the domestic prison many felt it to be.

In the 1950s, suburban domesticity and the house became the significant cultural association to the heterosexual woman. The suburban housewife ideology was supported with advertisements and TV shows that displayed the “happy housewife” in her suburban home baking or cleaning with the children playing at her feet. The playful image below depicts a woman thrilled about receiving from her husband the wonderful gift of a washer and dryer. The husband confirms, supports and fortifies his wife’s position as suburban housewife keeping her place-bound to the home and sustaining her expected roles as nurturing wife mother. The two children also perform their expected gender roles with the girl cuddling a teddy bear and the boy playing with toy guns while riding a rocking horse. Interestingly, all of the home appliances seen are in light pink perpetuating the environmental schemas for femininity.

Figure 2: 1950s advertisement for washer and dryer

As this 1950s advertisement shows, male and female attitudes and behaviors were, thus, setting specific and established by socially accepted norms. Identities for women were grounded in the home while the male adult identity evolved in the workplace. Interestingly though, the very same domestic equipment that was expected to bind women to the home (e.g. the washer and dryer advertised), also expedited household chores affording them more time to leave the home.

Rappoport's influential research on house form and culture presented gendered theories that indicated how the house takes the shape of the culture that it resides in. His numerous cross-cultural studies looked at the layout and use of various dwellings and found that houses were representative of the socio-genderal dynamics of the people. For example, in the compounds of the Foulbe' in the Camerons the man's place was always in the center of the dwelling surrounded by his wives (Rappoport, 1969) emphasizing the central position of men in this culture. Rappaport's findings reminds us of the ubiquitous nature of house-culture dynamics that have strong genderal associations.

Architect and social theorist Dolores Hayden looked at how genderal and familial relations play out spatially. She reinterpreted the suburban home claiming a “Grand Domestic Revolution”. Hayden explained how the suburban home became the stage for heteronormative domestic family life:

> One can describe suburban housing as an architecture of gender, since houses provide settings for women and girls to be effective social status achievers, desirable sex objects, and skillful domestic servants, and for men and boys to be executive breadwinners, successful home handy men, and adept car mechanics. (Hayden, 1981: 17)

This statement remains a powerful description of domesticity today and, therefore, because of this, the home manifests feelings of ambivalence and often internal conflict in women. For most women home represented a place of both positive and negative associations: power, submission, control, confinement, sex, self expression, alienation, safety, and labor.

Recent literature

One recent study explored the role home plays on masculine identity. In this study, Smith and Winchester found that the home was a place for men to create “alternative masculinities” (i.e. identities that contrasted with the socially accepted hegemony of men being more powerful, dominant, and the breadwinners) (1998). Men admitted to sharing domestic work equally, subordinating their own social positions by letting their wives be the “boss”, and expressing themselves more emotionally. In accord with these findings, Chusmir and Koberg (1990) found in their research that for both male and female participants, a higher level of feminine identity was found in the home rather than at work. One may then conclude from both of these studies that the home, as

an environmental context, induces feelings of femininity which then manifest female-typical behaviors in both men and women.

Other recent literatures have focused on the relationship between one's sexuality and one's home. For example, Johnson and Valentine have found that for lesbians, the home has been a place of conflict due to past negative experiences with adversarial, homophobic family members and with the heterosexual domestic life that the home represents. They assert that the heterosexual home is "incapable" of meeting the needs of the lesbian (Johnston & Valentine, 1995). Looking at the heterosexual home in comparison to the lesbian home, Johnston and Valentine found that the heterosexual home (the typical family home of a lesbian) was a place of surveillance and discipline whereas the lesbian home (the home a lesbian occupies either alone or with other lesbians) became an environment that supports, expresses, and shapes the lesbian identity.

"Home", as both a concept and a physical space, has been incorporated into the trans discourse as well. Trans theorists such as Judith Halberstam and Jill Prossner have addressed the trans "quest for home" as a search for their "true" self. For many trans individuals, this image of home is a physical and symbolic space signifying feelings of belonging, security, and acceptance. Home, therefore, acts as a metaphor for the self with statements from trans people like, "I am finding my home (i.e. self)".

The home as a woman's site of resistance and empowerment

The home has also functioned as a site of resistance and empowerment for women. Because of their subordinate social position, women have intentionally used the house to elevate their status and reclaim autonomy and domination. Most men will admit

that their wife controls the house, however, this place-based empowerment goes beyond the microcosm of the family unit and that of the walls of the house. As women join forces with each other within their own homes, they create a powerful social stratum that reaches societal and cultural levels.

In Walker's chapter, "Home and Away: The Feminist Remapping of Public and Private Space in Victorian London", she describes how women in London redefined traditional meanings for home during the late 1800s. Women, Walker, explains, used the home as "political space in which social initiatives germinated and developed" (2001: 297). She furthers this idea by positing that these women not only reclaimed and dominated the physical space within the home, but that the home became a place to develop new identities that challenged social norms. They used the home as a site for professional, occupational, and personal training, as well as for expanding social initiatives.

hooks (1990) describes the home as a place one can renew and strengthen one's contested identity, specifically the black woman's identity. She describes the *homeplace* as a safe space where black women can reclaim their identity and build empowerment:

> [O]ne's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world […] it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. (1990: 42)

Through the everyday speech acts in black vernacular to the braiding of a daughter's hair, hooks asserts that the woman's identity, as a strong and autonomous

being, is defined, enhanced and reinforced within the safety of the home. Within this space, black women can develop into a person of power, rather than one of subordination and vulnerability.

Looking at the lesbian perspective of home, Elwood (2000), and Johnston and Valentine (1995) posit that the home is a place of conflict and contradiction, while at the same time it is also the location for liberation and domination. Both studies, developed from interviews with lesbians, however, discussed the tension between the home as haven and the home as potential target. For many of their participants, though, this transgressive, feminist landscape became a collective site for developing new, more healthy identities as well as for social and political movement.

The home is a place that not only has strong cultural associations to the heterosexual woman, but it also has significant personal meaning. The positive and negative associations with home produces internal conflict for many heterosexual women and lesbians and, conversely, for men, it opens up a new avenue for alternative identity expressions. Interestingly, though, the hetero-normative lifestyle that is so tighly associated with domesticity and the home is one that is strived for by many people in the GLBTQ communities. Many gay and lesbian homes have been internalized and then reshaped into the typical “family” by moving to the suburbs, getting “married” and having children.

The home, in addition to developing a more feminine and hetero-normative identity, also became a site for women to challenge social norms and create personal and collective empowerment and autonomy. The production of femininity contextualized in

the “homeplace” environment offers the foundation and grounding for the research presented here.

Communal landscapes

Thus far I have focused on the physicality and symbolic significance of the home as it relates to one’s identity. Communal home environments, however, add a new dimension to this particular person-place relationship. In a collective living environment social factors also significantly influence one’s gender and sexuality. The power of the group provides one with feelings of empowerment, elevated esteem, and security. However, the communal home also opens residents up to a new level of surveillance that often can induce competitive group dynamics. Here, I will discuss literature that explores how an individual’s understanding and subsequent display of gender is influenced by the shared group experience.

Shared environments of mostly homogenous populations can significantly enhance the lives of subordinate groups, particularly gays and lesbians. Queer landscapes such as the Castro in San Francisco and Chelsea in Manhattan, and even, to a large extent, private commercial establishments (e.g. gay and lesbian bars and night clubs), afford gays and lesbians the opportunity to elevate their social status within that particular microcosm of the socio-spatial environment. It is within these settings that subjugated people establish dominance by enforcing their own social norms and maintaining control over the physical space. Nimmons describes the social milieu of the Pines on Fire Island, a small peninsula off of Long Island, New York. The Pines is a residential section of Fire Island that is appropriated by gay men:

> The first thing one sees [on Fire Island, Pines] is a charming skew of accustomed male mores. Everywhere men hug and smooch; couples walk, hands entwined or casually draped into the rear of a partner's cutoffs[…] Everywhere an easy male affection suffuses the air. (Nimmons, 2002)

Nimmons' account of life in the Pines illustrates a gay-utopian environment where men can openly show intimacy toward each other in public without fear of discrimination, biased attacks, or verbal harassment. It is easy for one to understand how an environment such as this supports and validates a gay man's identity.

Communal environments populated by lesbians also afford women a place for empowerment and autonomy: "Women's land was and is a dream. It encompasses self-sufficiency and independence, creativity and community support." (Corrine, 2003). Like the environment of the Pines, women's collectives afford women a socially and sexually-open environment free of male domination and misogyny. Interestingly, the male to female trans population is challenging the doctrines for women's land and spurring debate about who is female. For instance, places like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival have policies that only allow access for women born women, thus excluding all trans women from enjoying the space. However, ironically, they do allow trans men into the festival.

Communal dwellings

The environment of the communal home imposes a new set of confounds that can significantly affect one's development and expression of one's gender and sexuality. Specifically, a dwelling occupied by a group of non-related trans women 1) blurs the boundary between private and public (i.e. a place to "just be" while still remaining under surveillance by the other residents), 2) offers an avenue for residents to establish new

domestic rules and norms for gender and sexuality, and, at the same time, 3) can become a target for heterosexist/transphobic violence.

Blurring the boundary

Communal dwellings offer unique environments that straddle the boundary between public and private space. They have the illusion of being a place where its resident can "just be", while remaining a landscape where one is still under the watchful eye of the group. Because of this socio-spatial dichotomy, maneuvering within these public and private spheres will influence one psychically and behaviorally.

Goffman's dramaturgical theories can be useful for understanding how one navigates the public-private domains of the communal home (1959). He explains that an individual uses particular areas or *stages* of the home to perform their various identities. The front region (e.g. the living room) is the area where one's public performance is enacted. Actions of *politeness* and *decorum* are played out for audiences that are both interacting with the performer as well those who are within visual or audible range. The back region/backstage is the place where the performer "can relax; he can drop his front". It is also a place where performers can be schooled in frontstage identity expression.

Illustrating Goffman's theory is a study on lesbian occupied homes that was conducted by Johnston and Valentine (1995). They assert that in lesbian homes, the "pubic" rooms (e.g. living room) were prepared for visitors by removing or limiting the amount of lesbian identified objects that are displayed. Other, more private rooms of the house, however, may have many symbolic objects that indicate the occupant's sexual identity (e.g. Melissa Etheridge posters or photographs of lovers). These areas have limited access or be off-limit to outsiders (Johnston & Valentine, 1995).

The public areas within a communal living environment also affords residents opportunities for social comparison. An individual compares themselves to others in order to maintain a “normalized” and consistent social identity. These kinds of social comparisons are instrumental for the individual’s self-evaluation, and behavioral or image refinement.

Additionally, because the commune is a residential environment that is shared by other members of a particular group, the identity and esteem of the group becomes synthesized with the resident’s individual identity. According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) and social categorization theory (Turner, 1979), one’s individual identity and esteem is enhanced due to the stronger collective identity. Being a member of a group, even if that group is stigmatized, will improve the individual’s self-esteem and enhance individual performance.

Supporting Tajfel’s and Turner’s concepts, Elwood found that the communal home for lesbian women is a place to develop and enhance sexual identities (2000). In her study on lesbian living spaces, many of the participants described a more positive “coming out” process because it was an experience that was shared with their lesbian housemates. The home served as a landscape for socialization expanding the lesbian’s social circles and networks while also providing a place to go to for emotional support. Lesbians also used symbolic markers (e.g. flying rainbow flags from windows) both inside and outside the home to help them proclaim their identities in a more public way.

The image one typically conjures up when thinking about the home is one of privacy and seclusion from the outside world. However, for those who live in a collective living environment, both the physical spaces within the house along with the social

dynamics cloud this vision. Because these factors are now added into the identity equation, one's presentation of the self is constantly changing adapting to the region of the house and the audience one is performing for.

Potential for newly defined norms and rules

Seeking the utopian life, Americans have a long, deep history with communes. These planned communal neighborhoods established new sets of rules and norms for work, economics, religion, political governance, and family. Hancock in Massachusetts, for example, had an economic base from farming, crafts and furniture, while Oneida in New York discouraged couples and supported group marriage (Hayden, 1976).

The communes that flourished in the 1960s provided its residents with the opportunity to create a new set of rules and social norms by which to live. Historically, communes were created in reaction to the restrictive heteronormative lifestyle and quickly became transgressive environments that rejected the societal customs and traditions. They were part of the counter-cultural revolution that abandoned the heteronormative family structure and replaced it with the new family of polyamorous love, gender egalitarian roles, and fluid sexualities. Men defied the typical masculine role by letting their hair grow long, wearing gender-ambiguous clothing and behaving in more stereotypical feminine ways (e.g. gentle behaviors and focusing on emotions, interpersonal communication and personal growth) (Conover, 1975). These communal living environments, Conover explains, "stimulated the development of new social institutions to provide a context and structure for its different sexual and genderal norms." (1975).

Research, however, is inconclusive as to whether these modified norms of sexual subversions contribute to the success or failure of communal life. Several studies posit that gender and sexual deviations supports individuality, promotes bonding, and asserts freedoms that defy conventional heterosexual norms (Berger, 1981; Ramey, 1972). Conversely, other research claims that polygamous, non-heterosexual relations break down the communal order and create a destructive emotional atmosphere (Raimy, 1979; Zablocki, 1980).

Safe haven or target

As discussed previously, queer space offers gay men and lesbians a place to express and proclaim their sexual identities by affording them places to behave and dress in ways that defy socially accepted norms for men and women without fear of provocation or violence. These environments, however, have also become main targets for heterosexist and transphobic perpetrators of violence. They are sites of contestation and hostility that often are breeding grounds for harassment and violence.

Historically, because of the conservative socio-political climate, particularly in the early and mid 1900s, queer space has been the site of contestation. Bars, nightclubs, bath houses and private homes occupied by gay men or lesbians were raided by police or forced to close down. Legally and socially, homosexuality was not an acceptable lifestyle, and individuals who proclaimed their trangressive identities were publicly chastised, beaten and sent to jail.

Though the more liberal and accepting socio-political climate today affords more public freedoms for gays and lesbians, tensions between straight and gay populations continues. Myslik's study of Dupont Circle (1996), the well-known gay neighborhood in

Washington DC, clearly illustrates these inter-group conflicts. The gay participants in this research claimed that Dupont Circle "is our territory" and that they expected a certain amount of tolerance and adherence for particular transgressive behavioral patterns. However, Dupont Circle was plagued with a considerable number of hate crimes against gays and lesbians.

Myslik's research underscores the complexity of a queer space. For many individuals in the GLBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans, Questioning) communities[6], queer space is essential to confirm, validate, and express their transgressive identities. And yet, because of the collectivity defying societal norms, these queer sites become targets, possibly magnets, for biased activities.

Queer space: sites for resistance and empowerment

Though many queerscapes have been and continue to be contested sites for hatred and bigotry, the GLBTQ population, like many subordinate groups, assert their resistance and empower themselves using spatial tactics – usurping the physical environment. Sharp *et al* (2000) asserted that the domination of territory, even if only temporally, makes tangible the power relations between groups. Nancy Fraser coined the phrase *subaltern counter publics* to describe the phenomena of minority (re)claimation of space: "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" (1993). People who do not conform to the socially constructed cultural norms,

[6] I use the term 'community' loosely due to the controversy about whether trans people are part of a trans community. Many trans men and women strive to pass in mainstream society as their chosen gender and live a hetero-normative lifestyle. For this reason, many trans individuals choose to blend into society rather than create their own, separate community.

therefore, will create their own space for which to construct, reproduce and display their identities.

Contested sites such as parks, bath houses, bars and clubs, bathrooms, piers, and even sidewalks have been the subaltern counter public for members of the GLBTQ communities. Bordering on legality, straddling the lines between public and private, these sites of resistance quickly became places for empowerment. Free sexual exploration, social networking, underground hormone exchanges, and political strategizing perpetuated and supported gay life within these various domains. Most, in fact, would agree, that it was within these not so closeted spaces that the gay revolution (i.e. Stonewall) grew.

The making of queer space as sites of empowerment, identity formation, havens, as well as places of contestation is a relatively recent field of research documented by feminist geographers and queer theorists (Bell & Valentine, 1995; Ingram *et. al.*, 1997; Lauria & Knopp, 1985; Munt, 1998). Manuel Castells initiated much of the research on gay geographies when he published his highly debated and talked about book: *The City and The Grassroots* (1983). Castells claimed that gay men appropriated specific and defined geographic territories, while lesbians created their own space through social networks. Though these assertions have been challenged by demonstrating the existence of lesbian neighborhoods (Adler and Brenner, 1992), Castells did create space for new discussions about the role and influence of queer landscapes.

Ingram, Bouthillette and Reitter, for example, emphasized the important role queer space played in the lives of gays and lesbians in their anthology, *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance.* They posit, “Queer space enables

people with marginalized (homo)sexualities and identities to survive and to gradually expand their influence and opportunities to live fully" (1997: 3). Designated space for gays and lesbians, therefore, is essential to having a safe and satisfying life.

Several authors have suggested that queer geographies are created, like Butler's gendered bodies, through the repetitive performance of queer acts within a specific geographic space (Knopp, 1987; Desert, 1997; Valentine, 1996). However, their process for making queer space brings up two questions: "Would a public place become lesbian space if a woman is there holding hands with her girlfriend?", and "If the heterosexual majority still occupies and controls that space, does one lesbian couple's presence make for a queer space?"

The body, in and of itself, may also be a site of resistance and empowerment. This is clearly seen in the adolescent, punk generation where young men and women, as a way to publicly defy societal norm, tattoo their skin, shave or die their hair, and pierce their bodies. Trans individuals also transgress society's static norms for gender display by altering their bodies with hormones and surgery or enact atypical gender performance. With these intentional and targeted performances, the trans population, as with the adolescence, is declaring themselves distinct and separate from straight society. These acts of transgression can empower the individual to continue with that individual's identity exploration and development, as well as seek other like-bodied individuals to strengthen their collective identity. The trans body, therefore, as a site of resistance, defies prescriptions for gender and redefines what it means to be male, female or in between.

Sites of resistance and empowerment are seen in many shapes and sizes. These sexed and gendered bodies and physical landscapes, create space to explore, develop, express, and validate contested identities. The subaltern counter public that Transy House creates offers trans women the queer space that they need in order to reposition and (re)define their identities. Challenging theorists discussed earlier, in this particular queer site, I argue that it is because of the majority appropriation and control by trans women over a specific space that opens up the door to reconfigure the social hierarchy and adapt social norms. Within this trans-dominated space they are free to behave and present in trans-positive manners without fear of persecution. Minority presence, therefore, does not constitute minority space. In this study, the trans women employ specific and intentional spatial tactic mechanisms that creates subaltern counter publics as real sites for resistance and empowerment.

Research Framework

As can be seen in the literatures, the physical environment of the home and the trans body are two sites of resistance and empowerment that can proclaim and validate the trans identity. Though home continues to have strong cultural associations to the heterosexual woman, the home offers one a new lens for which to look at the gendered and sexed body. Transy House is a collective home, however, with mostly women of trans experience living there. In this particular environment, an additional element is added to the identity equation - the social factor. This afforded me the benefit of being able to look at the socio-spatial elements that underlie gender identity and sexuality for trans individuals. I established the framework for the study to further understand the

relationship between the collective home and the trans self by answering the following guiding questions:

- How do the trans women's definitions and meanings of "home" relate to their definitions and meanings of self? Specifically, are there connections between what one considers a feminine identity and a feminine space? Answers to this question help support and expand existing theory that asserts the house is a metaphor for the self.

- How do the trans women manipulate their home to help support their (new) gender and sexuality? How are visual cues in the environment intentionally used to help one feel more feminine or masculine? Is the transition in gender identity or sexuality seen in the physical environment? Findings here offer a new lens for which to understand the uses and functions of one's landscape providing specific links to one's gender and sexuality.
- How does living in a communal environment with other trans women foster or hinder the transformation in one's gender and sexuality? How do trans women "teach" others about (new?) prescriptions for the gendered and sexed body? Though social perspectives on identity development are vast, ones that explain the trans experience are limited. Answers to these questions expand current literature while also offering new ways to define and describe and problematize gender and sexuality.

Though significant advances have been made in the understanding of gender and sexuality, particularly the trans identity, there is a lack of approach using a more holistic paradigm. Within the following chapters I use the aforementioned questions to explore (trans)gender identity and sexuality using social constructionist/ performative and environmental perspectives. I use these perspectives, ones typically considered and

functioning as mutually exclusive, as a harmonious and fully synthesized model for which to create a more complete understanding of how the self develops and is expressed.

Additionally, I am hoping that the research presented herein, can open new doors to reinterpreting traditional definitions, roles and stereotypes typically associated with being male of female. More broadly speaking, having transgressive identities, living within a contested space, and creating their own norms for behavior, trans individuals have the ability to create new socio-spatial ideologies. It is within this framework that I apply the unique site of Transy House to conceptualizing gender and sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological case study takes an in-depth look at Transy House, a communal home for trans women located in Brooklyn, New York. The reason I focused my research on Transy House is because, from my past experience both personally and academically, I realized the significant role it plays in the lives of both its residents and those individuals who are in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and questioning (GLBTQ) communities. At the same time, it is a unique place to explore the links between one's personal living environment and one's gender identity and sexuality, specifically understanding the transitional and fluid element of the trans identity. Unlike other research on gendered space, this study also looks at the social influences affecting those who live within a collective environment.

Originally, I planned to conduct my research at both Transy House and at Central House. However, Central House redefined its identity as a home of "priestesses of the Maetreum of Cybele for all types of women" (from their website) and requested that they be dropped from the study. This turn in the study created an opportunity for me to spend more time at the one house and to develop closer relationships to the women living there.

There are only two known collective houses for people who are trans in the United States. One is Central House, in upstate New York, and the other is Transy House. A trans collective, Davis House, existed in Minnesota, however, it closed in the summer of 2004. Currently, Housing Works, an organization helping persons with AIDS (PWAs),

is in the process of setting up a residential facility for trans women with AIDS. For purposes of this dissertation I focus only on Transy House using information gained on the other sites as a basis for contrast and comparison.

Transy House: setting, house, social history, and residents

Setting

Transy House is located on the border of two very different Brooklyn neighborhoods, Park Slope and Windsor Terrace. Park Slope is a politically and socially liberal neighborhood with a socio-economically diverse population. Because of gentrification, however, many of the lower-income, ethnic minorities are slowly being priced out of the neighborhood. Rent and sales prices are comparable to Manhattan. Park Slope is also known to have a significant lesbian population and has one of the few lesbian bars left in the City. On the other hand, Windsor Terrace is a predominantly Hispanic, working-class neighborhood with more affordable rents and housing costs.

Both neighborhoods are architecturally similar with turn-of-the-century 2 and 3-story brick, brown/limestone attached walk-ups. Along the wider Avenues buildings are mixed-use with a variety of small commercial establishments lining the ground floors. The smaller, tree-lined streets running perpendicular to the Avenues are residential. There are variety of services available for residents such as grocery stores, banks, pharmacies, laundromats, and specialty shops. Because of its location within an urban neighborhood, residents of Transy House have a short walk to the nearby establishments. Additionally, the house is two blocks from a subway line which is the primary means of transportation for residents.

The House

Transy House is an attached brick house with green aluminum siding built at the turn-of-the-century. Originally designed as a 2-family house, the structure has 6 bedrooms and 3 bathrooms on its 3 levels. There are two porches in the front and back of the building. There is a small front porch and a larger, 2-story back deck that has been enclosed on the second floor which is currently used as a bedroom.

The façade and much of the interior is in need of minor repair. There is insulation exposed in the walls of the back porch; holes in the original wood, planked floors; water damage seen on areas of the ceilings, walls and floors; holes in walls; peeling paint. To open up the space, doors have been taken off their hinges and placed in the narrow hallways.

The house is also cluttered with boxes, stacks of magazines and papers. The furniture, much of which has been taken from off the street, is in disrepair. Navigating the spaces of Transy House is difficult and requires one to step over piles or boxes, move papers to sit, or walk sideways in parts of the hallways. There is also a strong smell permeating the house from the numerous cats and dogs that also reside there. At one point there were 16 cats and 2 dogs, though, at the time of this study there were 2 dogs and 3 cats. On the front door there was also a large sign posted reading “Residents only! No guests allowed! Stay out! Stay out! Stay out!” as well as a Safe Haven sticker. There is also a trans rights sign displayed in the front window.

Social History

The house was purchased by Rusty, a transexual woman, in 1994. She, her partner, Chelsea, another transexual woman, and a third trans woman, Julia, were the

original residents of the house. They each were “coming out together” during that time and lived in a three-way relationship. Inspired by the Sylvia Rivera Star House, the three women decided to open their doors to other trans women who were in need of a place to stay. They request a $200.00 a month rent from residents, however, most do not pay. The residents who were unable to pay rent were expected to help around the house with maintenance, cleaning, shopping, or cooking. The desire of Rusty, Chelsea and Julia was to encourage trans women to live collectively as a “family”.

Initially, when Transy House opened its doors, the close-knit residents held many parties, dinners, and meetings for political strategizing. The atmosphere was described by one participant as similar to that of Haight-Ashbury. As a self-proclaimed hippy, Rusty admited that their desire was to create a commune much like the free-love communes of the 60’s. Today, Rusty and Chelsea explained, they are getting older and the social dynamics have changed because of that and due to the newer occupants. Many of the trans women who recently came to the house were younger, entering with more psychological and social problems, and not motivated to maintain a familial relationship.

Transy House also has an open-door policy that allowed visitors to enter the house freely during any time of the day or night. On a typical day, there were at least two additional people ‘hanging out’ in the house who were not residents. Because of this policy and due to the transient nature of the newer residents, the house was in a continual state of flux. All of this contributed to the physical condition of Transy House.

Residents

Transy House was open to anyone, in any stage of transition, who needed a place to sleep regardless of their income, employment, or substance use. They specifically targeted trans women discouraging cross dressers, drag queens, and poseurs. Additionally, prostitutes and hard drug addicts are against the "rules". Rusty and Chelsea would also prefer not to house women who are on psychotropic medications. Though, because of lack of information from referring social workers and counselors, as well the shortage in alternative housing for homeless trans women, several residents have been housed in Transy House that have some of these issues. Many transexual women seeking assistance from Transy House work the streets, have been evicted from their homes or shelters, formerly lived on the streets, or have been released from prison or psychiatric treatment centers, have emotional problems, and several have had addictions to drugs and alcohol. At its maximum capacity, there have been up to 12 trans women living there.

At the time of the study there were 7 residents living at Transy House. One woman was born female and currently identifies as a heterosexual woman. Six of the women are trans. These women were born into male bodies and were raised as males although since childhood, they have felt female. Transitioning to their chosen gender during their teens and early twenties, they were all living and identifying as women. The women dressed wearing women's clothing, adorning make-up and perfumes, behaving with typical feminine, if not hyper-feminine, mannerisms, and using female names. Additionally, they take hormones daily that redistribute fat to increase their bust size and enhance their hips. Only Rusty and Chelsea had sex reassignment surgery to create female genitalia.

The life experiences of the trans women are diverse. Some continue to have close relationships with their born-families while others have no contact from parents or siblings. All of them have been the victim of homophobic and transphobic violence. Most have been homeless or close to it. Several have worked as or are still working as prostitutes. One is living with AIDS, another is diagnosed with depression, and another a recovering drug addict.

Rusty

Rusty is the owner of Transy House. She is a 57 year old post-operative transexual, lesbian woman. She transitioned at the age of 48. Rusty is a White woman. Rusty is a tall, small-framed, post-operative transexual woman. She has brown wavy hair worn all one length, parted in the middle and to her shoulders. Rusty's clothes are plain, jeans and a t-shirt around the house; professional woman's attire at work. She does not wear a lot of make-up, and wears small, gold, wire-framed glasses. Rusty's mannerisms are neither masculine nor feminine, though she speaks softly with a feminine voice.

Rusty has a PhD in Economics and works as a professor at Hofstra University. She has been married twice and has three children all with whom she maintains contact. Rusty also has one grandson. Rusty is a self-proclaimed "pack-rat" and considers herself a "hippy".

Chelsea

Chelsea is Rusty's life-partner. She is a 45 year old post-operative transexual, lesbian woman. Chelsea transitioned at the age of 26. She is a tall and lanky White woman with short, straight, light brown hair parted simply down the middle, striking blue eyes usually lined with dark eye liner, wears light, almost white facial foundation, and

has a very androgynous look. Chelsea does not change voice to feminize it nor does she dress or act particularly feminine. Her voice and demeanor can be gruff. She considers her look “Goth”.

Chelsea is very political and opinionated and is not afraid to share her comments and beliefs with anyone. She can also be quite aggressive and confrontational. She has taken some college classes and continues her studies in language, music, philosophy and religion. Chelsea is also a professional piano player and runs her own telemarketing business from the home. Like Rusty, Chelsea has also been married and has a son, though she has not contact with either.

Celia

Celia is a 26 year old Puerto Rican trans woman who transitioned at the age of 18. She is a short and stocky woman who wears small, wire-framed glasses and has shoulder-length, straight, brown hair which is usually kept tightly back from her face in a bun. She is soft spoken, shy, and quite secretive. Her mannerisms are feminine. Celia may have a learning disability.

Celia arrived at Transy House from a homeless shelter after being put out to work as a prostitute by another trans person. A local church requested that Rusty and Chelsea take her in when she was very ill and homeless. Celia went to high school and currently does not work. Celia continues to have contact with most members of her family.

Sadaisha

Sadaisha is a 20 year old multi-ethnic (Black, Hispanic, Polynesian, White) trans woman who transitioned at the age of 15. She is a fairly large trans woman, about 6 feet and overweight. Sadaisha has dark skin, dark eyes, and finely shaped eyebrows. Her hair

is dark brown, shoulder length and is held back in a ponytail. She speaks loudly and openly, almost as a performance.

Sadaisha arrived at Transy House after being evicted from the Sylvia Rivera shelter at a local church and placed on their "Never Again" list. She had also been evicted from two other battered women's shelters twice and refused at other shelters in New York City. Sadaisha has some high school and is currently not working. She does not have close contact with her family.

Tasha

Tasha is a 34 year old White trans woman who transitioned at the age of 14. She has a medium build and is about 5'10". Tasha has light blue eyes, long, straight, bleached blonde hair, and always is wearing make-up. She has very feminine mannerisms and is quite talkative. Tasha grew up in the south and therefore speaks with a slight southern drawl.

Tasha arrived at Transy House after being released from prison. She was serving 5-7 years for 2nd degree larceny, breaking and entering, check forgery, and parole violations. Her personality is quite volatile and can be considered dangerous. Tasha also has AIDS. She completed high school and does not work. Growing up, Tasha was close with her family and she maintains regular contact with them.

Musa

Musa is a 36 year old Japanese trans woman who came out as trans at the age of 12. She is a petite woman, about 5'2", with long, straight, brown hair parted down the middle, brown eyes. She looks like she could be in her late teens. Her appearance is very plain not adorning make-up or styling her hair, and pays little attention to clothing.

Musa's facial expressions and mannerisms are flat. She speaks softly, with a strong accent.

Musa is diagnosed with depression. She arrived at Transy House after she was beaten, raped, and living on the street. Musa was referred to the house by a local church. She considers herself a loner. Musa has no contact with her family.

Maureen

Maureen is a 27 year old White, non-trans woman. She has long, straight, blonde hair parted in the middle with bangs and fair skin. She has plain looking wearing t-shirts and jeans at the time of the interview and no make-up.

Maureen arrived at Transy House originally working for Chelsea's telemarketing company and became fast friends with the women of the house. She has a BA from Parson's School of Design. Maureen is living at Transy House in order to save money for Graduate School in Germany. Rusty "gave her the taks of silkscreen T-shirts to get her out of prostitution". She maintains contact with her family.

Social Organization

The original intention of Transy House was to create an egalitarian atmosphere of trans individuals that was as cohesive as a family unit. Residents consider their home a collective and sometimes refer to it as a commune. However, there is a definite social hierarchy that frames the interpersonal dynamics within the house. Although there are occasional "house meetings" to discuss and resolve problems that may have surfaced, all of the participants agree that Rusty has the ultimate decision-making power. She is the legal owner of the house, is the oldest member, and has the most education. Additionally, Rusty's calm, friendly demeanor gives off an overall impression of fairness.

Chelsea, Rusty's partner, is considered second in command. Her strong and sometimes aggressive personality along with her significant relationship with Rusty, fortifies her position. Length of stay also elevates one's position in Transy House. The two residents who have been in Transy House the longest, Celia and Tasha, have seniority over the newer residents such as Musa and Sadaisha. They will often help with gate-keeping informing Rusty and Chelsea of their opinions about new residents. Additionally, Celia and Tasha offer their suggestions with important house decisions. Chelsea agrees that Celia and Tasha have "more weight" because of their longevity.

Participation in the study was voluntary and no financial incentive was offered. However, I offered my assistance around the house with cooking, cleaning, and minor maintenance and repair.

Methodology

For this dissertation I am using case study methodology. This approach will allow me to have a full understanding of Transy House by extensively focusing on one site and capturing as much rich information as possible from numerous sources. Applying a phenomenological approach to the study, will also enable me to determine the "meaning of peoples experiences toward a phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998:38). Specifically, I am exploring the experience of living in a trans collective while looking at how that experience influences one's understanding and use of gender and sexuality.

To be able to understand the socio-spatial environment of Transy House, the methodology I use must focus on three elements: the social factors such as: social

hierarchy, interactions, status, and roles of residents living in the house; the physical landscape including: colors, decoration, objects, furniture, layout, scale, traces/cues and room locations; and contextualization: socio-political position of the trans population, psycho-social history of the house and its residents, physical location of the house (i.e. Brooklyn, New York). Data on these research elements was conducted by using existing documentation (e.g. written or filmed material provided to me by Rusty), observations conducted through participant observation, interviews, and participant-lead tours.

The owner of Transy House originally contacted me for participation in my first study. When I decided to narrow my focus on communal homes for trans individuals, I contacted her to request permission for a more in-depth exploration of Transy House. Rusty invited me to dinner one evening to meet the other women of the house and explain the intended research. Once everyone agreed to participate in the study, I visited the house several other times to make some initial observations and to get to know the women. Once I felt a certain level of comfort was achieved, I proceeded to set up times with the women to "talk" one-on-one and to do the house tours. For some of the participants, interviews and tours occurred on the same day, while, for others, we rescheduled a day later in the week to conduct the tour.

Existing Documentation

Rusty supplied me with archival material on Transy House. A manuscript written by Rusty, originally intended for publication, provided me with the history of the collective. In this manuscript, Rusty described her personal experience running a commune for trans women. Rusty also provided me with a home video that was recorded

by residents when Transy House first opened. Additionally, a short documentary video produced by an independent producer, and a German production company produced a short video which aired on German television was also provided. These videos helped me to see the original relationships, behaviors and gender presentations of the women living in the house at the time of the video, several years before the present study. I was also able to see glimpses of the house and its uses in these videos.

Initial analysis of archival material was conducted in the beginning of the study, before the participant interviews. The various material provided to me became the foundation for which to compare and contrast findings from my own observations and interviews. It also gave me insight into the inner-world of Transy House, one which a researcher or visitor may not be privy to.

Observations

I based my theoretical grounding for person-place links assuming that one's sense of agency is used when intentionally choosing and creating one's own environment. As Harris and Lipman (1980) posit: "[…] people do not merely react to their spatial environments, they actively endow them with meaning; they interpret and change them." (pp 425). Therefore, my experiences and observations in Transy House occurred knowing that what I sas and heard weree not random, but had very specific internationality and meaning.

I visited the home roughly three times a week for a period of six months conducting obtrusive, participant observations. The time I spent in the house during each visit ranged from two to six hours. During those visits I spent some of my time one-on-one with the residents either conducting interviews or house tours, and some of my time

was just “hanging out” with the women talking, helping with dinner, or helping with minor house repairs like painting or spackling. I was able to use this ‘free-time’ to observe patterns of activity such as looking at resident exchanges with each other, behaviors when residents are alone, and resident-environment interactions. I looked for patterns over time, place, and activity.

My initial understanding of how the environment corresponds with and supports one’s identity was grounded in a study called *A Room With a Cue: Personality Judgments Based on Offices and Bedrooms* (2002). The authors, Gosling and Ko, use Brunswick’s lens model (1956) to perceptualize the links between the self and the environment asserting that by looking at the observable cues of a person’s environment, one can create a fairly accurate picture of that person’s personality.

They propose a two factor model for understanding the interconnections between a room and its occupant: *identity claims* (*self-directed*, adorning a room with symbolic objects of personal or cultural significance intended to “reinforce their own self-views” and *other directed*, displaying symbols intended for others (e.g. diplomas)); and *behavioral residue* (*interior*, traces left from occupant’s activities conducted within that space; and *exterior*, remnants of activities that have, or will be taking place outside of that space). By studying the personal and work environments, Gosling and Ko found that all four elements could “provide information about an occupant’s personality.”

In addition to Gosling and Ko, John Zeisel provides similar methodology to look at the relationship between the individual and the environment (1984). He provided detailed outlines of ways to observe individual and group behavior in various environmental contexts and offered suggestions on how to look for “physical traces” that

can help to “form an idea of what people are like who use that place – their culture, their affiliations, the way they present themselves” (p. 89). Expanding Gosling and Ko’s research, Zeisel now conceptualizes the individual in the socio-cultural environment.

Zeisel (1984) proposed four kinds of traces that are seen in the physical environment: 1) *Byproducts*, evidence of use, such as where a rug is worn out (*erosions*), what items are left behind (*leftover*), and what items are *missing*; 2) *Adaptations*, ways people manipulate and change their environment to meet their needs; 3) *Self Display*, presentations of personalization, identification and group membership; and 4) *Public Message*, official, unofficial, and illegitimate signs or graffiti.

I documented my observations using the two aforementioned environmental methodologies in a field notebook that I kept with me. In addition to my notes, I drew sketches in my notebook and I photographed significant places or objects. Some of my thoughts were recorded at the time of observation, however, at times, I needed to record my notes, from memory, later that day.

Interviews

During the time of the study, I conducted a total of 13 interviews including: current and past residents of Transy House, a trans woman who lived at both Transy House and Central House, the owner of a trans collective dwelling in Minn. and the program manager for the Housing Works trans housing program.

Residents

The interviews were one-on-one semi-structured asking the participants a set of pre-determined questions while also allowing for "free conversation" to further explore topics triggered from the more formal inquiries. The interview questions were broken down into 4 categories (see Appendix A). I first asked the women general background questions about themselves, their housing history and their introduction to Transy House. Sadalla's research (1987) prompted the next set of questions which dealt with correlations between descriptors of self and house. Here, I asked residents questions about how they describe themselves and how they describe their home looking for possible links. The third section focused on how the resident's created and manipulated the environment to meet their personal and social needs. More specifically, I focused on displays of territoriality and changes (both wanted and completed) to their bedrooms as well as to the common areas of the home. Lastly, I targeted the social influences involved with living in a domestic collective. Some of the questions inquired about role models and "learning gender" from others in the home.

I left the decision of where to conduct the interview up to the resident, all of them occurred in the more public spaces of the house. Other residents as well as guests frequently interrupted the interviews, commented about the discussion, and remained in the rooms for short periods of time. Therefore, because of the public nature of these interviews, the responses to interview questions posed may not fully reflect the opinions of participants.

One participant started her interview in the very public space of the kitchen and then she requested that we move to the privacy of her room where she quickly shut the

door and spoke more softly. Another resident agreed to be interviewed on the condition that I also answer the questions I pose to her. I agreed and the interview proceeded. Documentation: Interviews lasted between two and four hours and were both audio taped and manually recorded for accuracy. One participant did not want to be audio taped, therefore, only written notes were taken during the interview. Another resident spoke very softly and the tape recorder was not able to record some of her responses. I recorded notes during the interview and from memory for this interview.

Trans individuals are unique in their experiences. They vary on many levels such as: personal identity, interpersonal relations, education, and occupation, to name a few. There are many highly successful, well educated trans women who are comfortable with who they are and how they feel they fit into the world. Rusty, For example has a Phd and has a sucessful career while living as an “out” lesbian trans woman. On the other hand, there are still many trans women who are living on the streets or in substandard housing, working in illicit professions (e.g. prostitution), and have psychological instibility. Some of this later group are individuals who reside in Transy House. It is difficult, therefore, to speak, generally about trans women. The lives Rusty and her partner, Chelsea, have are quite different, as lived experiences, than the lives of their residents. Thus, their perspectives, skills, motivations, and expectations about living within a communal environment will contrast and sometimes even conflict. The ideas presented here intend to represent and explore all of the lenses for which each of the residents see Transy House.

Past resident of Transy House and Central House

For a more comprehensive understanding of the influence a collective living arrangement can have on the life of a trans women, I interviewed a trans woman who resided in both Transy House and Central House. When she was living at Transy House, Marilyn was just coming out as a trans woman. Marilyn was 18 and lived at the house for almost three years. Marilyn was given her name by Chelsea after the actress, Marilyn Monroe, her idol. At that time, her look and mannerisms closely resembled the actress'. Several years later, as Antonia, a name more closely resembling her given name, Anthony, she moved into Central House. During this time she created a more androgynous look for herself keeping her hair short and her clothing non-gender specific. Antonia earns a living in sex work.

Procedures and documentation: I interviewed Antonia over the phone because she is currently living in upstate New York with another trans woman. The interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions exploring her experience living in both houses. The interview lasted two hours and was recorded using written notes.

Past resident of Transy House

Nathan, is a young, gay, black man who lived at Transy House seven years ago when he was 19. He remains close with the residents of Transy House and visits the house frequently to works for Chelsea's telemarketing company or just hang out. Nathan also remains vested in the house cleaning and straightening up the public spaces. One resident jokingly called him "our house boy". Nathan is not trans, however, in addition to gay, he has self-identified and presented as queer, bisexual, drag queen.

Procedures and documentation: I conducted a one-on-one interview with Nathan in the living room . The interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions exploring his experience as resident, guest, and gay man. The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half and was recorded using audio tape and written notes.

Owner of Davis House

Davis house was a trans collective located in suburb of Minneapolis. It was owned and maintained by a trans woman, Debra Davis for ten years. Davis opened its doors to trans women with the goal of providing a safe place for trans women to live. The house was large, 3000 square foot rambler with 6-bedrooms and 3 bathrooms. At maximum capacity, there were seven trans women living in Davis House with ages that ranged from early 20s to late 50s. Their life-stories varied: some couples were married, a couple were physically disabled, and others had “mental issues”. The typical stays at Davis House ranged from 2 months to 4 years. Davis House closed in June, 2004.

Davis sold the house of the trans collective because it eventually, “it got to be too much”. Many of the women she asserted were “needy” and had problems with drugs and alcohol. The “last straw” was a woman who owed more than a year’s rent. Most owed money when they left and did not maintain the house in good condition. Before it could be sold it needed 800 hours of repair.

I contacted Debra Davis for the purpose of speaking with her about her experiences owning the home to use for comparison with Transy House. During the interview, Davis was extremely friendly and open to speaking with me about the house as well as her own trans experience.

Procedures and documentation: The two hour interview took place over the phone and followed a semi-structured format. While we spoke I took written notes.

Manager of Housing Works Trans housing

Housing Works is a community-based AIDS organization providing individuals with housing, job training, health care and advocacy. Currently, it is in the process of opening up a residential building serving trans individuals with AIDS. I spoke with the person who is organizing the program about critical issues that warrant targeted housing for trans individuals.

Procedures and documentation: The interview was conducted over the phone and took one hour. Questions were open-ended and semi-structured. Written notes were recorded during the conversation for accuracy.

Participant tours

I asked each resident to take me on a tour of their home and to "tell me about it" while we walked around. They were encouraged to take their time and to tell me about the room itself as well as the objects within it. I audio taped the tours and took notes and sketches while we walked.

During the tours, I noticed and recorded where we went first and last possibly indicating priority or a favorite place; what rooms, areas, objects were excluded; what objects were discussed, possibly indicating a symbolic representations of personal and collective identities, personalization of space, territoriality, place attachment; and what narratives or stories were told.

Procedures and documentation: The tours lasted between 45 minutes and an hour-and-a-half. I audio-taped the tours, and took notes and sketches while we walked.

Conferences and Lectures

In addition to the direct research conducted at Transy House, I also attended numerous conferences lectures on issues related to the trans community. Some of these events included: a conference entitled, “Ensuring Shelter for Homeless Trans New Yorkers; the Environmental Design Research Association conference, the Association for Women in Psychology conference, and a lecture on Trans identities and embodiment.

The information collected at these formal, informational sessions, enabled me to have a more complete picture of the background, living conditions, and socio-psychological states of those who are trans and gender-variant.

During the conferences and lectures I took copious notes of what was said, the people who attended, the perceived atmosphere, and my overall impressions.

Analysis

Field notes, sketches, behavior maps, photographs, and audio transcriptions were first reviewed to obtain an overall feel of the data (Creswell, 1998). Data was then described, classified and interpreted for emerging patterns or themes (Strauss& Corbin, 1990) that either related to how the home was used to express or validate the resident’s gender identity, or how other residents influenced this identity development and expression.

Existing documentation

While I read through the written material and watched the videotapes provided to me, I recorded pertinent information in a notebook in a narrative style. I coded and categorized my notes and looked for patterns in the way gender and sexuality are used

and understood. For example, in the home video a lengthy conversation between Rusty and Antonia about gender presentation was recorded whereas in the written transcript gender presentation was also described using Sylvia Rivera's personal history. I used both content and discourse analysis interpret the findings.

Observations

During my observations I looked for physical traces and patterns of behavior by individuals interacting with each other and with the environment. Specifically, when I observed social interactions that fostered or hindered the residents' perceptions of gender or sexuality I recorded the exchanges and applied a discourse analysis approach. For example, I heard women gossiping about the clothing of another trans woman. This dialogue indicated to me that there is a definitive standard for appropriate women's dress.

My observations also included focusing on how the physical environment is used to support, express and validate one's identity. An illustration of how one resident uses the environment is in the numerous photographs of herself as a drag queen displayed in her bedroom. In these cases I recorded in a notebook and photographed and annotated the environment.

Interviews

I used both content and discourse analysis for understanding data collected from interviews. Discourse analysis allows for multiple interpretations of the layers of discourse. For example, during the interview with one participant's she described the house as "vulnerable like a woman". This could be interpreted as the socially perceived state of women as a whole, or the status of trans women in particular. It can also be read

as a self described feeling or the physically poor condition of house structure. However, with Transy House's open-door policy, this leaves the house vulnerable to "penetration".

I coded and categorized transcripts according to emerging themes and trends that related to gender or sexuality. Thereafter, I was able to look at the texts as they compared to the data obtained from the existing documentation and from my observations. As I listened to the stories and experiences from the participants, I began to understand and confirm the dynamic interconnections between residents, the social hierarchy established, and the norms and expectations for self-presentation.

Tours

During the participant-led tours I observed and recorded notes and sketches on person-place experiences looking for patterns in group behaviors and in personal themes. For example, as each person entered a particular room, it became clear through their narrative which resident staked their claim over that territory. Everyone indicated on their tour that Celia "owns" the back yard and garden. The tours also helped to clarify the past and present functions of some of the less defined spaces such as the downstairs dining room. Additionally, patterns emerged about areas in the house that are of particular importance or ones that are disregarded. For example, there is a "trans library", a book case filled with books and videos on trans identity and social ideology that is located on the lower level. It was a place that I originally thought would be important to the residents of Transy House. However, very few people mentioned the book shelf as we walked it on their tour indicating to me that the library has less significance than I believed.

Using the data and analysis compiled from existing documentation, observations, interviews and tours, I have been able to have a more complete understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics in Transy House. Presented in the following chapters I describe some of the ways in which residents' identities have been both enhanced and hindered by this particular unique living environment.

CHAPTER THREE:

BACKGROUND: CONTEXTUALIZING THE TRANS EXPERIENCE

As discussed in the previous section, housing is a key element in helping one develop and express their identity, however, many people who are trans have a difficult time in the housing market. Due to the rigid and well fortified gender binary, we know there are significant repercussions to transgressing male and female norms. There is rampant prejudice and discrimination against those who transgress expected look and behavior for masculinity and femininity. For example, it is difficult for trans people to be accepted into mainstream society, find adequate housing, and seek and maintain legal employment. In this chapter, I will present some data about the living conditions for many trans people.

From the statistics on hate crimes against the trans population we can assume these biases are played out in housing, with landlords not renting to, harassing or evicting trans individuals; at the work place, with discrimination, harassment, and firing; and in the family, familial rejection. These factors often lead to unemployment, poverty, illicit work (e.g. prostitution), drug use, and emotional instability.

The Washington DC Trans Needs Assessment Survey found that 13 percent of their trans respondents reported not feeling safe in their current housing situation (2002). Some trans individuals go to unsafe and unaccepting city shelters, others live on the streets, while a small number find their home at Transy House. Other than Transy House,

there is only one other collective that accepts trans people, Central House. Central House, though, is highly selective with their admittance policies.

Discrimination against gender variance

When individuals who, only by their appearance, upset the dichotomous model for gender that society has tried so hard to promulgate and protect, it triggers strong emotions by on-lookers: “perceivers may experience a range of negative affect, including embarrassment and anger…” (Madson, 2000: 158). In fact, most people in the United States (over 93 percent) feel that crossdressing is not “normal” or “all right” (Janus & Janus, 1988). These adverse, transphobic reactions directed towards those who defy gender categories leads to daily acts of discrimination, harassment and violence. The findings from Witten and Evan’s large-scale, transnational survey on the trans population indicated that this group was more likely than the general population to experience violence against them (1999). In fact, according to the Remembering Our Dead website, that tracks anti-trans violence and murder, from the late 1990s to 2002, there was a documented average of one murder a month. However, in 2003, that rate doubled and continues to rise.

According to Hill, trans violence is conceptualized through genderism, transphobia, and gender bashing (2003). Genderism, similar to the feminist concept, sexism, is considered “the system of beliefs that reinforces a negative evaluation based on gender nonconformity or an incongruence between sex and gender” (Hill, 2003: 119). Transphobia, on the other hand, is “the motivating force for negative reactions to transed

people that involves fear and disgust in the observer" (Hill, 2003: 119). Leslie Feinberg, a gender-variant writer and advocate maintains: "Gender-phobia targets women who are not feminine and men who are not masculine. Trans-phobia creates fear of changing sex" (Feinberg, 1996). The results of this biased attitude is discrimination, gender bashing, harassment, abuse or assault.

Witten and Eyler found that "transsexual, transed and cross-dressing individuals were more likely than their non-transed peers to experience multiple forms of violence and victimization across their lifespan" (1999: 464). In fact, roughly two trans individuals are murdered each month in the United States with at least 2/3 of all trans people having experienced either physical or sexual assault (Isaacs, 2001), most of which happens in public space. Reported incidents against individuals who are trans, though, are lower than what is expected to be the reality of experiences and they are often difficult to obtain due to the victim's hesitance to report an attack because of the often turbulent relationships with people in positions of authority, such as police officers and medical physicians.

In addition, violence against gender-variant individuals bears close resemblance to that against some homosexuals because of the perceived sexuality of "butch" women and effeminate men. Roughly 1/3 of all hate crimes are against homosexuals (Isaacs, 2001) with nearly half of the incidents involving physical assault and 62% of those victims sustaining injury (National Center for Victims of Crime, YEAR). When an individual has physical characteristics that are inconsistent with their gender role behaviors they are assumed to be homosexual by their perceivers (Deaux & Lewis, 1984) and could be vulnerable to these hate-crimes against gays and lesbians. Heterosexist perpetrators also assume an individual is gay or lesbian if their gender is illegible

(Madson, 2000). The New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project (AVP) reports in their annual *Hate Crimes Report* that more victims are being assaulted based on perceived sexual orientation.

The research I conducted in 2002, found that this discriminatory social environment against gender variance is played out in the physical landscape as well. Trans individuals do not always have safe access to the public spaces open to nongender-variant people. Often times, even in the gay and lesbian communities, trans individuals are not welcome. One participant asserted her feelings about trans acceptance in the GLB communities: “We are the black sheep”. These sentiments of rejection and depravity are clearly exemplified in this statement.

In my chapter, “Living In Between” (Felsenthal, 2004), I posited six possible reasons for this bias against and violence targeting trans individuals: 1) *Medical Intervention*, the medical profession admonishing and annihilating any biology that is not consistent with the male and female secondary sex characteristics; 2) *Psychological Diagnosis*, the psychological profession labeling transgressive gender behaviors and presentations as a disorder (i.e. Gender Identity Disorder); 3) *Government Regulation*, lack of anti-discrimination laws and mandates that would protect individuals who are trans; 4) *Media*, distorted, exaggerated, pathologized, vilified, and denigrating images portrayed in movies, books and television; 5) *Individual Bias*, cognitive and psychological explanations for discriminatory behavior; and 6) *Citizen Policing*, social influences spurring anger and contempt against those who defy gender norms. Therefore, the institutionalization of gender that leads to perilous life experiences for those of trans experience is a product of both micro-level and macro-level governing.

The housing dilemma

Data on the housing conditions or homelessness of trans individuals is limited. Until recently, the trans population has been largely ignored in large-scale research. In fact, there are no statistics on how many people from the trans population have entered into the shelter system or are homeless and living on the streets in New York City. Since the city-wide "clean-up" campaigns starting with past Mayor Dinkins and proliferating with Guiliani, most of the trans people who were on the streets have been forced to evacuate the piers, meatpacking district, and in other well known trans spots. Most professionals in the field that I have interviewed or spoken with, however, agree that housing is a problem for gender-variant people.

The most data on the living conditions of trans individuals comes from San Francisco. For example, one San Francisco study found that 1/5th of all trans people do not have stable housing (National Center for Lesbian Rights and Trans Law Center, 2002). A 2003 study from the University of California found that 12 percent of homeless transwomen had been sexually assaulted in the past year. In addition minimally 40 percent of homeless youth are considered LGBTQ, however, the proportion of those individuals who are trans is unknown.

Both experts in the LGBT community and trans individuals expressed concern about the housing situation for people who display variant gender expression. For instance, Rusty and Chelsea, the trans women who run Transy House, received calls frequently from social service agencies requesting their help with housing a trans client.

Employment and poverty

Feeding into the housing dilemma is the difficulties trans persons face when seeking and maintaining employment. When people do not have steady income, they cannot pay rent or utilities. Often prohibiting trans individuals from finding employment are the legal identification requirements needed when applying for a job. Many people in the trans community do not have legal identification because their documentation contradicts with how they appear.

The work environment can be a scary place for trans individuals. Gender norms proliferate, socializing is gender segregated, and gender-typical behavior is required. Because of this, according to Gagne and Tewksbury, male to female trans individuals often feel pressured to socialize with same gender colleagues and to perform in a more "masculine" fashion (1998). They found in their studies on gender conformity, that male to female trans individuals have difficulty keeping jobs because "they had not yet perfected their ability to pass as women" (1998:93). It is essential in many work places for the binary to be maintained. When the binary is upset by an individual blurring the boundaries between male and female, that individual will often be fired.

When individuals break away from these gender norms at work there are life sustaining consequences. Many people who are transexual are fired or harassed once they "come out" at work. Lombardi *et al.* echoes these finding in their article "Gender Violence: Trans Experiences with Violence and Discrimination:

> 'Working adults who disclose their transed experience, or request reasonable accommodation to it, are fired, harassed, intimidated or assaulted by supervisors and coworkers, have their privacy violated, have their property defaced and destroyed, or are murdered. Workplace discrimination is so rampant that it is the norm among transed people, while outside the workplace visibly transed people are harassed, intimidated, and assaulted in public places' (Lombardi *et. al.*, 2001)

One example of trans discrimination in the workplace is a case where an individual was not fired, but transferred to another, more menial position that did not match his skills. His boss claimed that it was because there would be too much time off from the surgeries needed for sexual reassignment. Eventually, because of frustration and boredom, the employee left the company (San Francisco Human Rights Commission, 1994).

Recently, an article in Time Out New York (12/1-7/05:120) described the first trans job fair organized by TransJustice, an organization helping trans individuals with employment and discrimination issues. One person interviewed explained the employment conditions for trans people of color:

> Even if you have a law degree and you passed the bar, you may not get a job if you are a black transperson. When I transitioned I was unemployed for almost two years, and gender and racism played into that […] I've been homeless, and I have a college degree.

TransJustice has been actively recruiting both prospective employees and employers for the job fair. Outreach for recruiting trans individuals occurred in bars, clubs and even street corners hoping to get many of the trans prostitutes legal employment. Though the organization invited 150 companies to the fair, only 13 confirmed their attendance (among them were IBM and the Metropolitan Transit Authority). The City of New York declined. The low percentage of companies willing to

open their doors to individuals who are trans indicates a strong undercurrent of prejudice against those who transgress societal norms.

The Washington DC Trans Needs Assessment Survey found that 15 percent of their respondents reported losing a job due to discrimination and one-third of the trans people in the survey were earning less than $10,000 a year with 29 percent of respondents being unemployed (2002).

The precarious work environment leads many trans individual to finding other modes of making money. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute & National Coalition for the Homeless (2003), “To make additional money for rent or stay in a motel, [trans] individuals may need to engage in various types of survival crimes, from theft, drug trade, to sex work (and unsafe sex pays better than safe sex).”

As can be seen in the statistics on employment conditions for individuals who are trans, the workplace remains a place of turmoil and instability. When trans people are working there is a constant threat of being transferred or fired. If trans individuals are in the market for finding a new job, they face bias and discrimination in the interview process. Unfortunately, because of these circumstances that hinder trans people from finding and keeping sustainable employment, many are on the streets.

Conditions for trans people in homeless shelters

Due to the discrimination in both housing and employment, unfortunately, some trans women end-up homeless and seeking shelter and protection in the shelter system. However, for a trans individual in the shelter system, the results are sometimes opposite of their intention. Trans people experience harassment, rejection, and discrimination from

both workers and other shelter clients. In addition to this overt hostility, there is also confusion as to the placement of an individual who is trans. Should a male-to-female trans person be placed in a men's shelter or women's? Most often, a trans woman is placed with the men where she is sexually harassed and sometimes raped. Young trans individuals have similar experiences in the gay and lesbian shelters.

A conference that I attended on trans in the shelter system, organized by the GLBTQ Center in New York presented a panel of experts in the field and victims of shelter atrocities. Lourdes, a male to female trans woman in her mid 40s was placed in a male shelter for 21 months while she was living as a woman and described her experience. She explained that it was "an endless battle to be myself". People did not address Lourdes as female and staff continuously called her sir and used male pronouns. She also asserted that the staff called trans people "freaks of nature" or as "individuals who are confused". In addition to this verbal maltreatment from staff, all of Lourdes' women's clothes were confiscated and she was not allowed to wear make-up. Lourdes also faced daily acts of sexual harassment from other people living in the shelter: one time she woke up with a man in her bed; another, men pulled open the shower curtain while Lourdes was showering; and still other times men exposed themselves to her.

Because of the abuse trans individuals experience from staff and other shelter clients, the shelter system is a place where many trans people refuse to go. One of the experts on the panel claimed: "If shelters are not safe and respectful, many trans people will avoid them and seek other places to stay [incl. the streets]. Many trans women, therefore, are living on the street, have several roommates or live in substandard housing.

Diminishing number of collective housing for trans

One option for a place to live for trans individuals is collective housing. However, there are no known collectives for female-to-male people and there are very few remaining trans collectives for trans women. There were originally, three collectives for trans women, one in upstate New York (Central House), one in Minnesota (Davis House), and Transy House in Brooklyn, New York.

In 2004, Davis House closed after ten years of providing a home to trans women in Minneapolis. Also in 2004 Central House stopped identifying as a trans collective, although all of the women who live there are trans women. Transy house currently remains open to male-to-female trans people, however, they are considering closing its doors as well. Rusty and Chelsea, the house parents of Transy House, explained that they are tired and frustrated running a house where so many of the residents experience psycho-social problems that hinder them from improving their personal situations and living autonomously.

If Transy House closes, there will not be any trans collectives in the United States for trans women to go when they are in need of shelter and support. Considering the precarious housing, employment, and social conditions of trans individuals, closing Transy House can prove to be quite detrimental to the lives of trans women.

To understand the role Transy House plays on the lives of women who are trans, it is important to contextualize the New York trans experience. As can be seen by the data, there is vast discrimination on both micro and macro levels. Society remains bound to the gender binary leaving those who are in between male and female, or those who

defy gender norms by changing their gender, in a capricious position. Overt hostility targeting trans people continues to occur in housing and employment as well as socially. Because of this, Transy House is often times, the only hope trans women have for a safe and supportive home.

CHAPTER FOUR:

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

One's identity is a product of the physical and social environments which one engages. Transy House is a collective residential environment of mostly male to female trans women (one woman is a born-woman) where residents live, eat, socialize and share personal experiences in a communal environment. It is within this socio-spatial environment that residents have the physical space and the social kinship to explore, test, create, develop and enhance their gender identities and sexualities.

Because residents share common experiences in their psycho-social development, they have the knowledge and insight to create interdependent relationships of learning and support. As I discussed earlier, all but one of the current occupants in Transy House are male-to-female trans women. The born female in the group, admittedly, also has had struggles with her gender identity and presentation. All of the women have had various degrees of harassment and discrimination due to their transgressive presentations. However, they have found, through the strength of the group, that their autonomy and efficacy, as well as their trans-feminine identities are valid, acceptable and valuable.

In this chapter I explore the social dynamics occurring within Transy House. Specifically, I look at how living in a communal environment with other trans women influences the transformation of the residents' trans identity. Initially, I focus on the dyadic relationship between the role-model and the "student". Thereafter, I broaden the scope to look at how creating a collective identity impacts one's self identity. I also discuss the influence of Transy House's socially (i.e. sexually) open environment on

one's perceptions of gender and sexuality. Lastly, I scrutinize the social dynamics within Transy House questioning whether this environment allows for gender fluidity or if it proliferates our society's gender norms and stereotypes associated with the gender binary.

Social influence paradigms

According to social cognitive theories of personality development (Bandura, 1969), one's identity is developed through socialization, observational learning and contingent reinforcement. An individual is embedded in a social world in which she watches, interacts with and subsequently internalizes to become part of her own attitudes and behaviors. One's gender, therefore, is a product of social prescriptions for gender, including the roles and stereotypes associated with being male or female. By the age of four a girl understands how she is expected to behave and dress, what toys she should play with, and what professions are "suitable" for her to enter in as an adult (i.e. those in the "helping" fields like social work or nursing rather than those in maths and sciences). These ideologies are reinforced and proliferated by her same-sex role models such as her mother, sister, girlfriends and teachers. When the desired look and behavior is achieved, one is then rewarded with social acceptance and elevated social status.

Bussey and Bandura (1999) applied and enhanced the social cognitive approach for identity development to gender. They asserted that gender development and differentiation were derived from modeling enactive experience and direct teaching, however, agency and self efficacy allow for individual choice and change in gender definitions and expressions. In other words, according to Bussey and Bandura, gender identity is a conscious, dynamic process with infinite possibilities for change and multiple displays of gender presentations.

There is very little scholarly research documenting the influence of others on trans identities. Nutbrock *et al*, however, explored the role of the social environment on the transgender person's well being. He asserted that a trans person's social networks significantly influenced her self-awareness and acceptance (2002). Nutbrock *et al* developed a four staged model for explaining the dynamic identity progression of the trans identity within the social context.

1. Identity awareness: "Keeping the secret" about one's trans identity from others may, in itself, contribute to emotional distress. On the other hand, disclosing emotionally significant aspects of one's self concept to others has long been suggested as contributing to mental health.

2. Identity performance: Even if a trans identity is revealed to others, a failure to act upon it in the context of the relationship may negatively affect mental health. Behavioral expressions of trans identity, such as "cross dressing," may produce a sense of well-being.

3. Identity congruence: Even if others are aware of trans identity (identity awareness), and this identity is acted upon in the context of the relationship (identity performance), a failure of relationship partners to respond in terms of this identity may be disconcerting. A reciprocation of trans identity (identity congruence) may contribute to mental health.

4. Identity support: If relationship partners respond in terms of a trans identity (identity congruence) the *content* of this identity is critical. It may vary from ridicule and devaluation (identity rejection) to acceptance, positive reinforcement, and behavioral reciprocation (identity support). The type of behavioral response (rejection versus support) is seen as critically significant for the well being of trans persons.

In this model, Nutbrock focused on the dynamic interchange between the trans individual and his/her audience. There must be an awareness and acceptance of the trans identity from both parties in order to maintain personal well-being and social inclusion.

This reciprocal determinist approach to the development of a trans identity explains the unique experience of a trans individual.

Bussey and Bandura's paradigm, along with Nutbrock's model, present solid frameworks for which to understand the gender development process of individuals living in Transy House. The collectivity of trans women in the house, according to these approaches, will provide the model, support and context for which to explore and enhance one's trans-feminine identity.

Trans role models influencing gender and sexuality

One of the main players involved in the social construction of one's identity is a role model. A significant model in one's life offers one the opportunity to undergo vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1986) while also providing one with the opportunity for self evaluations and social comparisons with other individuals. These comparisons, along with peer modeling, can be powerful influences on developing self-perceptions of competence (Schunk, 1983). A trans role model, therefore, plays an important part in a transitioning woman's identity development as well as their self-efficacy.

Though there are still gaps in the literature describing the influence of role models on individuals who are trans, the research describing the influence of role models on one's self-perception is abundant. There are positive effects on the self in racial minorities, women, children, and those with physical disabilities when there are positive role models to learn from and emulate.

According to Bandura's social learning theory (1969, 1986), an individual will choose and be most influenced by a person of the same race and gender. In a more recent study, Wohlford *et. al*. (2004) found that one's perceived likeness to one's role model positively influenced self-esteem. For many trans people, though, there are no positive trans role models. Rusty explained that she used female family members for which to model gender performance. Her mother, grandmother, and aunts were significant to Rusty's gender development. However, others used the media for emulating feminine expression. Antonia explained:

> The only resources we have are media images. Forbidden to act feminine growing up, the only source to draw from is the media – one that is not real.

Like many trans women first transitioning, Antonia used a movie icon, Marilyn Monroe, as her role model. She emulated Monroe's look, behavior and speech patterns to help her develop her own female identity. When Antonia first arrived at Transy House, at the age of 18, her hair was bleached a bright blonde and styled in a fashion typical for Monroe. Over time and with exposure to other trans women, however, she mirrored Rusty's, and then Chelsea's personas. She described Rusty's look as one that is "more natural and down to earth"; an appearance she now tries to present.

Rusty and Chelsea

Rusty and Chelsea, the owners of Transy House, act as strong, influential role models for the residents of the house, as well as many who are in the GLBTQ communities. They have been together, as intimate life-partners for over 13 years.

In 1995 Rusty and Chelsea flew to Brussels for sex reassignment surgeries. Since then, they maintain, their lesbian identities became more pronounced and accepted both socially and personally. Coming-out as trans and being honest and forthcoming with their identities, is very important to Rusty and Chelsea.

Both women have also been relatively successful with their professional lives. Rusty has her Ph.D and is a tenured professor at a local university. Chelsea runs a telemarketing company operating out of the house and is a professional pianist. Additionally, Rusty is the owner of the property in Park Slope as well as has acreage in Pennsylvania. Because of these personal and professional accomplishments, Rusty and Chelsea have, in fact, become role models for many of the residents. They are positive examples of who the trans residents can become if they choose to turn their life around. Rusty described her perceived role at Transy House:

> […] And also there's a big contrast to where Chelsea and I are with transexuals, we're totally out about our lives. Probably I am in some ways I'm a role model to some people. The strength that people get from me is that I just move along living my life and um ignoring, no really, not giving any attention to the possibility of discrimination. You have to be honest with people when you meet them and be who you are. I think that trans people don't really do that, come out of their essence.

In this statement, Rusty concurs with the role that both she and her partner have taken on. For her, the life skills needed for dealing with the negative attitudes manifested from a gender-phobic society, ignoring, rather than focusing on possible bias and discrimination, along with possessing honesty and courage, is what is important to teach and pass on to the trans women in Transy House.

Both Nathan and Maureen stated during their interviews that Chelsea has served as a role model for which to emulate. Both remarked that Chelsea helped them to become

more emotionally mature and accepting of others. They spoke fondly of Rusty and Chelsea's ability to open their doors, and their hearts, to people in need. This, Nathan and Maureen assert, has helped them to also open themselves more willingly and be more giving to others as well.

The participants' understanding of sexuality has also been affected by living in Transy House. Prior to living in the house, many of the women adhered only to the ideolized, stereotypical prescriptions for gender and sexuality. They dated heterosexual men exclusively and had dreams of living out a straight, mainstream lifestyle to be a "good wife, a good mother" (Tasha).

Rusty and Chelsea, though, are a transexual lesbian couple who are openly affectionate toward each other while at home and in public. For many of the residents, seeing Rusty and Chelsea's relationship was their first time meeting and socializing with transexual lesbian women: "I never saw anything like this, this kind of love [two trans women together]" (Celia). In this case, Rusty and Chelsea became role models to help Celia understand and learn to accept two trans women as a lesbian couple.

In addition to providing the residents with a model for learning about gender and sexuality, Rusty and Chelsea also teach and support trans women how to better integrate themselves into society. For many trans individuals, their social and professional circles are mainly with others who are in the GLBTQ communities. In fact, because of this, many people within these communities claim that trans individuals, particularly male to female, have created their own culture, separate and sometimes isolated from both mainstream society and the gay and lesbian communities. According to Rusty, this self

segregation, marginalizes trans people and further enforces their liminal position in society. Therefore, when residents see Rusty working in a mainstream profession as a professor in a university, it provides a positive example of the potential goals one could achieve even if one is trans. Rusty further explains:

> They [trans residents] thought more about transexuality and living as a separate gender as what your original gender was. And living it in the mainstream society – I mean working a job and having a decent life and living as a person. Not necessarily as a separate culture. I think that's empowering to people.

Rusty and Chelsea provide the trans residents in Transy House with the positive role models for which to identify and emulate. Their personal and professional lives within the GLBTQ communities and in mainstream society demonstrates a more successful lifestyle for trans individuals than what is often seen in the media and on the streets. Because many trans individuals are living in dire circumstances, living on the streets, unable to find legal employment, and grappling with the transphobic discrimination and harassment, having positive trans role models who have overcome these obstacles is vital to the residents of Transy House.

Sylvia Rivera

Another influential figure in the lives of those who are trans was Sylvia Rivera. Rivera was a past resident of Transy House and a well known trans activist who made her gender transition while living at the house. She was considered by many to be the quintessential trans woman. Describing her role and influence on the trans community, Rivera was affectionately called "Queen Mother". Rusty describes Sylvia's personal journey as one of Transy House's great successes:

> When we first met her, when I first met her, she was like totally involved… when she came here she called herself a drag queen, she said "I'm just a drag queen"

> and didn't even know there were transed and didn't think of it in quite the same way. I think the atmosphere here and the stuff we were doing the way we lived was making her, um, I think she opened her eyes. I think she went through transition when she was here. When she came here she was almost never presenting herself as female. Although Sylvia, by just being Sylvia, seems very feminine, um, like after, by the end of her life she was wearing dresses all the time and make-up and everything and fixing herself up in that feminine fashion. That was sort of released. This was probably the first time in her life that she had the kind of supportive environment where she could do that.

Living at Transy House and seeing the lifestyles of her role models Rusty and Chelsea, Sylvia, was able to explore her own identity as a woman and as a lesbian. With their help she was able to transition to living as a woman and to find her female life companion, another trans woman living at Transy House. Rivera became immersed in the trans activism scene fighting for trans rights and visibility at rallies and speaking at various gender-political conferences. She was also known to financially and emotionally help trans women in need. Rivera quickly made the transition to becoming a trans role model for all those in the GLBTQ communities. Although Rivera died in 2001, she continues to be a significant influence on the lives of many men and women.

Rusty, Chelsea and Sylvia Rivera have become important role models for the GLBTQ communities. Their comfort with their own identities and bodies as well as their lived experience as lesbians, supportive and political advocates, and working professionals provides other trans women with a new lens for which to see and understand the trans identity. With the help of Rusty, Chelsea and Rivera, participants empowered themselves by learning to develop and accept their own identities, understand the life styles of others', and become more comfortable entering into mainstream society rather than socially isolating themselves in a comfortable queer bubble.

Influence of the Collective Identity

Role models offer individuals ways to reproduce and create new identities. They also can provide one with a link to socio-political groups. By identifying with a particular role model, one is, therein, identifying with that person's associated memberships. Identifying with a social group helps one to further develop one's own self concept. A collective identity, or proclamation of group membership, requires an individual to synthesize her own self concept with that of the group. As discussed earlier in this chapter, self-other merging enhances one's identity and esteem.

Research on ethnic minorities shows that a collective identity acts as a buffer to the daily acts of discrimination (Phinney, 1991). One can assume that this will also apply to those individuals who are marginalized due to their gender dysphoria or sexual orientation. For one who is trans, creating a collective identity, therefore, can become an important tool for protection from a homophobic and transphobic society as well as for one's self enhancement.

Two influential models that describe the development of a collective identity for ethnic minorities and for gays and lesbians are Cross' nigrescence theory (1991) and Cass' homosexual identity formation (1979) theory. Nigrescence theory posits a five stage model for Black identity development or "conversion":1) *Pre-Encounter*, the original, stable identity that eventually changes, 2) *Encounter*, the events that challenge and destabilize the original identity, 3) *Emersion*, trying to destroy the old identity while learning the new one, 4) *Internalization*, stabilization and finalization of the new self, 5) *Internalization-Commitment*, after a personal commitment to the new identity occurs, one merges with others to fight in the struggle for Black unity, advocacy and civil rights.

In Cross' model, a specific event occurs to spur the individual to question their own identity. It is only then that the person will continue with the reconstruction of the self. In this process, a black person destroys their original identity, one that is initially developed by and molded into the image of the parents, in order to explore and develop a new black identity. As final proclamation of a stabilized black identity, Cross posits, one becomes part of the black community in the collective struggle for equality. This is their new collective identity maintaining strong and positive associations with black people and black culture.

Similarly, Cass posits in her psycho-social model for homosexual identity formation one develops one's sexuality by seeking a connection with the group. She offers a six-stage psycho-social model that consists of: 1) *Identity Confusion*, first conscious awareness of own sexuality, 2) *Identity Comparison*, a commitment to self while understanding the potential for social alienation, 3) *Identity Tolerance*, seeking out others in the GLBTQ communities for support, 4) *Identity Acceptance*, increased contact with GLBTQ for feeling "normal", 5) *Identity Pride*, nearly complete acceptance with participation in collective activism, and 6) *Identity Synthesis*, the new gay identity is synthesized with other aspects of self.

For Cass, one starts her identity development process with a realization of their sexuality rather than experiencing a specific incident that causes the individual to question their identity. For many individuals who are gay, lesbian or trans, the feeling that their identity is different from the norm is felt at an early age, sometimes as early as 3 or 4. Immediately, thereafter, a commitment to the self occurs. Unlike in Cross' model, where the collective identity starts in the last stage, it is here, in the third stage of Cass'

model, that the gay man or lesbian seeks like-individuals for group membership, affirmation, and validation. In fact, this identification with other group members is essential for one's social and psychological well-being, as well as for feelings of normalcy. The collective identity, then, is an early contribution to the development of the homosexual self.

Though there is not an established model for creating a collective identity for a trans person[7], my experience with the trans population along with my interviews with experts in the field and research on identity formation, enables me to see the connections between the models for ethnic and homosexual identity development and the trans identity formation. Like Cross and Cass' models, individuals who are trans experience initial identity awareness and acceptance spurring their transformations. One difference, however, is that trans people often start merging with the GLBTQ communities at the same time of their initial awareness, and sometimes even before identifying as and committing to a trans identity. A trans woman may initially start to participate in rallies and marches, join trans activist groups, and become advocates in the GLBTQ communities, or socialize at GLBTQ events before coming out as trans. During this stage, the individual may self-identify as gay or lesbian, a drag queen, queer, questioning, or even as straight. As Cass suggests, involvement in these collective activities help one to explore compare, understand, and validate her questioned identity.[8] For many of the

[7] I have struggled with identity development models that often suggest a linear progression to the formation of the self. Identity, in my understanding, is continuous. With each new experience, one's identity grows, regresses, enhances, modifies, adapts, and builds onto itself.

[8] For many FtM individuals who may more easily "pass" as men, find female partners and live as part of the mainstream, "heterosexual" society, this emersion into trans socio-political activism may not occur. It is assumed that because of the ability for trans-men to pass more easily, they don't need or seek the support of other trans people. This is illustrated by the lack of services, and community outreach for transmen.

participants, moving into a trans residential collective, like Transy House, indoctrinates them into the trans community.

Ashmore *et al* (2004) assert that the collective identity is multidimensional and consisting of social, cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects. They posit seven individual-level elements that an individual achieves when creating a collective identity: 1) *self-categorization*, differentiating themselves from other groups, 2) *evaluation*, the positive or negative attitude of that group, 3) *importance*, the importance of group affiliation to one's own self concept, 4) *attachment and sense of interdependence*, the emotional involvement to that group, 5) *social embeddedness*, the degree to which an individual's collective identity is embedded in social networks and interpersonal relationships, 6) *behavioral involvement*, the degree to which the person engages in actions that directly implicate the collective identity in question, and 7) *content and meaning*, the extent that descriptives associated with the group are internalized and associated with one's own self concept.

Though all of the elements described may apply to the collective identity of one who is trans, two elements of particular relevance and importance are: s*ocial embeddedness*, and b*ehavioral involvement*. In both of these aspects of a collective identity, the individual is an active agent in their own identification process. The individual must, consciously and effortfully, decide to identify with the group and then take targeted actions to merge with it. Therefore, with social embeddedness and behavioral involvement, the act of creating a collective is seen through the persons behaviors, and is, therefore, more easily quantifiable.

For one who is trans creating a collective identity with the trans community could mean moving into Transy House and identifying with and forming connections to the other trans residents. For others the collective identity happens when they participate in trans-political activities and partake in trans social networks. Inclusion into a politically and socially active life as a trans woman signifies the personal commitment and outward declaration needed for her emerging self-concept. These activities will also ingratiate her into the trans world while also, with the acceptance from other trans, validate and support her trans identity.

The owners of Transy House realize the importance of political and social involvement for both the individual and the community and encourage residents to become more involved in rallies, conferences and social gatherings. Most of the participants agree that their knowledge and level of activism increased while living at Transy House.

> We believe in taking political action to secure a social and cultural space for trans people in the emerging global culture. We are a part of the effort to educate people about trans culture, and the effort to educate trans people how to survive in the new millennium. (from the Transy House web site)

According to this statement, a political awareness acts as a shield protecting them from a transphobic society – it is linked to survival. As popular rhetoric states, “knowledge equals power!”

In fact, Rusty’s political side was clearly seen in a segment of the Transy House short documentary video. One scene shows Rusty approaching Chelsea and saying “I think you need a pin this morning Chelsea, let’s put this one on” In the video Rusty is seen picking up a pin from the dresser and putting it on Chelsea’s lapel. The pin has a picture of Guiliani’ face crossed out in red.

Chelsea and Rusty have been involved in many trans-activist groups such as: Metropolitan Gender New York and the New York Association for Gender Rights Advocacy. Additionally, both women have written articles on trans struggles for civil rights recognition, presented at numerous conferences on gender and GLBTQ issues, and participated in rallies and marches promoting civil rights for trans. Working on the New York State Trans Coalition (NYTG Coalition), both Chelsea and Rusty have also fought for inclusion in the highly controversial gender discrimination law SONDA (Sexual Orientation Non-Discrimination Act). This legislation protects individuals who are gay and lesbian in jobs, healthcare and housing, although those people who are butch, effeminate, or trans gays and lesbians are not covered. As role models, for the other trans women living at Transy House, Chelsea and Rusty encourage residents to join them in their socio-political fights through involvement in community outreach and awareness activities as well as political lobbying.

Antonia, for example, remarked on how Rusty and Chelsea exposed her to the "street culture" of trans life (i.e. hormones and drag queens), as well as to various social venues frequented by trans people such as drag shows and bars. Other participants admit to participating in trans events with the encouragement and support of Rusty and Chelsea.

"Queen Mother", Sylvia Rivera who, as mentioned earlier, was a past resident of the Transy House and well known GLBTQ icon and trans activist also helped many trans women to develop a collective identity. As a seventeen year old "drag queen", Rivera was a leader in the Stonewall riots. She also addressed World Pride in Rome, Italy in 2000 where 100,000 people cheered the legend. Rivera helped to create the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, she also was involved with feeding the homeless at soup kitchens, and

established STAR House (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries) in the early 1970's – "the first political/social initiative of the trans community in New York City" (National Trans Advocacy Coalition web site). At Transy House, Rivera helped many of the residents by providing financial support and counseling support to young individuals questioning their gender or who are transitioning. Rivera's personal experiences and social activism made her a figure with whom many young trans people could identity and aim to be like. Her legacy lives on at Transy House through oral herstories, posters, photographs and paintings that are hung throughout the house.

With Rivera's direct support many women were able to develop their own identity and create a connection to the trans community. The pride she felt in herself also spilled over in the trans community enabling trans women to also feel pride in themselves and in their association to the CLBT communities. Even after Rivera's death, women still speak fondly and with pride about connections or experiences they once had with her. This strong sense of identification with Rivera adds to the "Meaning" element of Ashford et al's model for creating a collective identity. Sadaisha, who now sleeps in the bedroom which Rivera and her lover once occupied, explains Rivera's impacts:

> I also feel that being in a room of one of the most influential trangenders of our time [Sylvia Rivera] and also her lover … it really is breathing new life into me. I really think you can feel the energy of this place.

This strong socio-political trans atmosphere that permeates Transy House significantly impacts the development of residents' collective identity. Their active involvement with the trans community and their strong identification with influential trans role models helps trans women to create the cognitive, emotional, social and

behavioral connections needed to merge with the trans group and develop a collective identity.

Transy House Community Center: a place to create a collective identity

Also playing a part in the development of a collective identity is the role that Transy House plays in the community. Transy House acts as a community center for the trans community providing the physical, emotional and social, space for trans individuals to receive support, community action, socialization, and trans-knowledge. Having this real space to own, territorialize, personalize and share in offers women another opportunity to create a collective identity.

Additionally, Transy House provides individuals with a space to have repeated exposure to and reduced proximity with others, increasing levels of attraction and strengthening bonds between residents and guests. All of the participants, for example, mentioned the social benefits of living in and visiting Transy house. When the house first opened, there were many parties and social gatherings. Every Friday night many people would come to the house to hang out and socialize. Though these weekly events no longer occur, the open-door policy at Transy House allows people to enter freely, at any time, to visit and socialize. During most of my visits to Transy House, there were several non-residents hanging-out and socializing. Tasha and Celia proudly serve guests of the house a good, home-cooked meal. Tasha admits to enjoying “playing hostess”. When I was first introduced to the women in the house, I was invited for dinner. They would also invite me to join them for dinner if I was there while they were cooking. Revealing the symbolic social significance of the meal, each of the residents told me during their interviews, without provocation, what meal they were famous for cooking.

Transy House still has various events and gatherings hosted there. For example, after Rivera's funeral march and tribute in 2001, which thousands attended, the women of Transy House held a memorial in her honor. Many members of the GLBTQ community and friends came to their home for this event. Additionally, for many of the holidays, such as Thanksgiving, they invite people over for a large "family" dinner. Though, because of an individual stealing Rusty's flatware set, and not having the energy, Rusty admittedly lost her motivation to hold these large gatherings. Because of the decrease in collective events at Transy House, Rusty suggests that the atmosphere changed. The last "big party", Christmas, 2004, was due to Tasha's initiative. Residents are less cohesive and intimate than they were when Transy House first opened to trans women.

Transy House also acts as a resource information center providing trans and non trans people with literature, videos or personal expert advice on an array of trans issues. In the house there is a video and book library available to anyone in the community. In the Transy House video, Rusty is seen bringing home domestic violence brochures that target lesbian audiences. Rusty and Chelsea will also provide information, either verbal or written documentation, to those who make specific requests. Many social science researchers, media personnel, and professionals in the GLBTQ fields often call asking for information on topics such as laws related to individuals who are trans, past research conducted on trans life, or housing issues for trans.

For many residents, Rusty and Chelsea provided them with help in transitioning, housing, jobs and finances. They often explain to trans women the benefits and side-effects of various hormones used for transitioning, assist women with their job search and will pay for immediate necessities such as food. For Antonia, Transy House was a place

where she found the support and resources she needed to live full time as female. In Michigan, her previous state of residence, there were no such resources for trans women.

Having the physical environment to meet as a collective offers trans women opportunities to meet, socialize, network, and learn. They use the space to help them build group cohesion as well as to create a collective identity and develop a sense of self.

An open environment: Affecting ideas of gender, sexuality and group cohesion

In the opening scene of the Transy House home video Chelsea is laying naked on Rusty's bed with Julia, another trans woman, who is wearing only a tank top. They lay comfortably with each other often giving each other loving caresses. As the viewer listens to their conversation about sex reassignment surgery an unidentified man walks in only wearing shorts and an unidentified trans woman flashes her naked chest to the camera. This scene illustrates the socially and sexually open environment of Transy House.

Although many social scientists assert that having privacy is essential to developing the self, the atmosphere at Transy House suggests that one's openness with themselves and others helps with identity proclamation and progression in a more significant way. Altman posits that privacy is the withdrawal from others. It defines the limits and boundaries of the self which are necessary for the development of one's self-identity (1975). Westin suggested four ways that privacy functions in one's identity development: personal autonomy, emotional release, self-evaluation, and limited and protected communication (1970). Therefore, according to Altman and Westin, identity development and creating one's self as an independent person, therefore, requires a separation. Furthering this idea, Laufer and Wolfe (1977) maintain that "The choice of

aloneness, then, becomes a statement of autonomy of the self [with privacy being seen as] a way of both enhancing the self and protecting the self (i.e., repression)." Now, according to these suppositions, not only is privacy critical in identity formation and autonomous functioning, but it is also used for fortification of the self.

The findings here, however, contrast with the theories of Altman, Westin, and Laufer and Wolfe. Privacy, as it functions in Transy House, plays a vastly different role in the development of a trans identity. The social and physical openness of Transy House has, in fact, brought many of the residents to fruition with their own gender and sexuality development. The owners' political ideologies about being "out" to yourself and to mainstream society creates opportunities for trans women to be more visible. Additionally, open displays of nudity and sexual intimacy in Transy House shows residents new pansexual prescriptions for sexuality and gendered bodies while strengthening bonds between like individuals.

When Rusty and Chelsea first opened its doors to other trans women, Transy House was a very socially and sexually open environment. The original three members of the house, in fact, were having sexual relations with each other, in a "sort-of three-way marriage" (Rusty). Since then, a diverse population made their way through the doors of Transy House and intimacy expressed between two, and sometimes more than two, people did not necessarily happen only behind closed doors. Some of this atmosphere continues to exist today. During one of my visits to the home, I walked by Rusty and Chelsea's bedroom. Through the open door I was able to see them as they lay naked on their bed intimately caressing each other's bodies. Rusty's belief about a sexually open trans environment is that "I figure everyone is a woman, what does it matter."

Additionally, Rusty and Chelsea's relationship remains open and non-monogamous. Each have the other's permission to have intimate relations with other people. Though their relationship with each other is what they consider lesbian, their outside relations vary, sometimes finding sexual attractions to men while other times they will date women.

At Transy House trans women and gender questioning individuals create new conceptions of gendered bodies and sexuality by observing trans residents in the nude and ones that are publicly involved in intimate relations. With the newly defined prescripts for privacy, they are able to see that stereotypical ideologies for a female body does not apply to all women. For example, a woman at Transy House may have a penis and breasts. Gender and sexuality, therein, remain terms to be scrutinized and problematized. However, in Transy House, it appears that no matter what one's body indicates, if the gender performance expresses the stereotypical feminine prototype, then the accepted gender label for that person is "woman".

When a trans woman comes to reside at Transy House, she sees others who are like her and realizes that she is not alone in her pursuit to synthesize her gender identity with her body. A trans woman will see others like her and will identify with and form connections to those individuals. According to social affiliation theories, like people are attracted to and affiliate with each other. The group's cohesiveness is then strengthened as similar looks, attitudes and behaviors are developed as a collective.

The openness of the social milieu of Transy House is magnified when contrasted with that of Central House. In this up-state collective, bedroom doors are closed and

locked and privacy is coveted. With tension and even a bit of anger in her voice, Antonia describes the atmosphere at Central House:

> People go on living their individual lives in the same house. There's not a lot of mingling. Everybody's doing their own thing. They have superficial friendships.

The lack of cohesion among the women at Central House demonstrated by the independent activities of residents leads to "superficial friendships". This is unlike Transy House, she further explains, where everyone is more "familial", more intimate

The socially open environment of Transy House offers residents and guest opportunities to develop new notions of gender and sexuality. They learn that the female body takes on many different sizes and shapes and that gender expression is not dependent on the body alone. Women are free to perform and display her body without judgment or harassment. In addition to new conceptions for gendered bodies and freedoms for expression, the residents of Transy House also develop a more enhanced collective identity. By observing and identifying with others who are now considered like-individuals the social bonds are strengthened. The self-other merging processes continue to mature and expand as their individual and collective identities develops and morphs.

A gender-fluid environment or a place fortifying the gender binary?

Transy House creates a social environment that allows for a multiplicity of gender displays, yet, antithetic to this assertion are also the verbal remarks made by some residents about gender display that reinforce the gender binary. Many of the participants claimed that they have been able to explore the gender and sexuality spectrums while

living at Transy House, though, at the same time, negative remarks about those who digress from the stereotypical prescriptions for gender fortify gender-typical norms.

Multiplicities of gender expression

As described throughout this chapter, Transy House is an environment that can redefine what it means to be male, female, gay, or straight allowing for more fluidity between the binaries. It is difficult, however, to rid oneself of the internalized beliefs about gender and sexuality that society works so hard to fortify and proliferate. This ambivalence is clearly illustrated in Transy House. Within this microcosm, whether new constructs for gender and sexuality are really being formed or if society's binaries are being maintained and fortified must be questioned.

Bem (1974) posits that most people exhibit both masculine and feminine attributes. She generated a widely used 60-question, self-reported, sex role inventory that loosely labels an individual as masculine or feminine. A majority of the population, Bem found, fall somewhere in the middle on the gender scale. She stresses in her study that the production of androgyny is prevalent which blends both masculine and feminine tendencies. Society, however, still adheres to the gender binary of male and female sexes.

For many people, this constricting, dichotomous structure causes psychological conflict. Maureen, the born-female in Transy House, describes her own experience with gender.

> I get schizophrenic about it sometimes [laughs]. Sometimes I get like little miss princess sometimes you know, it's not just about dressing up, but wanting to be pampered like a little girl. I don't know if that makes sense, or if I am saying it the right way. To me it seems like maybe it's when my estrogen is really high or something [laughing]. Other times I can like, it's natural, I mean, sometimes these things are natural, that's just the way I feel, or anybody feels and sometimes I think I kind of force it on myself to

> either be ultra masculine or ultra feminine or feeling like kind of in-between, or kind of both, or having none at all. Probably, I'd say I don't tend to be one thing more than another in any way I perceive masculine or feminine.

Maureen's ambivalence about having to maintain a single gender expression is manifested in her scattered monologue and her tension is heard in the nervous laughter that seeps through her words. She looks to me for validation of her feelings and rationalizes her thoughts by saying that it is "natural" and that it is the way "anybody feels" to exhibit both feminine-typical and masculine-typical displays. Though the desire to play both gender roles causes her conflicting feelings, she maintains that Transy House is a safe space to be fluid in one's gender expression.

Rusty describes another resident's gender development and expression changes as going full circle, starting in a hyper feminine state of transitioning to one of androgyny like Chelsea's. As Marilyn learned more about the expansive definitions of gender, and as she became more aware of her own self concept, she ultimately found a gender expression that was more comfortable to her.

> And other people like Marilyn… when she first came in the front door, she learned a lot here. She got to form her idea of gender. When she first got here her idea of gender, was to be real femme. She was always wearing sexy clothes, you know, mini skirts, looking, being real concerned about a femme type of appearance, and now she's like, it's funny, she did this whole circle where she relates to Chelsea as a person with a gender expression somewhat similar to Chelsea's. To me that's like a huge change.

Transy House offers individuals an environment to break from the binary model for gender and escape the prescriptions associated with them. Chelsea, for example, has crossed the gender line alternating between male and female gender displays. At one point, several years after her SRS, Chelsea unofficially changed her name to one that is

not gender-specific, and she started identifying as male. Her core gender display, however, remains androgynous, neither looking stereotypically male nor female. Currently, she self-identifies as a lesbian woman.

When Nathan first started coming to Transy House, he also claimed to "play" with gender. His sexual and gender identities went through various stages while living in the House. He self-identified as: bisexual, gay, trans, and now, "just plain queer". Nathan admits to the thrill of testing people's (e.g. non trans or gay) "rigid" understandings of gender by sometimes presenting as a drag queen, while other times presenting as a clean-cut, gay man.

This gender-fluid environment, however, does not play out in Davis House or Central House. For those living at Davis House, located in a suburb of Minneapolis, gender consistent expression was a requirement. According to Davis, the philosophy of the House was to be "out and proud". For this to happen, she asserts, it is important for a trans person to choose one gender and express herself as that chosen gender while out in public. To Davis, this single gender presentation displayed to mainstream society helps reduce societal prejudice against those who are trans. Davis maintained that gender ambiguity breeds aggression from outsiders. In fact this position was fortified by creating a "rule of the house":

> If I thought the person was hiding from themselves or the world, they could not stay there. I am not going to let someone who feels they are trans but not willing to go out in community, socialize. If they are outside the house they must present in one gender or the other, with appropriate dress, no in-between.

This strong position to encourage residents to present in a single gender presentation may be due to the geographic context of Davis House. Though Minneapolis is known to have a relatively progressive, liberal socio-political environment, its

surrounding neighborhoods tend to be more conservative. Requiring Davis House residents to adhere to accepted prescriptions for gender is an act of protection from potentially harmful acts of gender phobia.

Additionally, Central House, located in upstate New York, also prefers women to display a consistent, specifically female, identity. In this trans collective, the women residents are strongly encouraged through both overt and implied rules for gender display, to express as female. In fact, there is a known gender hierarchy at the house with post-operative trans women positioned at the top.

Patrolling the gender binary

Though Transy House prides itself on offering residents and visitors a place where they can present anywhere on the gender spectrum, negative remarks from residents targeting those who defy society's norms for gender display act to fortify the gender binary. This process can be explained through the perspective of symbolic interactionism. SI is a school of thought that asserts one's identity is constructed through his or her social interactions. It is a highly cultural process that takes cues from the social representations for gender existing for that society. The individual receives information (both verbal and nonverbal cues) from her social environment and, thereafter, reacts and performs according to the perceived expectations of the group. Women in the MtF trans community may make derogatory remarks toward a trans woman who presents in a way that does not meet their standards for what they expect a female to be. The targeted trans woman will then change her presentation to adhere to the standards of the group.

Adding to symbolic interactionism, Deaux and Major (1987) posit that one's gender enactment, generated from social interaction, is a product of three factors: 1)

one's individual goals, 2) environmental influences, and 3) modifying conditions such as the number and type of like-people in one's environment. Using Deaux and Major's premise, a more androgynous trans woman, when around other more feminine trans women, may adjust her behaviors by speaking and behaving in a more feminine-typical way if her personal motivation is to fit in with and be accepted by the group. On the other hand, when a trans woman is in an all straight, more conservative environment, she may hyper-perform the female identity she feels is expected of her. Although this performance may be due to self-protection and trying to "pass", symbolic interactionism, remains as a regulatory agent that patrols an individual's behaviors to adhere to societal norms and expectations for gender-typical display.

During my observations at Transy House, I heard many residents make deprecating remarks and have discussions about the hair, clothing, and mannerisms of other trans women who were not deemed by the group to be feminine enough. Some examples of these remarks were: "Did you see that outfit she was wearing?", or "She's such a bitch. She thinks she's so pretty the way she carries herself with her high voice." The tension, anger, envy and fear is heard in their voices as they make these very targeted comments. The statements residents made question whether the target is living up to their perceived gender expectations for what is considered female. Through these social interactions they are, thereby, reinforcing the gender binary prescribed by society.

In the Transy House home video, a scene taking place in the kitchen depicts the contestation, curiosity, and jealousy felt when the women discuss the impending SRS of Chelsea and Rusty. The scene is as follows:

> Marilyn (Antonia): Tell us, Chelsea, what's it gonna feel like to get it chopped off […] Rusty will have something in common with the Chelsea

> Fish Market – they're gonna smell like it. […] So, tell us, Rusty, how does it feel to go and get your pussy?
>
> Rusty: (seriously) I'm scared, yea, and I'm looking forward to it too.
>
> Marilyn (Antonia): Cause she's afraid Chelsea will keep her dick and it will stay with her forever and keep hitting her.
>
> Rusty: (jokingly) I'm afraid she'll keep it and she'll be longer than I am deep. I have to worry about that.

Marilyn's derogatory remarks about smelling like fish once the surgery is complete, juxtaposed with the curious envy heard in her questions to Rusty and Chelsea portray the ambivalence she feels about what it means to be a sexualized woman. Additionally, as can be understood from this short segment, the societal hetero-normative gender roles are also reinforced by discussing the potential for typical sexual intercourse between a man and a woman. Marilyn, therefore, reinforces the gender and sexuality binaries through her comments posed targeting Rusty and Chelsea's transition. Interestingly, and contrary to Marilyn's suppositions, the SRS Chelsea and Rusty underwent transitioned both of their bodies into women's bodies, therefore, the intimate relations between the two will be lesbian in performance, not heterosexual.

In fact, the gender proscribed comments made by residents produced significant reactions in the targeted individual. When the comments were directed toward a specific woman in the room, attention to these remarks caused a change in the gender expression of the target. As either a conscious or subconscious appeal for approval, and/or to maintain gender standards for trans expression, she changed her clothes, fixed her hair or applied more make-up creating a more feminine identity. When the comments targeted

trans women who were not residents of Transy House they continued to establish the gender norms expected for those who were in the room.

The gender binary is strictly enforced in Central House. Here, asserts Antonia, a past resident of both Central House and Transy House, a lot of women enjoy "gender baiting":

> [It was] petty little shit. Like any kind of aggression or assertive… or intelligence, was marked as male behavior. It was very condescending.

Antonia explained that the women at Central House wait for other trans women to perform what they consider to be masculine behavior, before they "pounce". This overt, even hostile, fortification of consistent female performance maintains the clear distinctions between men and women proliferating society's dichotomous framework. Antonia interpreted this behavior to be due to an inferiority complex. The women living there, she asserted, need to "make up for their own insecurities" by denigrating others. This is a prime example of downward social comparison where one belittles another who is considered to be inferior in order to elevate her own self-esteem. Therefore, if one is feeling unconfident about one's masculinity or is experiencing ego insecurity, one may insult another's gender appearance making herself feel superior.

The creation of family proliferating gender norms

In addition to symbolic interaction attributing to consistent gender-normative behaviors, the social dynamics in Transy House proliferates male-female distinctions. Although, Rusty and Chelsea consider the familial dynamics similar to those of lesbian families, all of the participants asserted that the social structure mimics that of the hetero-

normative family with a mother, father and children. Tasha describes the accepted family structure:

> Rusty definitely takes over as house mother, Chelsea's kind of like, I don't want to say, a…, Chelsea's kind of like a father and mother because she takes on both roles as far as discipline [mimicking a typical father's scream] – definitely father role and the mother role is trying to help you with resources trying to let you know where to go what to do.

Tasha continued to explain that the other residents act as Rusty and Chelsea's children. Adhering to feminine social roles, she self-described as the big sister who offers the other women support and advice. Additionally, she helps the mother with domestic chores such as cooking and cleaning.

Though Transy House offers individuals the opportunity to defy the prescribed familial structure, the recreation of a hetero-normative family proliferates society's gender-normative behaviors. For example, the domestic responsibilities typically assigned to women are taken on by the more feminine-typical women in the house. Tasha and Celia admit to doing most of the cooking and cleaning in Transy House. Tasha claims to do a lot of the cleaning calling it a "feminine thing":

> I don't know if they really notice how much I do – cleaning supplies [buying food she doesn't eat because she knows everyone else eats it] – that's another feminine thing about me, I'm like a shopper […]

Rusty is the "breadwinner", though Chelsea, behaviorally, is still considered the 'father' of the house. Most of the residents admit, Chelsea tends to be take on the paternal role acting in typical masculine fashion. She is more messy, tries to be the authoritative, disciplinarian, and attempts to create order by yelling at others. In contrast, Rusty, the house "other", admits to more having more subtle techniques for creating social order.

For example, she posts notes around the house indicating what the house rules are. This is, what might be considered more feminine-typical behavior.

Though the participants in this study explored and presented a variety of gender displays while they lived in or visited Transy House, socially accepted prescriptions for masculinity and femininity continue to be encouraged and enforced. At all three trans collectives, Transy House, Central House and Davis House, women are encouraged to adhere to feminine-typical performance. Apparently, one's multiple gender displays is socially accepted at Transy House as long as it is for identity exploration. When the trans woman's identity is more fully developed, gender performance is expected to remain consistent with norms and standards established for women. Rusty's hope is for the trans women to be able to survive in mainstream society working in legal employment as openly trans individuals.

Other personal changes

In addition to developing new conceptions of gender and exploring more deeply new opportunities for sexuality, residents of Transy House also admited to having other positive and pertinent changes that affected their life functioning. As described earlier, many of the women who came to Transy House with numerous issues such as unstable personalities and social behaviors and precarious environmental histories that influence their ability to live within a group setting. However, Transy House provides them with a safe space to develop and enhance their social skills.

Nathan perceives many of the residents as "lost". They then looked to Transy House to help find themselves. Halberstam and Prossner's quest for home metaphor is clearly illustrated in Nathan's depictions of Transy House residents. He explains:

> You know, so they're found. They do learn a lot. Most of it is like dealing with other people. I think this house is like a house of communication. It's strange. Like everybody, people usually come here with issues of like being too reclusive or being too outgoing. So like it sort of teaches them how to sort of uh regulate those like if they're too… if they don't know how to deal with people it teaches them sort of, how to break that ground. It's like the house is breaking ground. Which is why it's so turbulent.

Transy House, therefore, enables individuals who may have been socially ostrisized and placeless to make connections to both people and place thus affording them opportunities to find home. Tasha reinforces Nathan's depictions of Transy House by recounting her own psycho-social development while living at Transy House:

> I've changed a lot since I've been here – I have learned to be more tolerable, to hold my tongue sometimes and let things go. [Ten years ago] I probably would have thrown dishes.

Tasha disclosed to me that, in the past, she would have physically reacted to a negative confrontation or an undesirable situation by "throwing dishes". She admitted to me that she can have an "explosive" personality which she has learned to curtail since living in the collective environment of Transy House. Because she now can regulate her behaviors, Tasha is able to live more easily with other people.

Living in a communal environment is a difficult experience. When individuals bring to the group their individual social and personal problems, the collective problems and tensions become magnified. However, while living in Transy House, residents learned to function as a valuable group member and their social skills, therefore, matured.

Conclusion: Bringing it all together

From a social interactionist perspective, Transy House creates an environment to question, create, develop and express a range of identities that transgress gender norms.

Though the women who reside in the house admit to having had both positive and negative experiences, each person was able to question, explore, and express a wide range of gender identities and sexualities while living there. This process of self discovery and social acceptance is essential to the development of the self.

As discussed earlier, Nutbrock's model for trans development emphasizes the use of social interaction to develop, support and validate a trans identity. The stages he proposed are easily applied to residents of Transy House. In his first stage of identity awareness, for example, he stressed the importance of coming-out as a trans individual. In fact, if a trans woman remains closeted, her well-being could be compromised. All of the individuals I spoke with have been in various stages of their coming-out process. They have used the open and supportive environment of the house to make themselves visible publicly and to further define and develop their gender and sexuality.

The second and third stages of Nutbrock's model emphasize the importance of being able to perform as their the chosen gender while in front of others. Of equal importance is having others treat you as that gender. Transy House provides individuals with a safe environment to explore, test and perform a variety of gender identities. Residents offer their help and, sometimes, criticism on gender expression and performance. This response from residents, known as identity congruence, acts as a way to patrol gender ensuring certain standards for gender display. Additionally, it helps to validate the target's gender decision by acknowledging and referring to the individual using their chosen gender.

Ultimately, the residents at Transy House create a ‘family’ where members of the house stretch the hetero-normative family roles. With this new family, members support and protect each other as if blood-related. According to Nutbrock, these familial social dynamics is the final stage of the model and is essential to a trans person’s well-being. The familial development at Transy House will be discussed further in the “Safe Haven” chapter.

The social influence on one’s identity development, validation and proclamation is essential to the creation of a new self. For the individuals living and visiting Transy House, gender and sexuality take on new definitions as their old prescriptions for male-typical and female-typical look and behavior are replaced with new, more fluid conceptions. For many in the GLBTQ communities, blurring the gender binary allows them to become a more cohesive group that strengthens not only their own self concept, but their collective identity as well.

Although Transy House is a place to challenge and problematize norms for gender and sexuality, these binaries are fortified within this transcape. Gender performances in Transy House continues to adhere to societal prescriptions for typical male/female gender displays. The establishment of a familial social dynamic reinforces the heteronormative performance. Individuals are taught and encouraged to behave in stereotypical feminine ways and when they digress, there are significant social consequences such as public chiding. This trans-specific environment, therefore, is a parallel landscape that mirrors the larger society.

CHAPTER FIVE:

NOT AS I HAD HOPED

Transy House, Davis House and, to some extent, Central House are communal dwellings open to trans women. They provide residents with a room, furniture, meals, social support, and physical protection. Though all of the houses, run by trans women, have the philosophy of “trans helping trans”, unfortunately, many of the residents have hae more serious problems to overcome than just finding housing. Women come to the homes without legal employment, with behavioral or emotional disorders, a few have been dependent on illegal substances, or have experienced trauma in their life; this affects their psychological states and outward behaviors. As indicated in the “Background” chapter, there is also considerable discrimination against individuals who are trans at work and in housing. All of these factors can prevent trans women from living independently, thus they may go to a place like Transy House seeking help.

In the first findings chapter, I discussed how the influence of the group positively influenced the women living in Transy House. This chapter will explore some of the possible negative aspects to its social dynamics. First, I describe the adverse behaviors of residents living in the house; second, I explore possible explanations for these behaviors; third, I look at how residents react; and fourth, I explain what pro-active measures are taken to counter these adverse effects.

Manifestations of tension and aggression

All of the participants in the study agreed that Transy House is a place where many trans women go to seek help financially, emotionally, socially and even medically. Residents acknowledged their sincere appreciation for having a place like this to call "home" and where they could feel comfortable being who they are or want to be. However, most of the residents also spoke to me about the significant amount of disruptive and aggressive behaviors exhibited by the trans women living in the house.

Several of the women described factors that influence trans residents' behaviors. For many of the women, it is their first time living in a shared-collective. They are not used to the social interactions required for this particular environment. Other residents come to Transy House with their own personal troubles (e.g. emotional and mental health problems, and current or former addictions) that cause serious manifestations. Data on the trans adolescents indicate that they have higher incidences of anxiety and depression as well as having lower self-esteems (Rosenberg, 2003) than non-trans people which may also be true for some of the women at Transy House.

Manifestations of these psychosocial states of trans people are clearly demonstrated in Transy House resident behaviors. Some have stolen from other residents, destroyed property, fought, and displayed covert hostility such as gossiping. Some of these social disturbances were caused by guests of the residents. The effects of these acts have significant impacts on residents and the collective.

Stealing

All of the participants talked about various occurrences that have caused turmoil and hostility in the house. Some of the incidences that residents discussed involved stealing. In fact, most participants mentioned in their interviews and during their tours incidences of stealing and not being able to trust some residents because of it.

One incidence of visitors stealing was when Rusty's sterling silver flatware set was stolen. She describes how this act influenced her desire to have formal social gatherings in Transy House:

> The dining room, I wanted to have a more formal dining room […] nobody ever appreciated it. When I was away in Europe for my operation in '95 they stole my sterling silver flatware. That was that for that. I used to give these elegant dinners, with linen napkins and crystal and stuff like that and I don't even try any more.

In the case of someone taking the flatware set, this act not only affected one individual, Rusty, but it had an impact on the members of Transy House as well. Now, as Rusty explained, she does not hold the same style of formal dinners for residents and guests. Because these kinds of social gatherings contributed to the familial bonding, as explained in the social influence chapter, the aggressive act of stealing flatware now plays a part in the cohesion of the women living in Transy House.

In addition to the flatware set, Rusty's power tools were also taken. A laptop computer and some of Chelsea's music CDs and videotapes were also stolen. According to Rusty, when she and Chelsea are out of town, residents "violate" their space by "making free with things we have in the room and take consumable candy/liquor."

Stealing has affected the individuals of Transy House as well as the collective environment. These acts are manifestations of one's psychological and social-situational state. Many people who steal are doing so as a "pick-me-up" and get a high from this act.

Others may steal because they feel it is “due” to them because of prior maltreatment or discrimination. Whatever the reason, acts of stealing has hindered residents’ ability to trust and build a cohesive group.

Overt aggression

Aggression is typically defined as “any form of behavior directed toward the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment” (Baron, 1977). Baron also included in this definition behaviors that resulted in the destruction of property and personal injury. The occupants of Transy House have exhibited outward displays of aggression that disrupt the overall functioning of the house, though no one has ever been seriously physically hurt.

Social conflict and confrontation

Residents of Transy House sometimes have verbal and physical confrontations with each other. For instance, during the time of the study Sadaisha was forced to leave Transy House because she became physically violent with another resident. During a disagreement with Tasha, Sadaisha had an emotional outburst and threatened Tasha with a knife. After several months, however, Sadaisha was allowed to live in the house again when she lied to Chelsea saying that she was taking psychotropic medication to help with her aggression and going to counseling. Tasha, however, voluntarily, moved out to the separate storage structure in the backyard and chooses not to associate with Sadaisha..

In the Transy House video acts of aggression are also clearly evident in Transy House. One scene shows two women, Chelsea and Julia, who were first observed together snuggling on the bed, are also filmed later that day having a physical altercation.

As the audience sees, Julia is yelling at and chiding Chelsea on and Chelsea starts to hit her with a closed fist. The videographer speaks over this scene and explains that Julia is "pushing Chelsea's buttons". Rusty, in reaction to their relationship, brought home brochures about domestic violence in lesbian relationships and counseled them on more appropriate interpersonal relations.

Several residents admited to sometimes "losing it" with others in the house. Rusty, Maureen, Chelsea, and Celia all agree that they have a tendency to yell at other residents when they are upset or angry. During my visits to Transy House, I have also experienced several episodes where a resident would come into the room screaming at another resident.

One of the findings of this study, as I discussed in the previous chapter, is that residents learn how to control their temper. All of the participants admited to changing in this matter and increasing their levels of tolerance. However, as is indicated in this section, one's temper is not always controlled. During her interview, Maureen half-heartedly joked that currently, there is nothing "life threatening" happening in the house.

Property Destruction

Another outward manifestation of aggression exhibited by residents is the destruction of property. Some residents direct their frustration, hostility and anger toward the house or objects in the house. During the participant-led tours, several stories were conveyed to me about how particular pieces of furniture was damaged or how parts of the house were destroyed (e.g. doors, holes in walls) due to fighting or resident outbursts.

To illustrate this point, Rusty conveyed a story about how the shared wall between the living room and the hallway became damaged (i.e. a large section of plaster

has come off the wall). During an emotional fight that occurred in the hallway between a resident and her female lover, the two became physical. The resident pushed her lover into the wall and, subsequently, the plaster on the adjacent living room wall broke away and crashed to the ground. Residents also conveyed stories about furniture being thrown and "bashed into pieces" when people became angry.

Gossip

One less blatant, yet, just as hurtful aggressive behavior is gossip. Rosnow and Fine define gossip as, "nonessential (often trivial) news about someone" (1976:87). For intensive purposes of applying gossip to the actions occurring at Transy House, I will expand the Rosnow and Fine definition to include stories told, whether they be fabricated, exaggerations or true; and with the possible intention to cause hurt to the targeted individual.

Residents of Transy House refered to this behavior as cattiness or "drama". This was one of the most common complaints expressed to me by participants. In fact, one resident exclaimed that her room is "drama free". Other residents either physically or emotionally remove themselves from the drama by seeking shelter in their rooms or immersing themselves in their hobbies. For example, Maureen choose the back porch to stay away from the fighting and gossiping, Rusty immerses herself in reading books, while Chelsea plays piano. One of the residents admits to only inviting her male visitors at times of the night when she knows people are sleeping just to avoid the gossip it may bring, which is considered against the rules. Tasha explained her position on gossip.

> There's a lot of drama, people getting into other's personal business – I don't think it's feminine, I just don't like it at all.

Tasha brings up an interesting point by gendering this behavior. Gossiping is a manifestation of aggression that is typically expressed by women. Because of the different ways that boys and girls are socialized, girls express their hostility in more implicit ways, while boys direct their anger outward onto other people or onto objects. The trans women living at Transy House, therefore, unconsciously, are acting in stereotypical feminine behaviors when they gossip.

Though gossiping tests residents' ability to trust others who live in Transy House and it easily acts as a weapon that denigrates the reputations of certain women, it also defines clear boundaries of who is considered "in" and who is "out", preserving solidarity and building cohesion among group members. On a subconscious level, women can be actually trying to build trust with in-group members by gossiping about those considered in the out-group.

Davis, owner of the trans collective in Minneapolis, revealed similar negative experiences in her house. She remarked on the extraordinary financial and emotional costs she and other residents paid to repair damages to the house that were caused by residents before it was sold. Davis agreed that many trans women have social and psychological issues that hinder their identity development as well as their ability to adapt in various interpersonal contexts. Similar to some of the women living in Transy House, many of the women who lived at Davis House, she explained had drug addictions, problems with alcohol and emotional issues that caused them to fight with other residents and destroy their living environment. Like Rusty and Chelsea's sentiments, Davis asserted that, ultimately, it was the lack of personal improvement in the trans women

residing there that led to the closing of Davis House. She “grew tired of helping women and not seeing them help themselves”. Davis, however, confessed that if she could, she would still do it all over again.

The frequency of aggressive behaviors is not a daily occurrence in Transy House, however, there are enough of these detrimental incidences, that have high enough levels of intensity, to cause all of the participants to discuss them during their interviews and tours. From stealing and gossiping to more directed aggressive behaviors that demonstrate residents’ socio-psychological states, there are significant implications on one’s personal growth and development and on the group’s cohesion.

Reactions

Although all of the participants agreed that Transy House has had significant positive impacts on their lives, they also are negatively influenced by the sometime outwardly hostile environment discussed previously. Some, psychological and emotional reactions ranged from disappointment to noticeable changes in attitudes and personality. Other responses were more behavioral. For instance, several residents physically and socially segregate themselves from the turmoil in the house.

Disappointment

Most of the residents of Transy House agreed that the social dynamics of a domestic collective for trans women typically helps one to improve one’s life and also elevates one’s self-esteem. Transy House, specifically, creates an atmosphere that fosters one’s gender development and furthers explorations with one’s sexuality as well. For

many residents, however, Transy House is only a temporary escape from living on the streets. This attitude toward one's home affects one's investment in and attachment to it, as well as one's incentive to change one's own life.

Rusty and Chelsea established Transy House to help trans women not only find shelter from a life on the streets, but also to help women find the means in themselves and empowerment to live a successful and autonomous life. They agreed that there were some individual "successes", like Sylvia Rivera, however, the house, as a whole, does not work as well as they had hoped.

By providing trans women with physical, social, emotional, and financial support Rusty and Chelsea expected to see more positive changes in the women's personal and professional lives, however their "lack of motivation" and social skills impede their process. Rusty revealed her opinions about residents' progress:

> There were still too many people who didn't change; were doing the same things they were doing when they first came – sex work. They still weren't going to school, weren't getting real jobs in the real world. That's sort of a disappointment.

Rusty's sentiments were shared by Davis as well. In her interview, Davis said she was also saddened that the residents of her house also did not improve their lives as she had hoped. She admitted that she felt a lot of frustration because of seeing so many women making the same mistakes repeatedly.

As described in the "Background" chapter, the psycho-social situation of many trans women hinders their ability to become self-sufficient. There is vast discrimination in housing and employment, as well as prejudice and harassment that is experienced while out in public. The harsh treatment of trans people contributes to their already vulnerable psychological state and negatively affects their ability to become autonomous.

Cynicism and anger

The sometimes tense social environment in Transy House had negative impacts on residents' attitudes and personalities. Several residents remarked on how the social dynamics negatively influenced their perceptions of others and their own emotions.

Although Chelsea had experience with living in other communes, Transy House had unique effects. During her interview, she explained how she was influenced by living in this particular collective:

> It sure as hell changed me over the years I've lived here. I'm less idealistic, but I do think I'm still loving, I'm still compassionate, [but] I've gotten a lot more cynical, I've gotten a lot harder.

According to Chelsea, the implications of living in Transy House are how she perceives and reacts to others. Due to the unpredictable social dynamics, Chelsea is less trusting of people which causes her to question their intentions.

During her conversation with me Chelsea supported these changes by claiming that is now much easier for her to "kick people out". It also altered her screening of new residents. She said that now she personally meets prospective residents and wants to know their friends before inviting them to stay in their home. For Chelsea, the self-protective change in attitude also helps her maintain healthier social dynamics in Transy House by weeding out potentially disruptive individuals.

Celia explained to me that she has also been negatively affected by the women in Transy House. She described how she internalizes, and then reenacts, the thoughts and feelings of other residents:

> The people around me made me change, their stresses, their anger. It's made me more spiritual and more angry.

For Celia, her negative reactions the social environment are a reflection of the other women living there. Rather than attributing her emotions and behaviors to an internal state, she reflects the blame and responsibility onto others.

Chelsea and Celia describe strong negative emotional reactions to the social environment in Transy House such as becoming “harder” or more “angry”. However, more importantly, they paired these descriptions with positive attributes by stating that they are still “loving”, “compassionate”, and “spiritual”. By coupling their negative effects with their self-proclaimed positive attributes, both women are able to rationalize their situations by creating a psychological and cognitive balance between positive and negative effects.

Additionally, rather than expressing the anger they experience from living in the collective by outward aggressions, their ambivalent feelings are sublimated and projected inward creating more spiritual and religious life styles. Like Celia, Chelsea also professed to being a very spiritual person. Chelsea, in fact, explains how her continued involvement with helping others in the trans community is acting in a way that is in accordance with her religious beliefs:

> [The reason] I keep doing this at all, because in a way trying to live communally, and trying to help other people who are worse off then you are to the best of your ability, and trying to care what you have. Give unto others and all that. At this stage in my life, I still keep doing this because I still believe that it’s along the general lines of what Jesus would want. […]

Chelsea and Celia’s religious identities are mirrored in the physical environment of their bedrooms. There are numerous shrines, candles, and iconography displayed. The process of person-place synthesis helps one to develop and validate one’s identity. Appropriating and personalizing the environment will be discussed in detail in the

following chapter, ‘Linking Self to the Environment’, however, it is noteworthy to discuss here as well. Each of their rooms are adorned with various religious paraphernalia (e.g. statues of the Virgin Mary, framed reproductions of Jesus, and various dieties of Afro-Latina spirituality such as Yemanja, Godess of the Sea). Both Chelsea and Celia proudly discussed their various decorative markers indicating individual identity and group membership during their interviews and tours. As in their discourse with me, the physical environment validates this positive aspect of their identity also providing a psychological and cognitive balance.

For Chelsea and Celia, their feelings of frustration and anger are countered with a renewed focus on religion and spirituality. This sublimation helps the women to understand and deal with their emotions. Religion and spirituality also provides Chelsea and Celia with a much needed solace and order in a very chaotic environment.

Physical and social isolation

Some of the residents in Transy House react to the tumultuous social environment behaviorally, rather than emotionally or attitudinally. They separate themselves from the disruptive activity by physically segregating themselves to other locations in the house or by socially detaching from the volatile interactions.

Three of the residents commented on how they cope with the stress generated from living in a trans collective – seclusion. Maureen, Tasha and Celia each explained that turmoil in the house often causes them to socially isolate. Maureen, for example, intentionally selected the back porch to live in because it is more physically separated from the rest of the house. During her interview, she laughed while explaining that in order for one to enter her room, one would have to walk through the upstairs bathroom.

Tasha also physically removed herself from the chaos randomly occurring in Transy House. At the beginning of the study Tasha lived in the small room attached to the upstairs office. However, after several conflicts with Sadaisha, Tahsa decided to break away from the group by moving to the separate storage structure that is located in the back yard where she had independence and more space.

Additionally, Celia uses the privacy of her bedroom to separate herself. Though her room is a middle room situated off the common hall upstairs, the space is secured with both physical and symbolic barriers. Celia's room is closed off to outsiders with a door that is always closed. In addition to the door cordoning people off, her numerous religious paraphernalia displayed in her room also deters people from entering the space. These symbols of identity, Celia admits, also keeps uninvited visitors at bay because it makes them uncomfortable. Most participants agree they don't enter Celia's room unless they are specifically invited. The first and only time I entered her space, was when Celia required privacy to speak more freely during her interview.

While Maureen, Tasha and Celia separated themselves using physical boundaries such as a closed door or a separate, more isolated location, Rusty and Chelsea socially detach themselves from the group through their various personal activities. Rusty is an avid reader who is continuously immersed in her books. Oftentimes, Rusty is in a room with others, and yet, she is not a part of the group because she is reading and not participating in the social interactions.

Likewise, Chelsea is often practicing jazz compositions on her piano in the living room. Though this room used to be a popular place of social activity, when Chelsea is playing, only Rusty and sometimes Maureen enter. Her privacy, is therefore, secured.

Additionally, on the occasional times when others are in the room when she is playing, like Rusty, she socially isolates herself by immersing herself in the piano playing rather than the discussions taking place around her.

By separating one self from potentially volatile situations, residents secure their physical and psychological well being. Most of the residents, therefore, have developed spatial tactics to help them survive in Transy House's tumultuous environment.

In reaction to the serendipitous social disturbances in Transy House, residents exhibit a variety of emotional and behavioral effects. Some are disappointed at the psychological, professional and social outcomes of the trans women; others changes their attitudes and personalities adapting to a distrustful environment; while others behaviorally react by segregating themselves physically and socially at times. These reactions to the social environment in Transy House are healthy psychological mechanisms used for self-protection and preservation.

Why does this happen?

Research on the psychological states and behavioral manifestations indicates mixed findings. Pauly (1992) observed comparatively high levels of anxiety and suicidal ideation in the trans population. There is continuing disagreement, however, about whether or not trans persons, as a group, are significantly more mentally impaired than the general population. Most investigators would probably agree, however, that a significant segment of this population suffers from some degree of emotional distress (Jones and Hill, 2002). Israel and Tarver find that many trans persons experience depression, anxiety, adjustment, personality and stress disorders (1997).

When a trans individual is unable to express her true gender, she may suffer from lower self-esteem, higher incidents of depression, anxiety and suicide. Disruptive social manifestations are exhibited as well: chemical dependencies, aggression, and acute social isolation. (Jordan, 2000).

In addition to the psychological effects of expressing oneself as their chosen identity in a society where breaking from gender norms is not acceptable, there are also significant social repercussions. Digressing from a male or female gender presentation sometimes causes implied and overt hostility. Therefore, many trans individuals encounter daily acts of discrimination and harassment. This is discussed in further detail in the Safe Haven chapter.

Some of the findings here, parallel ones previously discussed. Ironically, counter to Transy House's mission of trans helping trans, many residents of the house experience psychological turmoil that results in a rejection of their original identity to foster self development; an outward projection of their inner turmoil; as well as drug and alcohol dependencies of several residents. However, there are also several findings that are unique due to the population living in and the policies related to Transy House. Residents experience psychological and behavioral regression because of the familial social structure established. Additionally, implicit rules for social/sexual openness and an open-door policy contribute to the sometimes tumultuous environment in Transy House.

Rejecting the original self

In the context of Transy House, nigrescence theory (Cross, 1991) for identity development of the black individual, as discussed in the previous chapter, can be applied to the trans woman's identity development. In Cross' theory one discards the original

black identity in order to replace it with a newly conceived self. This renewal process for identity conception, helps one to take pride in oneself as a black individual and to integrate more easily into the black collective. Though the changes in a black person's identity does not require outward physical transformations, nor changes in name, documents and history, as in the trans identity, the emotional process described by Cross is similar to the one a trans individual experiences. However, with people who are trans, this emotional transition manifests itself in bodily and presentation changes as well. Some MtF individuals, for example, start their identity transformation as gay men and then, once realizing and accepting their true female identity, they reject the gay self.

Nathan's experience in Transy House supports the idea of rejecting the original self to reconceive a new one. Nathan is a young, gay, black man who once resided in Transy House and who remains a close friend and frequent visitor to residents at the house. He explained one of his Transy House experiences to me:

> The big thing in the house to say is, "I hate that faggot shit, I hate that faggot shit". And I'm sitting there thinking, "My God sister, do you really think anyone really gives a damn?" Ya know anyone who's like holding a gun is going to distinguish between you, a transexual, and me, a gay man? They're going to think we're both faggots. I mean so what the hell's the problem? Ya know? I mean they'll put a fucking bullet in your eye just as fast as they will mine. So like I don't understand.

Nathan suggested that a gay man could remind some of the trans women of their life before transitioning. Therefore, he becomes the catalyst for the self that was once rejected. This may explain the negative reactions some of the residents have toward gay, male behavior.

Projecting inner turmoil

As discussed earlier in this chapter, many trans individuals experience psychological and social problems that sometimes manifest themselves, outwardly, in overt physical aggression. One question that arises for the researcher, however, is "Why do such adverse behaviors occur so significantly in this particular environment?"

Antonia offers one explanation for the dynamics that transpire in a trans collective. She suggests that "when there are a lot of people who are trying to figure themselves out and live in a society that does not accept them, a lot of anger gets built up. This anger, then, gets projected onto others." "If people are not given the space to heal themselves", she continues, "it can spiral out of control causing all these explosions, threats, melodrama, fighting…" Antonia, then rationalizes the negative outward behaviors as a result of psychological confusion and anxiety.

Antonia's explanation for resident's adverse behaviors coincides with the findings from previously conducted studies discussed earlier in the chapter. Many individuals who are trans experience confusion and anxiety over their identities and roles fitting in within society. Often, these feelings will then manifest themselves in as outward displays of aggression.

Competition and downward social comparisons are also manifestations of inner turmoil often resulting in fighting. When one feels insecure or inadequate, one may become the "bully" to elevate esteem. The fight between Tasha and Sadaisha was a result, as one resident described, "a fight between queens [trying to] one-up each other, show who's better" (Maureen).

Drugs and alcohol

Drugs and alcohol dependencies may alsocontribute to the conditions in the social and physical environment of Transy House. Trans women who have lived on the streets, worked as prostitutes, or who have psychological problems may self-medicate using drugs and alcohol to escape the realities of their lives. Rusty explained that several residents have been very involved with the club and ball scenes which tends romantasize drinking and using drugs as a way to party. Some participants attribute the destructive behaviors that occurr in Transy House to a few residents and guest who have had chemical dependencies.

Transy House has been the location for many individuals to gather for socializing, drinking and using drugs. Some residents and their friends have become more physically assertive when they are under the influence. Several participants complained about past residents staying up all night, partying, playing loud, hip-hop music, and sometimes getting violent destroying furniture. Most of this behavior, however was curtailed over the past rew years because Rusty and Chelsea ordered the visitors to leave.

Whether the alcohol and chemical dependencies of some of the residents are due to self-medicating to cover feelings of inadequacy or depression, or if it is part of the socialization of trans people, drugs and alcohol could contribute to the chaotic living environment in Transy House. The actions of only a few residents while under the influence, negatively impact the cohesiveness and trust of the collective.

Creating a family causing regressive tendencies

One of the effects, and some may say, benefits, of living in Transy House is the recreation of a family. When women make the decision to reside at the house, they are accepted into its family. For individuals who may have been rejected by their own family or ostracized from society, the recreating a familial relationship elicits feelings of security, support and acceptance. Becoming a member of the Transy House family, however, also offers the women a safe space to regress back to a child-like state both emotionally and behaviorally.

Rusty admited to contributing to and proliferating the regressive environment that residents partake in by taking on the role of the nurturing mother:

> sometimes I like to be in a parental teaching sort of role. That's comfortable for me, so I sort of helped create this atmosphere where I'm sort of in that role in my home life. But, I don't know. That's on one level when I look at what's going on here. When I came out I separated from my kids, I guess I sort of reconstituted that.

For Rusty, residents benefit from Rusty's role as mother, but she also is positively affected. The emotional loss Rusty experienced when detaching herself from her family was replaced by creating a new, surrogate family. Chelsea assists Rusty in her role as mother by performing as the "father" of Transy House. Like the traditional, stereotypical father, Chelsea resides with a loud mouth and a strict hand. The residents, therefore, easily accept their given roles of the children.

These familial roles are internalized and played out in the resident's behaviors. For example, residents vie for the love, attention and acceptance of the mother and father, while others rebel and test boundaries as teenagers, do by aggressively acting out and by

breaking house rules. Maureen describes the regressive process that occurs at Transy House:

> Rusty and Chelsea definitely act as parents, Tasha and Celia are like older siblings. If they come here as adults they come to act like children with Rusty and Chelsea who have the opportunity to be parents in a lot of ways.

When one regresses one is brought to an emotional state where one wants and needs others to take care of them. Individuals will often ignore their personal and social expectations. Either because of the comfort one feels when living in a familial trans collective, or due to one's inability to responsibly care for oneself some of the residents stop taking their psychotropic medications when they move into Transy House. Chelsea explained the repercussions of this situation:

> When they move in here they stop taking the meds that we didn't even know they were supposed to be taking until they were acting out in extreme ways [threatening with knives, suicide].

For adolescents, these behaviors are manifestations of emotional development. With the support from their family, adolescents are able to resolve their feelings associated with role-confusion and develop their morals. For individuals who may have not had the opportunity to explore and develop their self identities during their teen years, these behaviors may play out in a later stage of life. Many of the trans women who left home at a young age, may not have had the possibility to fully develop their self. The family at Transy House provides women with a safe place to regress, and therefore, resolve many of the emotional issues created during adolescence.

Open-door policy

Another contributing factor the erratic environment in Transy House is its open-door policy. Though the house rule is that the front door should be locked at 11pm, most

residents do not abide and therefore visitors enter and exit the house freely at any time of the day or night. Many people have been helped many people with its open-door policy knowing they that are welcome to go to Transy House when they are in need of shelter or support. There is an informal screening process for potential residents, however, sometimes the interviews are not conducted. In addition to the infrequency of screenings, the front door is rarely locked enabling many people to take advantage of the house's facilities.

In the Transy House short documentary video, Rusty describes the "party-like" environment that the young trans women brought to the house. She explains that friends of residents will come to the house at 4:30 in the morning, after going to clubs and then "there's all these giggles as they talk about the night's experiences. So it sort of gives a sort of 24-hour aspect to living here which is kind of an adjustment." The tensions this causes for many occupants has caused fights between the women.

Maureen explains the ambivalent effects of having and open-door policy: "I have been helped a lot through this open-door policy. They have also been hurt by this too. Maybe they need a better screening process." Most of the participants agreed that the open-door policy established for Transy House helps many people, though it also poses significant problems. Uninvited and invited "guests" often come to the house at all hours of the day and night and stay for very long hours. Rusty described past experiences with guests:

> We've had a terrible time with people making noise… we let people live in the living room cause they didn't have any place to go. But then that turned into a zoo. And they played hip-hop for Christ's sake all night long. And I'm like turn that shit off… I was totally enraged…

In addition to elevating noise levels through their loud music or talking, visitors also help themselves to the food in the refrigerator, use the computers in the office, and make long-distance phone calls:

> There's a lot of problems there with fighting over the computer… people running up these big telephone bills… people hanging out… (Rusty)

In fact, during most of my visits to Transy House, I saw many non-residents "hanging-out" in the upstairs office. Often times they were on the computer or in the kitchen eating.

Rusty and Chelsea try to curtail the abuse of certain facilities in Transy House by posting notes or talking to the guests, however, these are often failed attempts.

Openness

Early research on communes of the 70s (Raimy, 1979; Zablocki, 1971), found that the sexual subversions and blurring of gender roles occurring in these collective environments were significant factors that contributed to the demise of communes. Although the utopian goal of the communes was sexual freedom and gender equality, Raimy and Zablocki realize these goals as unrealistic and possibly resulting in tension and conflict between group members. This brings to question how a sexually-open environment influences a trans commune.

The socially/sexually-open environment in Transy House also sometimes causes tension and hostility from residents. When one moves into the house, it is expected that one be open and honest to oneself and to others. The owners and residents encourage each other to respect one another's bodies and sexualities. For many, however, this atmosphere is difficult to accept and causes friction between the women. Some of the residents express feelings of ambivalence when discussing the openness of Chelsea and

Rusty's relationship. For instance, Celia's reaction was revealed to me during her interview:

> People talk about their relationship [Rusty and Chelsea]. Why do they make it other people's business? Their personal relationship always creates problems for others and vice versa. And even though it's done some good […] your private life's supposed to be private.

The conflicting messages that a socially-open environment projects juxtaposed with the "catty" behavior of gossiping by residents causes some residents to feel tension and confusion. When a couple feels comfortable enough in their environment to display affection publicly, it then becomes vulnerable to the potential gossip about these exhibitions. Part of Transy House's philosophy is to understand and accept different lifestyles, however, several participants asserted that one's lifestyle "doesn't need to be in your face."

Like the tension caused by trans individuals blurring the gender lines, collective living environments blur the boundary between public and private space also producing similar feelings of discomfort. The comfort one feels in Transy House being able to act and present in one's chosen way becomes hampered when they become the target of gossip.

Explanations found for the negative resident behaviors occurring while living at Transy House varies. Some participants attributed it to drugs and alcohol while others posit more psychological manifestations such as projecting inner turmoil, regression, or a rejection of the original self. Participants also explain the adverse social dynamics as being a result of the social rules established at Transy House, such as the open-door policy and the norm for sexual openness.

Though some of these explanations are unique to Transy House, other trans collectives and social communes experienced similar occurrences. Davis House, for example, also has had problems with residents who used drugs or alcohol. Communes of the 60s were known to recreate the family structure which also caused its members to regress psychologically and behaviorally.

A study conducted on the failure of communes in the 60s and 70s, paralleled the findings here. According to Shey, communes fail for many reasons such as: inexperience and composition of members, over-idealism – unfulfilled expectations, lack of communal spirit – action, and individual problems (1977). All of these explanations tie back to the social dynamics contributing to the discord of communal members in Transy House.

Countering adverse behaviors

When a physical environment ties many people with varying backgrounds together, there is bound to be conflict and friction. How these group effects are handled, though, will ultimately decide on the success of demise of the commune.

The owners of Transy House have tried to counter adverse resident behaviors by establishing and enforcing specific social regulations. Rusty and Chelsea create rules of behavior, hold house meetings, evict individuals dependent of heavy drugs, and limit open access to the house in attempts to curtail resident tensions and the potential for outwardly aggressive behaviors.

House rules

Typically, to thwart residents' and guest's disparaging behaviors in a communal environment, formalized rules of conduct are established, agreed upon by its members,

and then formalized as “law”. Though all of the participants in the study here agree that there are ‘rules of the house’, no one was able to agree on what they are or how they are shared.

When asked to explain what they thought the rules of Transy House are and the procedures used for informing others about them, each participant had a different story. Each account was strongly related to and influenced by their own biases, interests, and backgrounds. Member roles and status in the social structure also played a part in affecting their perceptions.

Rusty, house mother and owner of Transy House, for example, discussed rules having to do with cleaning and the destruction of property:

> If this place were like it should be, you know, like, if it were just like my family, it would be a lot cleaner. But I’m not going to be like a maid fore everybody. I can’t do it. That’s the sort of things I had to start and make rules about… I would write them down and put the notices around. And other people do that too. Celia does it all the time… There are things I would assume like don’t smash the furniture up into tiny match sticks and throw it in the corner. But, I found that that was something that had to be positively stated. And then once I said that then the rules could be enforced because they were prewarned.

She mentioned using indirect means of communicating her expectations by posting notes throughout the house. Rusty continued discussing rules of conduct describing how residents should not put their feet on the furniture if they have shoes on and how residents should clean up after themselves. She compared expected resident behaviors to those of guests. As she was raised, and how she raised her children, guests are to be respectful of residents and “always, offer to help”.

The photograph below (see Figure 3)is of a note posted by Rusty to the residents and guests of Transy House. It was placed on Sadaisha’s door soon after she was forced

to leave the premises. Rusty and Chelsea decided to use the room as a library and video room. As can be seen, the maximum length of time one is allowed to stay, the policy for using and returning material, as well as rules for maintaining a clean environment are clearly stated. The size lettering and the use of all capitals acts as a reinforcement to the significance of the message. The letter was taken down when Sadaisha moved back into the space.

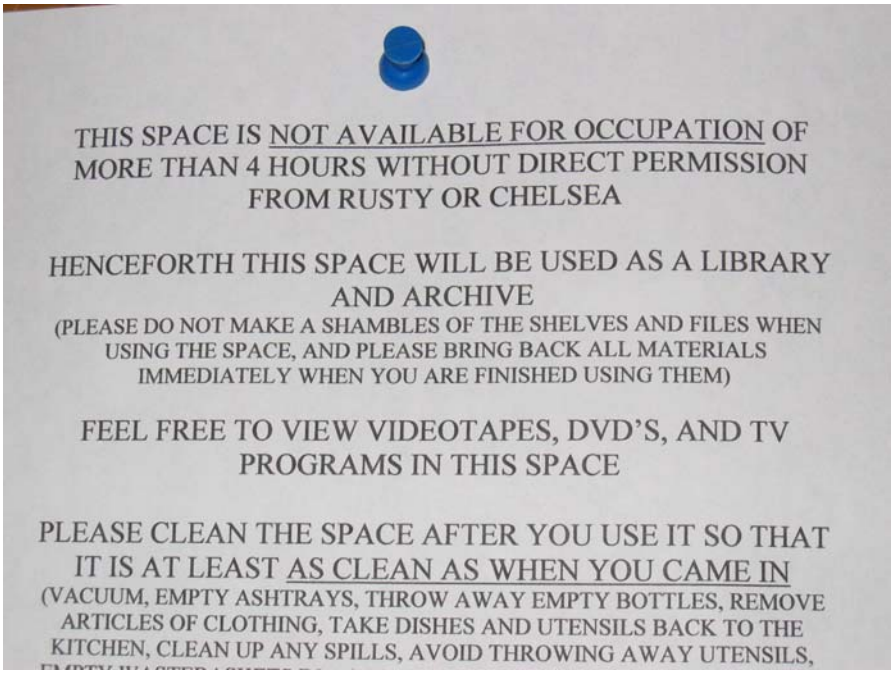

Figure 3: Note posted by Rusty (Photo by author)

Chelsea, the house father and Rusty's life partner, has a different, more blatant approach to how to communicate the house rules. Her status and personality style project explicit power and deems her the self-imposed authority in Transy House.

> There are, there are [rules of the house]. Rusty likes to make like Moses and write up a bunch of rules and hang them up. I don't even have a written set of rules. I keep saying that the rules of conduct in this house are regulated by a local standard – I am the local standard.

Tasha compared Chelsea's style for social control as that of the father in the family: "Chelsea's kind of like a father and mother because she takes on both roles as far

as discipline [mimicking a father's scream] definitely father role" Tasha assigned the typical behaviors associated with societal gender roles to explain Chelsea's social position. She described how the father of a family asserts discipline and control by hollering at 'his' children. Most of the participants agree with Tasha's assertions about Chelsea attitudes and behaviors by describing Chelsea's "rants".

On the other hand, Celia, a quiet and private woman who covets her personal space, stated: "Do not invade other people's space. If you are not invited you shouldn't be in it!" and "Respect one another" as the first two rules. Other rules, she remarked, involve prostitution and hours guests are allowed in the house.

According to Rusty, there is a list for Transy House rules of conduct that is posted on the information bulletin board in the hall of the front entry. The board is filled with notices, articles, and pictures, but I did not see the rules of the house. The only sign I saw posted was a hand-written list of chores that was taped to the refrigerator.

Though the owners of Transy House have the right intention to create and enforce house rules to establish order in the house and thwart off disruptive behaviors, the ambiguity and informality of them and the lack of enforcement weakens their influence on residents.

House meetings and collective decision making

Another attempt to create order in Transy House was to hold house meetings, however, many residents prefer not to have them. Typically, residents of the house would gather in the living room and discuss pertinent issues. Rusty would typically lead the discussion with Chelsea's support. House meetings were more common when Transy House first opened its doors to trans women. However, now house meetings only happen

when there is a serious problem to discuss, or as Rusty claims “in times of crisis”. Recently, however, collective discussions regarding the house or other the behavior of residents happen in the kitchen informally.

Sometimes residents claim power and control over decision-making in Transy House. For instance, there have been a couple of times when residents, without Rusty’s input or consent, met and agreed to evict destructive residents. As discussed earlier, the decision to force Sadaisha to leave the house was made by the residents. While Rusty was out of town, Sadaisha and Tasha had a disagreement which led to physical violence. At that time, the residents met and unanimously agreed to evict Sadaisha. In addition to Sadaisha, another past resident, Danielle, was evicted: “the house rose up and threw Danielle out over my objections” (Rusty).

The responsibility for creating strategies that maintain social order in Transy House are accepted by both Rusty and Chelsea, the house mother and father, and when needed, by the collective. Though most of the decisions are made by Rusty and Chelsea, residents may overrule them when they deem it necessary.

Restricting access

One initiative that has not been successful is the attempt to restrict hours of access to the house by locking the front door. As discussed earlier, one of the problems that residents posit to contributing to the disarray of the house is the open-door policy that allows guests to enter Transy House at any hour and take advantage of its amenities.

Although Transy House still has an open-door policy regarding guests, the owners encourage residents to lock the front door in the evenings, and sometimes during the day. Most of the residents, though, agree that the door is rarely locked. In fact, for

almost all of my visits to the house I was able to let myself in through the unlocked front door.

Zero tolerance for heavy drinking and hard drugs

Though many of the residents admit to social drinking and smoking marijuana once in a while, Rusty and Chelsea's tolerance for heavy drinking and hard drug use (i.e. meth or crack) has lessened. In the past, many of the destructive behaviors affecting the women living in Transy House came from residents who were involved with drugs and alcohol. Because of this, Rusty and Chelsea are quick to react and evict residents if they are showing signs of chemical dependency. No heavy drugs or alcohol use is one rule of the house that most of the residents agreed on. Chelsea explains her stance on the issue:

> I try to weed out the obvious crack heads, you know […] you have a drink once in a while I don't care. I notice that all day every day, you're drinking until you pass out, we have a problem and that problem will be addressed. You're smoking a little pot, I'll probably join you, you're smoking crack I better not know about it. You won't like what happens.

Chelsea and Rusty both admitted to kicking out residents and guests who broke this rule. Rusty explained that when people come to the house drunk or high it is disruptive to the social dynamics and rhythms of the house. People will often be up until the early morning hours partying and then sleep until the late afternoon.

Participants agree that as of late, there has not been serious problems caused from drug addictions or alcoholism. Residents, though, seem ready to address any occurrences that may arise.

Conclusion

Transy House played a significant role in the lives of individuals who are trans and gender questioning. They obtained shelter and have gained support and understanding from residents. It is a place where it is okay for residents to make mistakes without fear of expulsion. The collectivity of Transy House, however, also created many adverse conditions that negatively affect residents. In fact, the erratic and sometimes volatile social conditions that permeate Transy House challenges its identity as a trans collective. Chelsea reiterates this idea in her following statement:

> The original idea was that we could have it more democratic, everybody's equal, but when you get people that are more, that are crazy as hell and not taking their meds, when you got crack heads up in here, when you got every conceivable social problem has been in this house

Residents expressed both overt aggression and indirect anger and hostility toward each other and toward the physical environment. Stealing, fighting, destruction of property, and gossip are some of the experiences participants have had while living in Transy House. Because of these manifestations of social disorder, the ability of the group to work together as a strong and cohesive collective that ensures the success of this trans commune, therefore is significantly hindered.

Interestingly, the findings also indicate that the trans women living in Transy House display both male-typical and female-typical displays of aggression and anger. Masculine behavior, which is commonly directed outward, is evident in the destruction of property within Transy House; whereas the act of gossiping and in-group fortification is more characteristic of females.

Residents' typical reactions to the social landscape in Transy House include: feelings of disappointment, changes in their perceptions and attitudes toward

interpersonal exchanges, and reclusive behavior. To counter these conditions, Rusty and Chelsea attempted to implement regulations intended to prevent potential turmoil. However, the weakness in the ways these strategies are communicated and enforced makes them ineffective. The seemingly ubiquitous nature of the trans collectives have, thus, caused the owners of all three houses to question the resilience and effectiveness of their homes for trans women.

CHAPTER SIX:

LINKING THE SELF TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Figure 4: "Love Makes A Family" To All at Transy House bumper sticker (Photo by author)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the social environment at Transy House helps one to develop, support and validate the gender and sexuality of its residents. The physical environment, though, is another tool that residents use to help empower themselves and foster their gender transformations and expressions. The process of appropriating, and thus, governing and manipulating space works to empower and protect individuals. When one delineates the boundaries of a claimed space, one maintains the power to make decisions about its physical and social environments. For the residents in the study, claiming ownership of the physical space of the house and its grounds creates a site of resistance against a transphobic society. The physical environment of Transy House, therefore, provides residents with a safe place to create identity, secure the home (both physical and social), and empower themselves as individuals and as a collective.

Individuals consciously, and subconsciously affect and are affected by the objects and structures surrounding them. For example, in the photo above, one can see a bumper sticker posted to a door exclaiming “Love Makes A Family.” The “v” in love is made into a pink triangle, a symbol of the GLBTQ communities. The sticker’s original intention was to declare that a man and wife with children does not define family; it is love. The amendments made to the sticker by someone in Transy House, adding “to all at Transy House” and a cross drawn with black marker, is a proclamation of the individual’s identity and the identity of the collective living at Transy House. This is illustrated by the displays of representational symbols of group membership (e.g. the cross, pink triangle and the added “all at Transy House”). Thus, when entering or passing by this room, one sees these symbols and will be reminded of one’s collective and individual identities. This process of person-place adaptation is an important part to understanding how the self is expressed and validated.

Defining gendered space in Transy House

For many of the residents in Transy House the space in which they reside must be stereotypically feminine. A feminine environment, they suggest, helps one to feel and behave more feminine. When probed about what they consider feminine space, most of the women’s responses included environmental aspects such as: smell, color, and cleanliness. For Tasha and Celia, both of whom pride themselves in there very feminine rooms, emphasized the importance of smell. Both women light candles, have dishes of potpourri, and spray the air freshener, Febreeze, around the room. Color also seems to be an important environmental aspect. Pinks, reds and lavenders, the “feminine colors”,

highlight many of the trans women's rooms. Additionally, most of the participants agreed that cleanliness was a feminine quality. Tasha described Chelsea's more masculine space:

> Chelsea definitely has a masculine space. Her attributes are very masculine. She spills things, she doesn't clean it up, she leaves things, she doesn't clean up after herself. She half does laundry, ashtrays, she has them heaping over, things like that. She was brought up very masculine, it wasn't like a feminine kind of, ya know… from birth going through life. That's definitely masculine behavior and masculine environment. Her office was definitely masculine.

As well as the smell, color and cleanliness of a place, some women, during their tours, also pointed out the plants in the house and placed on the stoop in the front of the house. They stated that the plants help to make Transy House feel more "homey" and more "feminine".

Finding space – finding autonomy and power

When one claims space, one is appropriating it to make it one's own. Korosec-Serfaty maintains that when "we appropriate aspects of the world as anchors for self identity […] we change our environment and we are in turn changed by environmental experience." (1984: 48). She suggested that the individual is tightly linked to the environment with the physical space providing a foundation to secure our identity. Appropriating and creating meaningful space, according to place attachment theory, is a fundamental right and part of what it means to be human. Without the ability to claim and form attachments to space, one's identity development and proclamation will be hindered. It is within a defined space that users can feel they are able to move freely to meet their individual drives and social needs (Proshansky, Ittelson & Rivlin, 1976).

In the process of appropriating space, one claims control over a particular territory and defines it. It acts as barrier or boundary by preventing certain individuals or groups

from entering a protected domain or by fortifying the "sanctuary" of the interior. Architecture, therefore, becomes a tool for social control and empowerment. Trans women living in a communal home, for example, can restrict access to their territory in order to maintain a safe environment for which to live as gender-variant individuals. According to Harris and Lipman (1980), barriers and boundaries may be "manipulated to sustain particular patterns of social relations to maintain and reinforce particular definitions of social reality." The Transy House, therefore, creates a unique, and separate world with its own social structures as well as its own norms and rules for behavior.

Spatial appropriation is also tightly linked to power relations. Control and maintaining a particular area will reiterate and fortify one's social position (e.g. parents having the largest bedroom signifying having the most power in a hetero-normative family). All of the women in the study stated that their favorite past living environments were the ones where they either lived alone or ones that they shared with only one other person, but had complete control over. This is a critical point for the research here because of the subordinate social and economic position of trans people within mainstream society.

Due to the limited geographies designated or are safe for trans individuals (Felsenthal, 2004), the communal home can be a place to appropriate in order to elevate their social position. Within this defined microcosm, the women of Transy House have the power to claim space and establish the rules and norms of appropriate behavior and change expected images of male and female, masculinity and femininity. The owner of Transy House described this experience: "If you stay in your space, in *your* space, and you control other people. Most people play my game, I don't play their game."

(Felsenthal, 2004). Appropriating space, therefore, becomes an important tool for the empowerment of subordinate and marginal groups. It problemetizes and restructures in-group/out-group dynamic.

Personalizing space

One of the ways that groups or individuals appropriate space is through personalization. Personalization is the process of placing personal objects in space as a strategy to claim a territory or proclaim and display one's unique identity.

Object meaning

How objects are used as well as their interpreted meanings proves to be significant in how one chooses to express one's identity. Object meaning was investigated by cultural anthropologists throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. In 1934, Mead asserted that a person's identity is active, acted out, and reaffirmed through thought, action, and the objects one surrounds themselves with (Mead, 1934). According to Searles, objects are highly personal and are used for self and social development (1995). He posited four main reasons people utilize objects: 1) assuage painful, anxiety-laden states, 2) foster self realization, 3) deepen feelings about reality, and 4) foster appreciation and acceptance of fellow man.

Vinsel *et al*, (1981) explored object meanings. They posit that objects are a reflection of self, identity, control, memories, and aesthetic values. Bih (1992) also suggests that objects have multiple meanings such as: for personalization, to express personal preference, exhibit social membership, and signify social status. By using both

overt (e.g. family photos, cards and books) and hidden (e.g. pen, key ring) objects throughout one's home, an individual displays the various aspects of the self. Additionally, Bih maintains that object placement has its own meaning. For example, objects displayed for visitors in more public areas, such as the living room, are like performance pieces exhibiting a social self to the invited audience.

In the photograph below, Rusty appropriates and personalizes the corner of her bedroom with several representative objects. For example, the rainbow beaded necklace hanging from the top of the mirror signifying membership in the GLBTQ community and the masks that express more personal markers that can be related to a feminine gender identity.

Figure 5: Personalization of Rusty's dressing table (Photo by author)

Personalizing space and resident longevity

Personalizing space using personal markers has considerable associations with attachment to space and resident longevity. One study of college students living in

dormitories correlated the use of personal markers with student drop-out rates (Hansen & Altman, 1976). The researchers found that the students who dropped out of college had the least amount of personal markers displayed in their dormitory room. Similar findings occurred when linking markers to homes. Edney has shown that houses with more territorial markers indicated longer-term occupancy and openness (Edney, 1974). Taylor and Ferguson found that "ethnic" people display more territorial markers on and around their homes (1980). Perceived threat to culturally stigmatized groups, though, would influence the decision to display identification markers yet the researchers neglected to consider this factor in their study. The rainbow flag is often displayed in homes and businesses of the GLBTQ community as a marker identifying them with this community. However, if there is heterosexist tension or occurrences of homophobic violence in the neighborhood symbols of homosexuality would rarely be seen.

The literature associating personalizing space to one's longevity in the residence, coincides with the research findings here. Residents who expressed a strong desire to leave Transy House in the near future displayed few personal markers in their private spaces, whereas those who have been a resident for a longer period of time and who are fairly content with their living situations have claimed their space with an abundance of personal markers. Musa, for example, was only interested in living at Transy House temporarily. The only objects seen in her room were her bed and clothing. Although her paintings are displayed throughout the house, Maureen, who was residing at Transy House temporarily, did not personalize her bedroom. On the other hand, Celia and Tasha, long term residents of Transy House, display personal markers throughout the walls and surfaces of their rooms.

Appropriating and personalizing space at Transy House

In 1994 one trans woman bought a three-story house in Brooklyn, NY and opened its doors to other trans women. Rusty claimed, territorialized and claimed this space through the real-estate transaction and its open-door policy to other trans women. For her, creating a collective trans space is important to help trans women feel welcomed and understood. Rusty explains:

> It's such a unique thing to have a trans person own a house. No one can discriminate against us, nobody can throw us out…

In Rusty's statement quoted above, when one who is marginalized in society appropriates space, that space becomes a safe haven. In Transy House, trans women do not have to worry about encountering transphobic bias or harassment.

Fortifying the boundaries of Transy House

When an individual or group appropriates a place, significant efforts are taken to delineate and fortify that space. Boundaries defining a particular territory can be natural, such as a mountain range or a river, made (e.g. walls and gates), or implied by using symbolic markers of group membership such as a colored bandana hanging from a back pocket indicating S/M involvement or by members exhibiting group specific behaviors (e.g. the effeminate gait of many young, gay men). According to Altman, personal markers, such as a coat placed over one's chair, also help to define self-other boundaries (1975).

Though the walls of the house create an obvious border between trans space and mainstream society, residents of Transy House also display personal boundary markers that confirm their claimed territory. For example, on the exterior of the house posted on

the front door, there was a hand-written sign with large, black lettering stating, “Residents only! No guests allowed! Stay out! Stay out! Stay out!” Though the sign has been removed since the beginning of the study, the intention of this sign signified a real boundary for which outsiders should not cross. Currently, there is a symbolic marker of group membership, a “safe haven” sticker, displayed on the front door. The sticker represents to individuals who are GLBTQ that Transy House is a safe place to go if they are in trouble and need help.

In addition, upon entering the house, one experiences an immediate feeling of claustrophobia. There is much clutter, the state of the house is in disrepair, and from the dark, stuffy atmosphere, there seems to be inadequate light and air. There is also a strong odor from the animals living in the house (2 dogs and 4 cats). The house, according to both the occupants, has been in this condition for years. Though all of the residents commented, if not complained, about the poor living conditions created from the physical environment, there has not been any progress made on improving the situation.

The economic state of most of the residents does hinder more expensive home improvement projects, however, I wondered if the house is purposefully kept in this condition to act as an implied boundary discouraging certain outsiders from entering and staying in the house. Nathan confirms my theory by explaining that when people come into the home they either “run away screaming or stay”. He describes the ones who stay as the individuals who are more open-minded, less restrictive with their ideas of home and self.

The real and implied boundaries residents establish by posting signs and keeping the house in a questionable condition create a defined trans space. Transy House protects

the trans women from possible outside harassment while, at the same time, it creates and delineates a safe space to develop and strengthen one's self as an individual and as a collective.

Appropriating communal space

Though the house is appropriated by all of its residents, certain communal areas of Transy House are claimed by specific women. The women appropriate these places by either occupying it on a regular basis, thereby claiming ownership through its use, or by personalizing the area with personal markers. One's role and status also can work to maintain boundaries of the occupied territory. Though all of the women have their own private bedroom, it was revealed, through my observations and interviews, that several areas of the house meant for communal purposes were really appropriated by individual residents.

Transy House has a communal kitchen where all residents share their meals. Food is used by all. Participants of the study, however, all agree that the kitchen is "owned" by Tasha and Celia. Though they have not personalized the space with their individual markers, Tasha and Celia claim control over the kitchen by spending the most time there. Both women do most of the cooking for residents of the house and will host guests in this space. Tasha and Celia also claim that they also can control the space because they are the only ones who know where all of the groceries, pots and pans are located, though Rusty negates this claim. When one is unable to find and make use of the tools needed for that space, it is difficult to use it.

For Tasha and Celia, appropriating the kitchen helps them to claim ownership of a physical space. This allows them to maintain control and power over the social

environment as well. In addition, the kitchen is a safe space to play out their wished-for future roles of wife and mother. The kitchen, therefore, helps Tasha and Celia to empower themselves as well as to develop and practice new identities.

On the other hand, the living room and up-stairs office are both appropriated by Chelsea. Though she does not completely agree to owning the living room, most of the residents agree to this assertion. There are several personal markers of Chelsea's in the room and because of her clutter in and frequency using the living room, Chelsea is considered to have claim to this space. In the living room, the largest piece of furniture is Chelsea's piano that displays several overt representational objects such as jazz musical compositions and a photograph of one of Chelsea's music idols, Fats Waller, while a colorful painting of Chelsea hangs on the wall behind it. In addition to the piano there is another personal marker exhibited in the living room. A large pink stuffed bunny is prominently displayed on the top of the couch which Chelsea admits was given to her as a gift from a friend.

Aside from Chelsea's personal markers in the living room, she also controls the space by her presence in it. Because she plays piano professionally, Chelsea spends a lot of her time in the living room practicing Jazz compositions. When this is happening, her physical presence as well as the volume of the music that is played establishes a barrier that many of the residents do not cross.

Participants also consider the up-stairs office Chelsea's space. The walls of the office are wall-papered with representational symbols of group association. Torn pages from magazines and newspapers and political posters collage the walls with images of women, trans iconography, and symbols of the GLBTQ community (e.g. rainbow flags,

women's symbols and Marilyn Monroe). Also posted are various civil rights newspaper articles that have been important to Chelsea over the years. This decorative art was created by Chelsea shortly after she had her SRS. She remembers her personal process for expression: "At that time there's a lot of more or less random lesbian stuff that I hung up because I was going through a thing at the time." Chelsea explained that after the surgery she strongly identified as a lesbian feminist. On Maureen's tour of the house she stopped to describe the wall of the upstairs office:

> All these pictures you see on the wall, it's kind of toned down a bit. It's basically having to do with gender in one way or another. Whether it's a model, or Rue Paul, Marilyn Monroe in Kennedy's crotch, a trans DJ.

The photograph below shows a corner of the room decorated by Chelsea.

Figure 6: Office wall decorated by Chelsea (Photo by author)

Another reason why residents consider Chelsea to own the office is because it was originally set up as a work space for her telemarketing business. There are two desks with computers, a phone, several filing cabinets, and book cases. Like the living room

downstairs, Chelsea's stacks of papers and books, as well as her boxes are also scattered about the floor making it difficult to navigate. Though the office is not used for Chelsea's business on a full-time basis, many residents are still apprehensive about spending time there.

For Chelsea, appropriating the living room and upstairs office allow her to develop her various selves. The living room, for example, is the space for Chelsea to grow personally through her music, while the office is the place for her professional advancement.

Celia, however, maintains control and ownership over the backyard. In center of this exterior space there are two large gardens: one for fruit and vegetable, the other for herbs. Celia designed, grows the plants in, and maintains the space of these gardens. Much of her free time in the spring and summer is spent caring for the gardens. When we were outside standing near the garden, Maureen explained to me that Celia is "a good botanist and knows a lot about science and stuff". Celia spent a lot of time pointing out to me the various plant species during her tour. The excitement in her voice showed her enthusiasm and pride over this space.

For Celia, the gardens represent a symbolic link to her familial past and her culture, as well as a place for peace and spirituality. The herbs she plants and uses to cook with, she claims, allows her to cook as her grandmother used to. In addition, when she is working in the back, Celia explains, she is in solitude, away from what ever is happening in the house and she has time to think. Most of the residents admit to not knowing what the plants are, but they enjoy having the garden there and seeing Celia taking such good care of the backyard.

Rusty appropriated the downstairs office. This room is a small, connector room that is located between the dining room and the kitchen. There are two desks with one computer and the walls are covered by desk-to-ceiling book shelves. This room is where many of Rusty's material on trans life is stored. She also conducts many of the phone and face-to-face interviews with researchers, prospective residents, and other trans-interested parties in this space. When I first met Rusty and interviewed her for my original research, she brought me to this room to talk. Rusty also keeps remnants of her past in this room. This is the place where she took out and showed me her photo album from when she lived as a man.

Rusty is known to residents as the "house mother". All of the participants agree that she is the person who, ultimately, makes all of the decisions in the house with respect to the physical and social environments. She is also highly respected by the residents. Her role as house mother and her high social status in Transy House fortifies Rusty's physical space.

Many of the residents of Transy House appropriate areas of the house that would traditionally be considered communal. The kitchen, living room, backyard, and two offices, everyone agrees, are claimed by Tasha and Celia, Chelsea, Celia, and Rusty, respectively. The women use the exhibition of symbolic objects of self identity, physical presence in and utilization of the room, as well as their role and social status, to fortify these claimed spaces. As discussed earlier, having a space to claim as one's own, is essential to establishing one's self as an empowered, autonomous individual. Though their subordinate social positions in mainstream society along with their limited economic circumstances often prevents trans women from claiming space, the trans

women living in Transy House are able to appropriate certain quarters within the house. This will, in turn, help with their own esteem and identity development as an individual as well as a member of the trans community.

A collective identity expressed within the communal spaces

> [Transy House] is very feminine, it's very old, also the people that live here too […] because of the people because of the stability, this house is [like women] very vulnerable

The physical environment of Transy House, as explained earlier in this chapter, is used as a way help individuals express and validate their individual and collective identities. When one comes to and chooses to reside in Transy House, one soon becomes part of the group. Their identity becomes more synthesized with the collective, often self-identifying as queer or trans and becoming more politically active in the trans community. This evolution of the ones collective identity formation is apparent in the physical environment of the house. As poetically described by Musa, Transy House is feminine and vulnerable, as are the women who reside in it.

The collective identity of the residents is clearly seen in the physical landscape of Transy House. As discussed previously, the women come into the house with a variety of personal, social, and professional experiences. There is also high turn-over in the house with many residents only staying for short periods of time. Additionally, the open door policy established in Transy House has lead to a significant number of people visiting. These social dynamics generate feelings of chaos, tension, and anticipation. Transy House presents the atmosphere physically; the house is in a state of disrepair with water damage, holes in walls and floors, plumbing problems, and its rooms and hallways are cluttered with boxes, furniture, and stacks of magazines and papers.

Additionally, Maureen pointed out during her tour how many of the trans women come to the house hoping to make changes to the space. One past resident, for example, lived in Transy House for only six weeks and yet built the second-floor, enclosed porch. Maureen made a nice correlation between the women's identities and the adaptations to the house. As the women seek changes to the self and they also cause changes the physical environment. Also, the women who seem to be in more emotional flux sought to stability by manipulating and adapting the physical environment to meet their needs.

The collective identity of Transy House is also exhibited through object markers. These symbolic representations are used to delineate territory, are also used to show group membership. Like the cross that is worn on a chain around one's neck representing association to a particular religion, many GLBTQ individuals wear symbols associated with homosexuality (e.g. rainbow flag or a pink triangle). These symbols are worn to show establish relationships with others who are also gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans, as well as to express pride in their sexual identity. In Transy House there are many object markers displayed that signify group membership.

Trans iconography is used as a symbol for collective identity in Transy House. Marilyn Monroe, for example, is a popular figure for trans women. She represents the ideal female image for a trans woman to mirror while transitioning. Antonia, in fact, used the name Marilyn when first coming out as a trans woman.

In the up-stairs office, there is a "Marilyn Wall" dedicated to the late movie actress. As seen in the following photograph, the wall displays several, large black and white pictures of Marilyn Monroe. In each of these pictures, Monroe stares seductively into the camera; her hair is styled and her face adorns a significant amount of make-up.

Wearing very feminine clothing and posing in traditional pin-up model postures, Monroe seems to become the prototype for the stereotypical woman .

Figure 7: Marilyn wall in the office (Photo by author)

Recently deceased Sylvia Rivera, a past resident of the house and well known trans activist, is also considered an icon for the GLBTQ communities. Her memory is crystallized in the many memorials, articles and pictures displayed throughout Transy House. The following photograph shows a memorial that was created by the residents of Transy House to honor Rivera's legacy. The memorial is located in the upstairs hallway.

Figure 8: Sylvia Rivera Memorial (Photo by author)

Other significant trans women figures are also prominently displayed throughout Transy House. For example, the photo below shows a large painting displayed in the living room of Marsha P. Johnson, co-founder, with Sylvia Rivera, of the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries and STAR House, a past trans residence. There are numerous large, brightly colored paintings adorning the walls showing smiling, lively trans women as shown below.

Figure 9: Painting of Marsha P. Johnson (Photo by author)

In addition to the iconography displayed of Marilyn Monroe and Sylvia Rivera as well as other prominent figures in the trans world, there are many socio-political symbols exhibited in Transy House. As discussed in an earlier chapter, one's involvement in the trans-political scene contributes to one's development of a collective identity. In the photograph below, one can see two large posters pinned to the office door, one proclaiming "Trans Freedom" and the other stating, in large, black print "They Are Here" with an article about trans women and drag queens. There are many other trans-articles taped to walls, as well as large, trans-political posters used by residents in various GLBTQ marches and rallies.

Figure 10: Trans-power posters (Photo by author)

Adding to socio-political aspects to the physical environment is the "trans library" that is located downstairs in the dining room, outside Rusty's office. The library is a large wooden bookshelf stocked with books and videos on a variety of trans issues. Rusty established and maintains the library and explains that it is open to anyone who wants or needs information on trans life. She admits that it is not used as much as she thought it would, but it is there if needed.

Other symbols of group association to the GLBTQ communities are displayed around the house. For example, a picture of Zena, a popular figure with lesbians, is posted on the refrigerator door in the kitchen; pink flamingos, an often seen object in a gay house, in the upstairs hallway and in some bedrooms; pink, feathered boas, significant in drag shows, hanging on mirrors; as well as many rainbow flags.

One room that has strong connections to trans women is Maureen's room, the enclosed, upstairs back porch. This room is a highly coveted space. According to many of the participants, women battle to occupy this space. Though the original intention of this room was to be a porch, it was recently insulated and reinterpreted as a sleeping space. The room is still in disrepair and the insulation is still visible. To enter the room, one must walk through a long, narrow, bathroom that is used by all of the residents. The premise of the room being attached to, and yet not completely a part of the house, could be the attraction for its residents. The porch may be representative of their liminal position in mainstream society.

The numerous symbolic object markers exhibited in the common spaces of Transy House signifies group membership with the trans, gay, and lesbian communities. Residents display representations of their collective identity as their identity is forming and as the self-other merging is occurring. Presenting objects of their collective identity is a proclamation, confirmation, and validation of the trans collective identity. It represents a psychological and social commitment to the new trans identity. Additionally, upon entering Transy House, and seeing the various trans-collective objects exhibited, one feels an immediate confirmation and validation of one's trans identity. Most of the participants expressed to me that they liked seeing all of the object markers around the house. Some mentioned that when they see certain markers they fondly recall particular social or political events they went to or significant times in their lives. In Transy House, the socio-political physical landscape of is a definitive representation of its socio-political community landscape.

The appearance and personalization of the common areas in Central House contrasts significantly with the look presented in Transy House. In the common areas of Central House, there are no markers of group association. There are no rainbow flags, trans iconography or other symbols representing the GLBTQ communities. The color scheme in most of the rooms is muted beiges and whites. The living room, kitchen, dining room and hallways are minimally decorated furnishing only the essential tables, chairs and couches. The symbolic link between the collective identity and the physical environment is clearly seen in Central House as well as it is exemplified in Transy House. The residents of Transy House self-identity as trans women, are drag queen performers, and are involved in the social and political environments of the GLBTQ communities. On the other hand, the residents of Central House self-identify as women, and they don't have much socio-political associations. The location of the house, separate and isolated from the larger trans community in New York City, also is a proclamation of their lack of identification and unity with the trans collective.

Private spaces validating and expressing a personalized (gender) identity

Previously discussed was how the collective identity is developed, portrayed and then confirmed, in the communal spaces of Transy House. Here, the focus will be on the resident's private spaces, specifically, their bedrooms. The bedroom, Goffman posits, is a backstage region of the house that provides one with a space to create, develop and practice one's social performance. Laufer and Wolfe assert that "[p]rivacy functions as an opportunity to rehearse those aspects of behavior which may be included in social interactions (e.g., role playing)." (1977).

The privacy that is provided from one's bedroom is also critical for the development of her sexuality. It affords her opportunities to advance intimate and sexual relations. Though individuals, typically, first engage in meeting and socializing with others they are interested in more public settings, it is within the privacy of their home, specifically the bedroom, that deeper emotional and romantic connections are made. Individuals can also engage in activities of sexual exploration in their bedroom such as: sexual fantasy, role-play, fetishism, and homo/heterosexual testing and experimentation. These activities are pertinent to the self-definition process of one's sexuality.

The individual's self, including their developing gender identity and sexuality, are projected onto the physical environment of the bedroom. Several studies (Coope, 1974; Elwood, 2000; Gosling and Ko, 2002) found a direct correlation between notions of the self and the look or décor of their personal space. One will surround themselves with representational objects of identification. For example, paintings created by a resident will be hung on the walls of her room, or drag photographs of a trans woman performer will be framed and exhibited on a dresser. Like the collective identity, the individual identity is then confirmed and validated by observing these personal markers.

When entering the resident's bedrooms in Transy House, one starts to get a real understanding of the personality and identity of the woman residing there. The women who express a more gender-typical, if not hyper-feminine gender appearance have bedrooms that would be considered feminine. For example, Tasha and Sadaisha, two trans women who consider themselves highly feminine and have a very stereotypically feminine appearance have very feminine rooms. Sadaisha explains that she wanted to create a "queendom". Her walls are painted a dark pink, the ceiling is a light pink, and

there is a ceiling border of women apparently at a hair salon applying make-up, talking or reading (see photograph below).

Figure 11: Sadaisha's bedroom wall border (Photo by author)

When I interviewed Sadaisha she had just moved into Transy House. I was helping her clean and prepare the bedroom while interviewing her. She described her vision for the room:

> Originally, I wanted it neon pink and I wanted to get neon pink feathers to match. I like that kind of room, really bright colors, really froufrou. In the queer community that's like a drag queen thing, bright colors [….] I plan on painting [the room] like a blush, from there I'm going to cover it over with a neon pink. After that I'm going to put a border on with women doing their hair and make-up. I think of myself as a diva and I want to create a queendom, you know what I mean? I want to get a pink feathered mirror cause that's where I do all my make-up. I want to bring new life into the room.

Sadaisha also stressed the importance of her dresser and mirror. Because she is a drag performer, Sadaisha's appearance is important to her personal and professional identities. The dresser now adorns a large, framed photograph of herself as a drag queen. For Sadaisha, she admits, one's personal space must reflect one's personal identity.

Like Sadaisha's room, Tasha's bedroom is also considered by the residents as very feminine. When I first started the study, Tasha was living in a small room attached to the upstairs office (now Musa's bedroom). During the time of study, however, because of tensions with Sadaisha, she moved to a small, separate structure located in the backyard. This space was originally used for storage. In both bedrooms, Tasha highly personalized the spaces using vibrant colors, incense, flowers, curtains, candles and other "knick-knacks". She asserted that if she could, she would paint the walls bright lilac. The photograph below shows the corner of Tasha's room and displays her bed and blue, satin, fabric on the walls. Before the photograph was taken, Tasha quickly fixed her already made bed and added the flowers, flower petals and extra pillows.

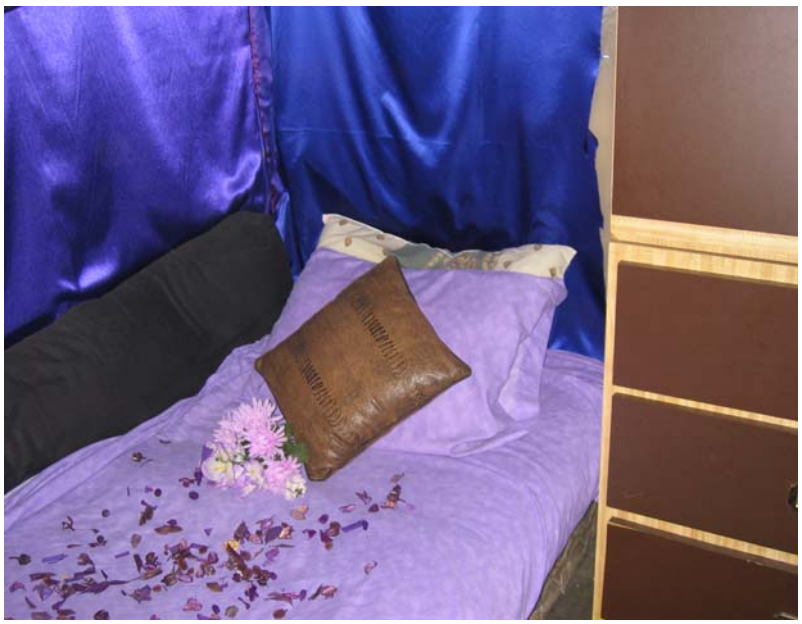

Figure 12: Tasha's bedroom with flower petals on bed (Photo by author)

For Tasha, one's environment is representative of one's identity. In the following statement, Tasha explains her philosophy on person-place dynamics:

> However you look, however your house looks is how you are as a person. If you are cluttered and disorganized, that's probably how you are as a

> person. For me, I have to be neat and clean and feminine and color coordinated and all of that because that's how I… I mean when I walk out of this door everything has to be perfect, everything matches my make-up is perfect and everything, I never leave unless everything is done. I never just go half way with anything, I was taught that at an early age. If you are gonna do it right, and do it all the way

Tasha confirms and exemplifies this tight link between her personal environment and her own identity by explaining: "I believe in smells, fabric cleaners, Febreeze, Lysol… I wear lots of perfume, body sprays, oils, body powder." In addition to the look of a place matching the outward appearance of the individual, for Tasha, even fragrances add to the feminine atmosphere.

The women who do not exude a highly feminine appearance, Musa, Maureen, and Rusty, have rooms that also lack some of the feminine décor that Sadaisha's or Tasha's have. Musa's, for example is a young, plain-looking Asian trans woman. She does not wear make-up, feminine clothing and her straight, dark hair is parted in the middle hanging loosely to her shoulders. She self describes as "a little bit lazy". During her interview, Musa asked several times if she was answering correctly and at the end she asked me if she seemed depressed. Like her personality and her appearance, Musa's room is also, insecure and plain. There are no personal markers exhibited or symbols of group association. She explains why her room is not decorated: "I'm not really keen on decoration. I'm not really planning to do any decoration." Her mattress that takes up most of the room lays on the floor, and clothes are strewn about. The condition of the room is clearly illustrated in the photograph below. In addition, as you one can see, there is no pillow case on the yellow-stained pillow and there are numerous paint stains on the comforter.

Figure 13: Musa's bedroom (Photo by author)

Musa is diagnosed with depression. Her psychological state is apparent in the lack of attention to the self as well as to the room. Though she describes her personality as lazy, her low energy level and unkempt room are typical symptoms of her diagnosis.

Celia, a very quiet, spiritual, and private trans woman who has been living in Transy House for 6 years, has a room that mirrors her identity. Behind the closed door is a small, feminine looking room decorated in pinks and reds. It also has a lot of religious imagery. There are crosses, rosaries, and religious statues. A strong religious atmosphere permeates the space.

Celia maintains her social position and fortifies her privacy in Transy House by using spatial tactics exhibited in her room. She always keeps her door closed and there is a plethora of religious imagery displayed. Very few people enter her space without specific invitation. On most of the tours, participants would walk by Celia's room

pointing out that it was hers, but we would not enter the space as we did in other resident's rooms. Celia believes that people are afraid of the religious feel to the room, so they avoid it.

Conclusion

Appropriating space gives individuals the power and opportunity to govern and personalize a particular territory. Because each of the residents in Transy House currently has their own bedroom, they can use this space to present their individual identities in a more concrete way – through the physical environment. Tasha and Sadaisha's rooms had more feminine-typical object markers, closely coinciding with there more self-proclaimed feminine identities. They pay close attention to the intricate details of their rooms ensuring the right look and feel (e.g. smell of incense) is presented for their own self projections as well as for their guests. Contrasting with the highly feminine, vibrant rooms of Tasha and Sadaisha is Musa's room. Her insecure feelings about her self and her clinical diagnosis are manifested in the physical environment of her bedroom.

The personal space of one's bedroom is an area for residents to control and personalize. They are empowered to establish the rules of conduct within that space, but also create the physical landscape for one to develop and perform. Their identities are expressed and validated within these spaces. For Tasha, her gender identity is influenced by the physical environment of her bedroom:

> I absolutely feel more feminine when I enter the room; everyone feels more feminine. They like the smell, they like the way it looks, they like the organization, they like the decorations, they like the color you know. Everything's feminine – everything I buy, I create, I organize.

The gross representations of femininity displayed in some of the bedrooms, though, may also be a reaction to the cluttered and unkempt (i.e. masculine) communal

spaces. Transy House is a respite from a transphobic society, while one's bedroom may also be decorated as a respite from the rest of the house.

For individuals whose subordinate social and economic positions in mainstream society hinder them from appropriating space, Transy House provides trans women with opportunities to claim a much needed and valued space.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

TRANSY HOUSE FOR SAFETY AND RESISTANCE

I was homeless for so long and now I have a space. (Sadaisha)

Transy House acts as a much needed safe haven for the trans community. As discussed in earlier chapters, because of societal exclusion, discrimination, and harassment, there are few places available for individuals who are trans. Housing and employment opportunities for people who are gender-variant remain limited. Sadaisha's statement above, reflects the circumstances of many trans women and demonstrates the vital role Transy House has played in her life. For both development of one's identity and personal resilience, having a space to call one's own is crucial.

This chapter presents findings that support the safe haven conception for Transy House. To ground and contextualize the findings, I present data on the implications for gender transgression. Thereafter, I discuss how residents of Transy House fortify and secure their space. Additionally, I discuss the importance of belonging to a group and how the group then creates a space to support sobriety. Finally, I posit from the findings, that Transy House has not only become a safe haven for its residents and members of the GLBTQ communities, but that it has become a site of resistance and empowerment within a gender-oppressive society.

Implications for gender transgression

When individuals defy the socially prescribed gender norms, the implications are severe. As explained in the Background chapter, either because of a transphobic society, or homophobia, most people of trans experience have had negative encounters while in public, and even in some gay and lesbian environments. Many have been harassed, beaten, raped, because of their gender transgression and their perceived sexuality. These experiences also negatively influence the psychological health and well-being of trans women. Many trans people, therefore, regulate their public performance to avoid possible attacks.

Gender-phobic actions have significant consequences to those who digresses from gender norms. They not only result in physical harm to the individual through violence and harassment, but daily hassles have psychological, somatic/physical, and behavioral outcomes manifesting in headaches, negative mood (e.g. depression), and high risk behavior (DiPlacido, 1998). Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor (1995) researched the implications of assault on young people and conclude that youth who have been victimized by assaults show more symptoms, posttraumatic stress reactions, and sadness.

Due to these societal pressures to conform to the gender binary, many trans individuals feel they must choose to live as either as male or female, if not, they risk the aforementioned harassment and ostritization. Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) explain this phenomenon of how trans individual contribute to maintaining and proliferating the gender binary:

> Beginning in early childhood, and continuing throughout their lives, individuals learn to expect rejection, stigmatization, and the loss of relationships, should they violate gender norms. Fear of rejection acts as

> a pressure to establish and maintain "proper" gender […]. (Gagne' & Tewksbury, 1998: 87).

Though individuals defy these prescriptions for male and female-typical presentation, their comfort level when in public is hampered. Chelsea, for example, has a very androgynous appearance. She is tall and thin and wears her blonde hair short, straight, and one-length. When going out in public, the clothes she wears is often gender neutral and other than eye make-up that she sometimes applies, her appearance defies gender definition. She explains her feelings about being outside of her safe haven, Transy House:

> Virtually anything on the other side of this door makes me uncomfortable [pointing to the adjacent front door to Transy House that leads to the outside world]

Chelsea is often seen wearing large, dark sunglasses and walking very quickly when she is out in public. Her often gruff demeanor and her physical appearance become her shield when she is outside of Transy House. This protective garb can be let down when she is in the house. Most of the women in the house have spoken to me about having similar feelings when they are out in public. Many of the trans women have experienced harassment or physical violence because of their appearance.

GLB (T?)

Not only is the heterosexual world grounded in the gender binary, but, ironically, the gay and lesbian communities, too, remain faithful to the dichotomy. These two communities historically have challenged stereotypical prescriptions for gender roles and presentation, however, today, with the trend of trans popularity, the male-female gender gap is, again, widening. Rather than the butch lesbian and femme gay man teasing society

about gender norms, these individuals are now taking hormones and having surgery, to, in fact, become the other gender.

In my exploratory research looking at experiences of and places for those who are gender-variant, I found that most individuals who fall outside the gender binary have not been able to find community or place within the so-called GLBTQ environments. One participant explained the position of trans people in the GLBTQ worlds:

> We are the black sheep of the gay world. They are angry with us 'cause we are giving them a bad name… we are not maliciously stating anything against them, we're just being us. (37 year old)

Though all participants expressed feeling tension when negotiating space in the gay and lesbian communities, most of the born-female individuals relayed having more positive relations to gay men or "fags": "I love faggots, I totally relate to them. I totally get 'em… I think this is what I look like". The participants who were born male tended to have more difficulty with gay men and preferred to be with people who are similar in gender identity: "A lot of gay men aren't comfortable with this sort of thing". All participants commented about the intolerance of lesbians, calling them "lesbian separatists": "they are so angry.", "gay women don't know how to deal with me […] I just feel shut out by them" and "you [lesbians] think I'm a charming sweetheart or a threat to your personal identity."

There is also a generational divide that seems to influence the level of acceptance of people who are gender variant. Gays and lesbians in their teens and 20s tend to accept gender variants as part of their community because "they themselves, I am sure, often like to do drag and play with gender". People in their 40s and up tend to accept the societal norms for gender and gender expression which have been established for them.

This is probably due to the age that they were when gay rights were being expressed and demanded in the late 1960s and early 70s.

This phenomena is played out in the physical landscape as well. Lesbian bars are dominated by women and gay male bars are appropriated by men. Even the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans Community Center in Manhattan offers services mostly for gay men and lesbians, with very few services targeting trans individuals. This means that even within the GLBTQ communities, the T is often neglected making one question whether there really is full acceptance and inclusion for those individuals who are gender-variant.

Below are a few of the comments I received when questioning participants from the exploratory research. They highlight the inaccessibility of trans into the GLBTQ environments. For example at a gay-life conference and exposition held at the Jacob Javits Convention Center, one person recognized the discrimination when using the bathroom:

> I went into the men's bathroom at the gay expo and I got looks from people and I thought: 'Shame on you!' (27 year old born female);

Another reiterated the discussion brought up earlier about gay and lesbian bars appropriated only by men or women, respectively:

> There are lots of gay bars where I would not be accepted walking into looking like this. (48 year old born male);

Even in environments where they encourage trans individuals to participate in services and social gatherings there remains bias. One participant explains how the implicit 'separate but equal' policy happening in a local church affects her.

> This church around the corner [has] a very big sign out front that says they accept all people, including gays. But the preacher couldn't deal with transexuals at all. The MCC (a church for the GLBTQ community), that is a more interesting situation. They have a trans group, the only thing is the first day I am there they want to dump me into this trans group. Say you accept us and then you pen us off, segregate us, and with no distinctions. (42 year old born male).

Though there are a few spaces that are designated for use by those in the trans community, such as the one mentioned above in the church, they tend to be for social services such as group therapy or drug and rehabilitation counseling. In addition, many of the participants explained that if you are in that "in between" state, trans groups are not always welcoming. Gossip and comparisons made verbally about individuals who either do not "pass" in society or about ones who are not feminine or masculine enough in appearance keep many individuals from accepting services or socializing in these spaces.

The experience of negotiating space within New York's public spheres for trans individuals and those who are in-between was complicated and often posed relentless risks of intimidation or bodily harm. The heterosexual and homosexual communities resist inclusion of those who are gender variant by remaining static in their compliance with the socially prescribed gender dichotomies.

Creating boundaries: Fortifying and securing the in-group

Because of the extremely liminal position (both social and physical) of those individuals who are trans, having a real space to appropriate and control becomes increasingly more important. The residents of Transy House use this space to renew, restore and strengthen individual and collective identities. Therefore, protecting this landscape is vital to resident well-being.

Boundaries, both real and symbolic, define and fortify a particular space within a larger physical environment. For instance, Lamont and Molar assert that symbolic boundaries, "contest and reframe the meaning of social boundaries" (2002: 20). Once people are separated into groups, in-group members form feelings of similarity with other in-group members (Epstein, 1992) and attitudes of superiority over out-groups strengthen (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). McMillan and Chavis posit that establishing and securing boundaries generates group cohesion, enhances feelings of emotional security, and fosters group intimacy for its members (1986).

The women who live at Transy House have created both real and symbolic boundaries to define their space and protect group members. The physical walls of the house, the "keep out" signs posted on the front door, and even the state that the house is left in establish a real border while, an informal interview process for prospective residents creates a symbolic border.

Defining and protecting the physical space

As discussed in the chapter, "Linking the Self with the Environment", the act of appropriating the a physical space, Transy House, demarks and defines the territory as a specific trans space. Behind the front gate and within the walls of the structure is a safe haven for those individual who defy gender norms and risk their lives, on a daily basis when in public, because of their transgressive gender appearance. Protecting and fortifying the physical and social space of Transy House, therefore, is critical.

The real borders of this trans territory are the front gate, building walls and doors, the "keep out" postings. To some extent, the deteriorated condition the house also wards off uninvited visitors. These object boundaries establish a defined place that protects

residents by restricting access to potentially threatening individuals. The ways that the gate, walls, doors, and warning poster fortifies Transy House are obvious, however, how the condition of the house contributes to protecting residents is more implicit.

When the physical environment of a house is in poor condition, whether it is due to deterioration from an aging building, lack of daily up-keep and maintenance, or because of messy and cluttered spaces, it works as a physical and psychological deterrent. People do not want to enter, nor feel comfortable in a space in which they feel threatened by physical harm or crowding. Crowding, whether it is a condition produced by a large number of people, a small space, or furniture and objects not to scale of the physical space, produces real, physiological reactions. When people feel crowded, their body reacts in anxiety with an elevated heart rate, increased perspiration and respiration, and muscle tension. Most of the participants asserted that the clutter and physical condition of Transy House creates feelings crowding and tension.

The structural integrity of Transy House can easily be questioned and the interior and exterior environments are in disarray with old furniture, papers, boxes and various other large objects (e.g. trans-political protest signs and pieces of wood) filling the spaces. This environment, along with the real boundaries of the space, fortify and protect the members of the GLBTQ communities who visit or reside there.

Defining and protecting the social space

Residents of trans collectives can delineate the borders of their space by using regulatory social mechanisms in addition to the as real, physical boundaries. In all three trans collectives, Transy House, Central House, and Davis House, there is an interview process in place for prospective residents. This initial screening gives the owners the

power to decide who will reside in their space and acts as a strategy for fortification. Trans residents take on the role of the gate-keepers for their territory and decide who will be part of their in-group. Internalizing their new role, they generate feelings of autonomy and empowerment.

Some of the women who have experience with Central House and Transy House commented on the how Central House is more strict with deciding who will reside there. Central House has a formal interview process for prospective residents. After an initial phone interview with the house mother, the prospective resident must then meet with both the owners of the house and its current residents for a formal, semi-structured interview. If all of the members of Central House agree, then the individual will be admitted to the house. There is no interview process for one if one's intentions are to only visit the house or to conduct research there (which is rarely allowed), yet the intentions of the visitor must be clearly stated and cleared with the house mother, who then advises residents. In addition to the strict screening process, there is also an implied gender-criteria. Residents and guests must be either born women or post-operative transexuals.

When Davis House was open to trans women, Davis, the owner also had a screening process for new members. Initially, Davis and all of the residents would meet with prospective residents and decide, collectively, whether to admit the person or not. Over time, however, it became more difficult, Davis explains, to meet all of the women as a group. Therefore, new residents only met with the existing residents, and they decided, as a group who would be accepted and who would be rejected. Davis, herself, did not live in the house.

Transy House also has an interview process for prospective residents, however, it is not as formal as in the other two collectives. When one is referred to Transy House by a social service agency or when one arrives at Transy House through word-of-mouth, one will typically meet with Rusty and Chelsea. The meeting is not a formal or structured interview, but it is just to meet and get a feel for the person, as Rusty states, "to make sure they will be an OK match for the house." Both Rusty and Chelsea admit that this meeting does not always happen before the person moves in.

In addition to the Rusty and Chelsea's initial screening for prospective Transy House residents, residents also conduct their own second "screening". Residents will often unobtrusively observe the behavior and presentation of the new women, have one-on-one conversations with them asking them about their background, and will scrutinize their social interactions. Sadaisha admitted that she found it difficult living in Transy House during the first several weeks:

> I like it, it's pretty stressful. The people […] it's pretty hard on the new one. You upset the balance that they've already created.

In addition to the screening that residents conduct for new members, a similar process occurs for visitors and those individuals requesting information. For example, as I explained in the Methods chapter, when I interviewed Chelsea, she only agreed to answer the interview questions if I would also answer the questions myself. I agreed, and she then allowed the inquiry to proceed. Chelsea was able to proclaim her power and control over the situation as well as build trust with me through this mutual exchange of information.

Creating and fortifying the physical and social boundaries of Transy House empowers residents to control their environment. They are able to restrict access to only

those individuals they feel they have built a trusting relationship with. Additionally, Transy House is a place where trans women, as the social majority, establish the norms and rules for behavior in that space. Rusty describes how this psychological effects the residents of Transy House:

> "[It is] atmosphere where everyone was either transexual or trans. For trans people it was a reinforcing feeling just to be here."

Unlike in mainstream society, where trans individuals are positioned on the periphery, in Transy House, Rusty explains, trans women are center stage, performing and presenting in any chosen gender. Therefore, protecting this space is critical to the trans woman's feelings of comfort and security.

The importance of belonging to a group

Transy House not only provides trans women with a fortified place to lay their head at night, but just as important, it is place to become part of group. Establishing oneself as a group member enhance one's self-esteem, strengthens one's resiliency or self efficacy, enables opportunities for social comparison, and generates feelings of belongingness & security. For individuals who are marginalized from society because of their gender presentation, this social connection with like-individuals is critical.

In McMillan and Chavis' seminal work on a psychological sense of community (PSOC), the feeling of being a group member and of being a person that matters (1986), they identified five dimensions to PSOC: 1) boundaries of inclusion and exclusion; 2) emotional safety; 3) enhance feelings of belonging and identification; 4) personal investment; and 5) a common symbol system.

Tajfel (Social Identity Theory) and Turner (Social Categorization Theory) posit that one's individual identity and esteem are enhanced and strengthened due to the stronger collective identity (1978, 1987). Simply put, people just feel better and have a heightened self-image when they can associate themselves with a larger group. This group association also helps one to define oneself. For example, I belong to a trans collective, I can now proudly call myself trans.

Another effect of group membership is a self-other merging. When one belongs to a group, one will consider those who are in this in-group to be similar to oneself, and will then, in fact, start to incorporate this group's norms into one's own identity. In other words, a person will start to develop similar looks, behaviors and attitudes to those of the group. This process of "self-expansion" (Aron, 1991) builds cohesion among group members and fosters the individual's altruistic behaviors. It is well known that individuals will be more likely to help others if the one being helped is perceived to be like themselves.

Group membership also affects one's sense of resiliency and self-efficacy. Resiliency is the ability to overcome environmental difficulties to become well-adjusted adults (Rutter, 1987). Similarly, self-efficacy is the "beliefs in one's capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1997: 2). Both resiliency and self-efficacy influences one's feelings of confidence, competence and autonomy. One's sense of resiliency and self-efficacy is strengthened by the group with which one associates.

Bandura (1997), who explored factors that affect self-efficacy, posited one's mastery experience, one's perceived results of own past experiences; vicarious

experience, the understanding of the effects produced by the actions of others; and verbal persuasions, the verbal judgments and feedback provided by others, play significant roles in one's perceived abilities. Though the two social influencers, Bandura asserts, are not considered to be as strong as one's personal experience, vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions continue to be vital in one's self-efficacy.

For members of a stigmatized group, effects of social influence magnified. For example, gays and lesbians coming-out to other gays and lesbians has the potential to provide a sense of well-being, authenticity, while also normalizing and validating their own identities (Evans & Broido, 1999). Though there is no research documenting this, we can assume that a similar effect would occur for individuals coming-out as trans.

Most of the participants agree that Transy House has created an accepting and supportive trans community for members of the GLBTQ communities. For Antonia, living in a trans collective was important for her emotional healing and gender development. After quitting her job because of the harassment she received as a result of her coming out as trans, and not having the social support or resources to live full time as a trans woman in Michigan, she reached out to Chelsea, another trans woman. Chelsea invited her to come to New York and live at Transy House.

Transy House not only connected her to the necessary resources in order to live her life as a full-time trans person (e.g. doctors, social workers, and clothing stores), but created the much needed "family" support for Antonia. Transy House became the place to provide her with "the space to come out and be relaxed and not to have to explain things to people over and over again and justify my existence". Antonia repeatedly mentioned the tight-knit community in Transy House. Living in a group of other like-

women, offered Antonia an environment to develop a heightened sense of self as well as strengthened feelings of self-efficacy and resiliency.

Many of the current and past residents, in fact, revealed similar personal experiences while living in Transy House. For instance, before coming to live in Transy House Celia and Musa were in hospitals for physical or psychological reasons. They neither had the financial means nor social support needed to live independently. In exchange for her room and board, Celia offered her help with the cleaning and cooking for the house. Musa made an agreement with Rusty that allowed her to stay in Transy House without having to pay rent. While living in Transy House, both women have developed a stronger sense of self and autonomy. They revealed to me that they are feeling more ready and able to live on their own.

For the residents of Transy House, effects of being a part of a group became significant players in building an enhanced sense of self as well as creating a stronger, more resilient person. The collective environment of Transy House also impacts individual's social position and power. In this microcosm, there are now opportunities for trans women to free themselves from the stigmas attached to trans people and now control their environments. In this particular environment, they are the gate keepers, rule makers and the norm of gender presentations. Residents, therefore, use the collective to improve their lives in very critical ways.

Creating family

When one becomes a member of a group and is emotionally and behaviorally involved with the activities of that group, over time, members create relationships with

each other that mirror those of one's family. In the chapter, "Not as I hoped", I discussed how the residents of Transy House have created a "family" causing many of its members to emotionally and behaviorally regress. Here, I will look at the more positive influence of establishing this familial network. When one is part of a family, whether it is one that is produced through blood lines or through strong emotional connections, members will tend to provide emotional support and physical protection.

On the other hand, from a social-constructionist perspective, the family provides an individual with the models for learning new, and not so new, social and genderal norms for behavior and presentation. Women learn from each other appropriate dress and mannerisms for presenting in public, feminine language and intonation, positive psychological and social attitude, along with increased knowledge about the socio-political trans life. Transy House is also the place where many trans women and gender questioning young people go to for their primary social interaction and networking.

The creation of a family at Transy House has created strong, protective bonds among its members. All of the women agree that if any one individual became the target of discrimination or harassment, that all of the members would come together in her defense and support. These acts of protection foster important feelings linked to one's physical survival and emotional security.

On the straight

Rusty and Chelsea run Transy House applying a harm reduction philosophy. They do not expect residents to completely give up their addictions to drugs or alcohol, however, they encourage them to limit their use or to replace their drug of choice with a less addictive, softer drug such as marijuana. The physical space of Transy House along

with the strong social influence, therefore, provide residents with a place to begin and maintain a healthier and safer lifestyle. Chaiken (1988) posits that peer influence can be a positive enabler encouraging cessation in drug users. Through emotional and financial support and security, along with rules against excessive drug and alcohol use, Transy House offers residents a place to quit or lower their chemical dependency.

Trans drug and alcohol usage is higher than that of non trans people. The psychological state resulting from defying rigid societal gender norms may contribute to one's dependency on drugs or alcohol. Feelings of rejection and inadequacy, anxiety, and emotional frustration often exacerbate and sustain narcotics use.

Conversely, self-determination and self-confidence may facilitate cessation of use and recovery by establishing self-control sufficient to finally become a "winner" over addiction (Chaiken 1988). Like the AA social-networks and role modeling style for recovery, Transy House also acts as an avenue leading toward recovery. It provides both the social support and positive role models that are needed to live a sober life.

> Transy House offers trans women a place to improve their quality of living by helping them get off the streets, providing food and shelter, as well as the giving them the social support and tools necessary to "keep clean". Rusty and Chelsea follow a harm-reduction approach by focusing on residents who are addicted to or are using heavy drugs like crack and heroine. In fact, residents who use "heavy drugs" on a regular basis will not be allowed to stay. Chelsea acts as the resident gate keeper, weeding out residents who are using heavy drugs.

Davis also promoted a sober and healthy lifestyle in her house. Rather than blatantly prohibiting drugs and alcohol, Davis required the women to either work, volunteer, enroll in a training program or in a school. With these requirements, Davis explained, it was difficult for a woman to have a chemical dependency. If a resident

exhibited addiction behaviors that led her to drop out of school be fired from her job, Davis would evict the resident.

Peer influence has contributed to one's drug and alcohol addictions, however, it has also worked to deter or prevent chemical abuse as well. The women in Transy House provide women with the social support to quit using drugs and alcohol. In addition to resident influence, Rusty and Chlesea are sober, successful role models for which residents can emulate, while at the same time, they are the enforcers of a no drug tolerance policy.

A site of resistance

Place plays a powerful role in the making of identity and the crystallization of social positions. Its construction depends on continual dialogues with its users. The environment can usurp one's power through a physical design that supports and proliferates a hegemonic social structure based on binaries or it can create slippages that open new doors for restructuring socio-spatial hierarchies. On the other hand, it is the individual who has the tools to employ the spatial strategies needed to help them adapt to, claim, and/or control that space.

> Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators. (hooks, 1990: 152)

As hooks explains, being located in the margin can position people in a place to create social change and collective empowerment. For trans individuals, who are marginalized from society due to their gender defiance, hooks' reinterpretation of

liminality and peripheral influence provides them with the opportunity to reclaim the power of their identities.

Transy House is a place where typically oppressed individuals now regain their power. Its occupants have created a unique environment where the norms for behavior, attitude and gender presentation have been established by trans individuals. Along with the trans socio-cultural spatial environment, Transy House is also a place where trans people are the majority. Unlike in the typical socio-spatial environment where trans individuals are rarely seen, now, there is a trans-space with members of the GLBTQ communities appropriating and creating that territory. Because of this new social structure, trans individuals now have the power to control their space, and their identities. Rusty explains the social dynamics of Transy House:

> When people come in here a lot of people have never been in a space where we are dominant in terms of the culture. And if anyone tries to harass people we would throw them out. You are not in a straight environment. Get over it!

As Rusty posits, Transy House has created a trans culture that offers its residents a place of safety as well as power and control. In fact, several of the residents assert that they feel the safety and power from other residents knowing if they were ever in trouble, everyone would come together in support and defense.

As in the other women's spaces that have been used as sub-altern counter publics, or sites of resistance, Transy House is also a place to create, strengthen and enhance a counter culture that defies social norms. Walker's Victorian women, hooks' black women, Elwood's lesbian residents each have created a home place where power was taken back by the oppressors and used to build a socio-political landscape for women to

develop and prosper as individuals and as a collective. Key elements that many of these sites of resistance share are the ability for people to behave, collectively as well as individually, in ways not accepted by society; a social space for networking and political activism; a physical environment with visible cues indicating group membership and personal identity. Within these spaces women were able to digress from societal expectations and create a socially and individually empowering identity.

Transy House has created such a space for trans women. Although I have questioned in a past chapter whether the women who live in the house have actually sustained the gender binary giving in to society's expectations for femininity, there is no doubt that the occupants of Transy House have been able to explore and try out new forms of gender. These explorations are the contestations of a counter culture that seek to problematize notions of what it means to be male or female or some where in between.

As discussed in the Social Influence chapter, Transy House, through its role models and socio-political activism, has also created a site for trans women to elevate their social standing. With the occupants' involvement in rallies, marches, conferences, and even research studies, they are, through their increased public visibility, shedding new, more positive light onto the lifestyles of trans people.

In addition, the physical landscape of Transy House is indicative of the ambivalent lifestyles of trans people. The house, through the visible cues of posters, newspaper articles and paintings, is a constant reminder of the power that trans women can claim when seeking visibility and inclusion. However, the clutter and socio-environmental chaos signifies the emotional states that many of the occupants are in.

Most of the participants agree, though, that the overall feel of Transy House is political, social, and empowering.

Conclusion

Transy House plays a significant role in the lives of members from the GLBTQ communities. For Sadaisha, as well as many others, it became a place to help her avoid a life on the streets. However, along with the physical shelter the house provides for homeless women, the social community of Transy House offers residents the emotional security and communal comfort that comes with becoming part a family. For some of the women, this collectivity and group bond helps to counter a transphobic society and develop a stronger, more healthy, sense of self.

As a site to transgress gender norms and create a counter-culture that defies societal expectations, Transy House has also become an important sub-altern counter public for those in the GLBTQ communities. Within this space social networking, political opposition and strategizing, as well as the strengthening of individual and collective identities occurs for a community that is typically forced into subordinate, liminal or invisible socio-spatial positions.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

TRANSY HOUSE DEFINED

While the physical landscape is often used to perpetuate and fortify hierarchal social frameworks, marginalized communities also employ spatial tactics to express, validate, and protect their individual and collective identities. For instance, there is very little space where the trans population can safely be who they are without fear of homophobic or transphobic violence. So, where does this leave the trans people to locate themselves within society's socio-spatial framework? Transy House is a trans-dominated environment that affords members of the GLBTQ communities, specifically, trans women, opportunities to perform trans-feminine identities freely without fear of the ramifications that are often experienced in mainstream society.

From my research five main themes emerged: 1) Transy House is a site with precarious social and physical landscapes, however, it is a transcape with the potential to become a powerful site of resistance; 2) through socialization with other trans residents, trans women learn about gender and sexuality while they perpetuate the gender binary; 3) individual identities are displayed, supported and protected in the physical environment of personal spaces; 4) the collective identity is expressed and reinforced in the landscape of the public spaces; and 5) within the tumultuous social environment and the poor physical condition of Transy House, many trans women continue to find refuge in this trans-dominated space.

The Creation of a Transcape

Like Appadurai's ethnoscapes (1995) that focus on the shared cultural and political experiences that bind transitory populations (e.g. migrant workers), and the queerscapes that have been described as geographies where the gay or lesbian identity is performed, the transcape, as I define it, is a trans-dominated space where trans culture and identity is played out safely and freely without fear of transphobic violence. It is a trans-specific landscape that residents appropriate and control and, therefore, make their own trans-normative rules for behavior and gender expression. Additionally, occupants manipulate the physical environment to exhibit and fortify their trans identities. A transcape that successfully builds and synthesizes the socio-spatial environments will strengthen and protect the trans identity and can become a site of resistance that challenges the norms and values of mainstream society.

Transy House has the potential of becoming an important transcape. Residents try to strengthen and empower trans individuals by creating an atmosphere that encourages socio-political engagement, and by developing a familial social framework that supports the trans identity. Trans-normative rules for gender performance and sexual activity have also been established (e.g. open displays of sexual expression). Moreover, the physical environment presents numerous visual cues that reinforce and validate the trans identity (see "Public spaces and the collective trans identity" section in this chapter). However, I found that Transy House residents' hostile and even violent behaviors produced a tumultuous social environment that hampers the trust and cohesion needed for collective empowerment. Additionally, the dubious and unkempt physical landscape causes one to question the safety of the house and, in fact, it may reinforce the marginal social position

of trans persons. Although the findings indicate that the domestic transcape has yet to reach its potential as a transcape for resistance and empowerment, it remains a place for trans women to (re)build their lives and their identities while expanding a social network of other trans individuals.

Gender and sexuality played out

Admittedly, like most researchers, I started this study bringing to it my own beliefs and biases. As an educated, liberal, gay woman, in a long term relationship with another woman, and raising a daughter in what I hope to be a gender-open environment, I initially hoped to present findings that demonstrated gender as a fluid and dynamic identity that is constrained only by societal norms and expectations. Transy House is a unique landscape that affords trans residents the opportunity to redefine gender and establish their own norms for gender performance and for sexual activity. Because of this, I hoped to find a trans-culture that transgressed (i.e. surpassed) the restrictive binaries for gender and sexuality. In fact, the very act of transitioning from a male to a female identity or alternating gender display establishes the very plasticity of its nature. However, what I found was a transcape of trans-feminine women who prescribe to stereotypical societal prescriptions for what is considered feminine.

Throughout this dissertation I have enumerated the complexities of gender and sexuality. One's self-proclaimed identity as male, female or someone in between is created by one's own understanding of gender, along with the expected norms for behavior associated with males and females, and the reinforcement from the physical environment in which one is situated. These factors are then integrated into and

complicated by other aspects one's identity such as: race, class, educational level, and psycho-social history.

The women living in Transy House learn their genderal presentations and sexual possibilities as a result of social learning (Bandura, 1969). Through direct observation, modeling, and teaching, one internalizes gender appropriate behavior. Because all but one of the residents were born and raised male, the trans women in Transy House became models, mentors, and teachers of gender and sexuality for other trans or gender-questioning residents and visitors. Their bodies and varied gender performances illustrated to others how one can blur the boundaries between being male or female. However, ironically, these very same people support and fortify society's dichotomous social framework for gender, thus proliferate socially accepted stereotypes for women.

When the trans residents gender bait or openly comment on the lack of femininity of other trans women, they establish a set standard for feminine performance that prescribes to societal expectations. Whether this patrolling of sex and gender occurs because cultural norms have become so internalized and played out to the extent that gender performance is, as Bourdieu defines it, habitus (1977) or if it is because one must perform a femininity that adheres to the gender binary expected from a mainstream audience or face the consequences (Deaux and LaFrance, 1998 and Butler, 1999), all but one of the residents fortify female-male distinctions by performing solely as a stereotypical woman.

For many of the women in Transy House, the hetero-normative lifestyle remains their goal. Their story-book dreams to meet a man and live happily ever after is sustained even through their gender transition and being exposed to a lesbian trans couple. Several

participants, in fact, commented on how they would be a good wife and mother because of their domestic skills in cooking and cleaning (i.e. taking care of their husband as a wife is expected to). These hetero-normative notions of gender roles and scripts adheres to societal expectations. This may be a consequence of socialization or a search for 'normalcy' in a society that idealizes the hetero-normative family lifestyle and demonizes the trans identity.

The familial social dynamics in Transy House also reinforce and sustain societal gender norms and roles. The women of Transy House (re)created the hetero-normative family where Rusty acts as the "mother", Chelsea as the "father", and the other residents behave as the daughters. As in traditional households, the residents follow their gender scripts with the more feminine-typical individuals performing the domestic chores (e.g. Rusty cleans, while Celia and Tasha cook), proudly adding the more "feminine touches" to the house such as spraying air freshener and planting flowers, and emphasizing their "nurturing" (i.e. feminine) qualities.

Transy House, therefore, socializes the trans residents into enacting a hetero-normative feminine performance rather than encouraging them to accept a place in-between the binary and defy gender prescriptions as I anticipated. However, my perspective of gender is from a place that is more privileged than my participants and this social positioning may then enable me to more easily critique the established gender framework. The goal, though, for the trans women in this study is to just be able to fit in and pass as a functional woman in mainstream society.

Public Spaces and the Collective Trans Identity

The self, therefore, is constructed from continual interactive dialogues with the physical environment. Fincher and Jacobs posit that “People’s relationships with places help construct their identities like their relationships with class, gender and ethnic groupings.” (1998). Helping to ground these person-place links is Proshansky’s seminal work on place identity (1978, 1983). The environment, along with one’s psycho-social development, is a building block to the self.

Person-place dynamics are clearly demonstrated in the various public and private landscapes of Transy House. Within its public spaces the collective identity of residents is manifested and supported through the physical environment. For instance, there are numerous exterior behavioral residue (e.g. trans-rights posters and banners that line the hallways and office walls) and self-directed identity claims, such as the paintings of important trans figures, that express Transy House’s strong socio-political collective identity. At the same time, the poor and unkempt conditions of the house (e.g. holes in walls and extensive clutter) are indicative of the problematic lifestyles that also characterize the house’s collective identity.

The dichotomous, possibly even ambivalent, identity manifestations exhibited in Transy House’s physical environment, though, also may reinforce the residents’ feelings of subordination and marginalization produced from societal condemnation of their transgressive identities. This raises the question, “If one lives in substandard housing, does one feel substandard?” At the same time, however, the rundown and disorderly physical conditions distinguish it from more mainstream dwellings and, thus, may impose

an implied barrier that works to protect its trans residents from the outside world. Some visitors quickly leave the house because they are not comfortable in the space.

The public spaces of Transy House, therefore, support and clearly illustrate place identity theory by demonstrating that the conditions of the public space mirrors the collective identity of its residents. Moreover, the physical appearance of the public spaces perpetuates the marginal identity of trans residents. Interestingly, though, this physical chaos may work as a defense mechanism protecting Transy House residents from possible transphobic intruders.

Personal spaces and individual identity

Like the collective identities that are exhibited and reinforced in the public spaces of Transy House, aspects of the residents' individual identities are displayed and supported in its personal spaces. Whether it is the woman's gender, religion and spirituality, visual artistry, or even psychological illness that is exhibited, each bedroom in Transy House indicates active and conscious person-place dialogues.

Musox's room clearly illustrates these place-identity dynamics. Musox diagnosis of depression produces symptoms that cause her to pays little attention to her own physical appearance. This characterization is played out in the physical landscape of her bedroom. Musox's bedroom is unkempt and lacks the personalization (e.g. missing byproducts) that is seen in the bedrooms of other residents.

Additionally, the gendering of personal spaces plays a particularly important role in the person-place dynamics. Although there is no empirical evidence that indicates what is considered a masculine or feminine environment, residents have explicit beliefs about what makes a space feminine that is demonstrated in their bedrooms. Women's

environments, they posit and present, are cleaner, more fragrant (i.e. accented using incense or scented candles), display feminine-typical colors such as pinks, lavenders and reds, use fabric to soften lines and edges, and are adorned with ornamentation usually associated with women (e.g. flowers). These conceptions of what makes for gendered space use stereotypical notions of femininity and therefore, through the environment, residents are supporting and perpetuating the gender binary.

The need to hyper-feminize bedrooms, though, may be a reaction to the more androgynous, if not masculine, appearance of the rest of the house. If one intentionally and effortfully creates a feminine self, one may want to ensure that this identity is represented and reinforced in the physical environment. However, in a collective environment the individual resident often does not have control over the appearance of its public spaces, therefore, she may personalize and territorialize her personal space with more blatantly feminine adornments.

The particular bedrooms environments that the residents have specifically created to represent and support their identities may also produce the psychological effect similar to safe havens and sanctuaries. As an escape from the turmoil experienced in the rest of the house, residents create “queendoms”, spiritual retreats, or artist’s sanctuaries that help to separate and protect them from other residents. These spatial tactics that residents employ ensure clear distinctions between their bedrooms (i.e. their individual identities) and the public areas of the house (the collective trans identity).

Finding Refuge

The precarious conditions of the social and physical landscapes in Transy House can easily challenge the notion that this site is a safe haven for members of the GLBTQ communities. Moreover, as discussed earlier, one can even raise the question of whether the site is potentially detrimental to the well-being of trans persons. Transy House does, however, enable its trans women to escape a life on the streets, avoid the precarious public shelter system, and find refuge in a collective of like-individuals. Many of the participants, for example, described in their interviews that while Transy House has helped to put a roof over their head, offered a bed to sleep in, they also provided the emotional comfort and security of being with other trans women.

I discussed throughout this dissertation that when one becomes a member of a group one's esteem, collective identity, and self-efficacy is enhanced (Tajfel and Turner, 1978, 1987). Additionally, when the psychological sense of community is achieved (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), one has a deeper sense of belonging and identification that enables one to feel part of an in-group. For individuals, like the Transy House residents, who are so often located on the periphery of society, becoming a member of a group is pertinent to their well-being.

For the participants in this study, the importance of providing trans women with a home, in both the physical and psychological sense, outweighs the poor conditions of the house and the volatile social dynamics.

As I stated in the opening of this section, I was hoping and expecting that Transy House would be a site of transgression and resistance defying proscribed taxonomies for

gender and sexuality. I find the rigid structures society established for male and female gender performance restrictive and oppressive. Though residents of Transy House abide by stereotypical feminine prescriptions, as seen in both the social and physical landscapes, the findings presented here do indicate that these two landscapes work together to help residents explore, develop, express, support, validate and protect their transgressive identities. Because of this, the Transy House transcape does become a safe haven and a site of empowerment for the individual and collective trans woman.

Implications For Future Research

A new model for looking at gender identity

Most identity paradigms use one perspective such as social constructionist or psychoanalytic, however, few of these consider the impacts of the physical environment. Throughout this dissertation I have approached identity by looking at it more comprehensively. I believe the self is constructed as a conscious and intentional performance that is influenced by dynamic interchanges with both the social and physical environments.

Butler and Deaux's theories on identity, looked at together, offers a perspective on identity that gives back power and agency to the individual. One regulates and performs behavior according to one's own motivations, the exchange with the target audience, along with the influence of social norms and cultural values. This socio-performative understanding of identity falls short, though, by neglecting the impacts of one's landscape.

Place-identity research, however, asserts that the physical setting in which one is embedded is internalized and then incorporated into one's self-schemas. Like one's

relationship with the social environment one will react to and adapt the physical environment to reinforce and express aspects of the self. Synthesizing socio-performative identity paradigms with the environmental theories for person-place relations offer a fuller and more enhanced perspective on identity. This research hopes to merge the psychological, social, and physical landscapes in order to spur more complete and complex models for identity, specifically, gender development.

Post-transition transgender identity development

Research conducted on transgender identity remains limited. Most focus on the pre-transition period of the transgender individual, however, identity development does not stop at the point of self-acceptance and complete social performance in the chosen gender. In this dissertation I begin to look at post-transition life using a socio-environmental paradigm for identity. I address how transgender women use their social and physical environments to help support, express and validate their transforming identities.

Though not all of the individuals who arrive at Transy House are fully transitioned trans women, all of the residents, at the time of this study, were living as women for more than ten years. Each trans participant discussed experiencing hyper-feminine periods of gender performance when first coming out as trans. This post transition stage of their gender development was manifested in and supported by their physical environments. As the women matured in their gender identity, this hyper-feminine performance eased allowing for some aspects of their original, masculine identity to show or blend with their new female identity. This identity progression and development was also seen in the physical environment.

A staged, post transition paradigm for trans identity development is worthwhile for further exploration. Not only will it expand existing knowledge about trans individuals and their identities, but it will also provide for a richer understanding of gender identity and performance.

Expanding place-identity literature

Much of the current place-identity literature describes the person-place connections as mostly experienced without notice until there are specific disruptions such as moving to a new neighborhood (Brown and Perkins, 1992) or if a place became memorable because an important event occurred there (e.g. meeting a lover for the first time) (Manzo, 1994). Adding to this theory, Twigger-Ross and Uzell (1996) suggest that a *conscious discontinuity* occurs when one intentionally moves to mark a new stage in one's life demonstrating a conscious decision about place. The findings here indicate a conscious and intentional relationship between the individual and her landscape. They show that a disruption or personal life-change does not need to occur to have a conscious understanding of the environment.

All of the participants, when questioned, articulated specific changes to their environments that happened as an intentional effort to display, support and validate their individual identities. Therefore, as indicated in this study, one purposefully manipulates elements in the environment to more closely match one's existing and possible selves. The understanding of links between individual agency and environmental adaptation can enhanced further with continued analysis and exploration.

Additionally, research on how groups modify the physical environment to support the collective identity can offer a more rich understanding of person-place dynamics. In

this study, the transcape that participants created as domestic counter public became a significant place for collective growth and empowerment. This group-environment exchange, though, is not limited to the particular landscape of the home. The notion of the transcape can be applied to neighborhoods, and even cities. Like the gay male landscape of Fire Island, Pines (Nimmons, 2002), a transcape is a place to freely counter and challenge traditional prescriptions for gender and sexuality.

Policy implications

The findings here also have the potential to impact current legislation and policy. As of 2000, only four states and 51 cities prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity or expression (Currah, Minter and Green, 2000) this research along with statistics on trans housing, economic conditions, violence and discrimination can be the impetus for changes in legislation and policy.

The living conditions for trans individuals is problematic. Homophobia and transphobia continues throughout the United States. There are still numerous hate crimes against individuals who are gender-variant as well as extreme bias and discrimination in the work place and in housing. The current shelter system, as well, has proved to be perilous for trans. Although New York City has anti-discrimination laws protecting trans individuals, there are still only nine states in the country that have included trans individuals as part of their antidiscrimination legislation.

There needs to be expanded policies to protect trans individuals from bias and discrimination in work and housing, more accessible public housing prioritizing trans people in need of housing, and stronger penalties for hate crimes resulting from homophobic, genderphobic, and transphobic attitudes. If the federal, state and local

governments establish an atmosphere of social acceptance for everyone, the public will likely follow. Therefore, there must be a clear separation between church and state.

Final thoughts

Though the trans population are actively taking steps to make a "place" for themselves in our socio-spatial environment, the socially accepted gender dichotomy still penetrates our society at all levels from individual bias to collective prejudicial actions. These conditions will continue as long as we live in a culture that only *sees* gender attribute differences but does not accommodate for those individual who are in-between male and female. The struggle to find "place" for people who are trans will, therefore, continue and pernicious crimes will proliferate.

How then do we deal with an environment that condones hate crimes against trans people? Discussing and reconceptualizing gender in theory or even crystallizing it in writing is the easy part, having the tools to implement change is where the challenge rests. Though most people can visualize what a third, fourth or Nth gender may look like, how do we make room for them in our society? Where do they fit within the rigid gender framework?

A transcape like Transy House is the start to building and fortifying the trans position and validating the trans identity. By usurping a defined territory that proclaims its own genderal and sexual norms for expression and behavior, members of a typically marginalized and oppressed population can rebuild their identities and empower their collectivity.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES

- **Basic background questions**

1) How old are you?
2) Where did you grow up?
3) Describe your bedroom growing up. Were you comfortable in it? Did you like it?
4) Did you feel you had a good relationship with your family growing up?
5) Do you feel you now have a good relationship with your family?
6) Since living on your own, how many places have you lived?
7) Which place did you feel the most comfortable in, the one that most matched your personality and why?
8) Have you ever lived in a communal situation? Describe.
9) Where was the most recent place you lived before Transy house?
10) How did you find out about Transy house?
11) How long have you lived here?

- **How do the trans women's definitions and meanings of "home" relate to their definitions and meanings of self?**

1) How would you describe yourself (e.g. personality, femininity/masculinity, clothing style)?

2) How would you describe your home?

3) How would you describe your bedroom?

4) How do you feel the character or personality of the house matches your own character?

5) How would you describe feminine space? Masculine space?

6) How is your experience living in this environment different now than what it was when you first moved in?

7) How do you feel you may have changed since living here?

- **How do the trans women manipulate their home to help support their (new) gender and sexuality?**

1) If you could change anything to the physical environment of the house, what would you do?

2) Where are the common areas of the home?

3) Do you feel any of the common areas of the house are controlled by certain residents?

4) Where do you find privacy? Is privacy respected?

5) What kind of activities do you use your private space for?

- **How does living in a communal environment with other trans women foster or hinder the transformation of their own identity?**

1) What are the "house rules" for residents and guests? When did you hear about them? How are they enforced?

2) Who chooses what room a resident gets?

3) How does the housework get divided?

4) How do decisions about the house get decided on? Are there house meetings?

5) Do the residents of the house take on familial roles (e.g. mother, father…)?

6) Do you feel the women in the house are close or do they remain pretty independent from each other?

7) How do the other women living here contribute to how you express your gender or sexuality (e.g. comments about attitude, behavior, dress…)?

8) Do you consider anyone in the house a role model or like a mentor? Why?

9) What's it like living in a communal house?

10) Was it important to chose a communal house of other trans women?

11) Would you prefer to remain in a communal environment or have a place on your own? Why?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORMS

Informed Consent

My name is Kim Felsenthal and I am a Ph.D. student in the Environmental Psychology Program at the Graduate Center and the City University of New York, and the principal investigator working on a project entitled "The Home as a Tool for the Construction and Expression of Gender Identity and Sexuality: a Look at Communal Group Living for Transsexual Women." I am asking you to participate in a study attempting to understand the links between the use of the physical environment of the home and transsexual identity. There has not been any research done on this subject and I feel it is an important area to explore.

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview that will take approximately one hour. With your permission, I would like to audio tape the interview to record the details accurately. I will also ask you to take me on a guided tour of your home to point out and explain places and things of personal or social significance. The tour should last approximately one hour. At any time you can refuse to answer any questions or end the interview or tour.

All of the information I collect will be confidential with all names of participants and any identifying characteristics removed from the data. My field notes and audio tapes will be kept in a locked file cabinet, which only my advisor and I will have access. I may publish results of the study and a copy of the final report will be available to you by request. Please provide your address or email for this purpose.

The study poses minimal risks to you other than heightening your awareness of the physical and social environments of the home and the restrictions they may pose. Your participation in this study will create a better understanding of how the home is used to facilitate the identity transformation of transsexual individuals.

If you have any questions about this research you can call me at: (347) 262-5839 or kfel@nyc.rr.com. You may also contact my advisor, Prof. Setha Low, at (212) 817-8725 or slow@gc.cuny.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in the study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Director, of Sponsored Research at (212) 817-7523 or hfisher@gc.cuny.edu.

Thank you for your participation.

I agree to have the interview audio taped, please circle one: Yes No

_____ _____ _____ _____

Participant's signature Date Investigator's signature Date

Photo Consent

I _____, owner of Transy House, authorize Kim Felsenthal, principal investigator working on a project entitled "The Home as a Tool for the Construction and Expression of Gender Identity and Sexuality: a Look at Communal Group Living for Transsexual Women." to photograph interiors of the house for research purposes. I understand that certain photographs may be used for publication, however no identifying information such as house address will be used.

_____ _____
Owner Date

_____ _____
Kim Felsenthal Date

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