Trans-Form-Asians:
The Liminal and Disrupted Lives of Singaporean and Balinese Transwomen Sex Workers

by

Kevin Chavez Laxamana

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

Master of Arts

Department of Anthropology
University of Alberta

ABSTRACT •••

What does it mean to live a non-linear or disrupted life? When circumstances and society deny someone's existence because of their non-normative gender and sexuality, by what means do people reconstruct their lives, reclaim their identities and sense of being, and gather the strength to survive their everyday hardships?

This thesis looks at the lived histories and stories of transwomen sex workers in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia. By telling the experiences of these individuals, the more we learn about the intricacies and nuances of the transgender experience and reality which informs and shapes our perspectives on gender and categories. As such, I argue that anthropological studies on transgender and queer subjects, in connection with sex work, are sites for contesting and reformulating classifications and categories. The meanings produced and created from anthropological research and gender, as a matter of fact, are ways and processes for cultural transformation. This research is based on 28 in-depth and semi-structured interviews conducted and collected during my ethnographic fieldwork in Singapore and Bali in the summer of 2017.

Given the scarcity of scholarly material pertaining to transwomen sex workers in Singapore and Bali, I hope to contribute a comparative anthropological study of these individuals to highlight their marginalized lives and denied existence influenced by their layered non-normative gender identities.

PREFACE •••

This thesis is an original work by Kevin Chavez Laxamana. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name "Trans-Form-Asians: The "Disrupted" Life Cycles of Singaporean and Balinese Transwomen", No. Pro00072348, 12 June 2017.

No part of this thesis has been previously published.

DEDICATION •••

Burn the scorecards, balance out the scales
We are one wind distracted by our different scales
Underneath what's detectable with eyes
Every particles vibrating with the same life.

- "One", Birdtalker (2018)

To Papa†,
we're all doing okay,
and I know you're proud of me.

To Mama, Kathleen, and Kenneth,
we did it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS •••

This thesis was a labour of love, not just from myself, but from everyone who has shared their lives and believed in me to tell their stories. Doing anthropological work is a long and laborious effort, riddled with sleepless nights and travels to the unknown, and sometimes to the familiar, even when that familiar feels uncertain and foreign at times.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, now committee member and lifelong mentor, Dr. Gregory Forth, for his guidance and mentorship in the last six years. *I am the anthropologist that I am today because of you.* I am forever grateful for your insights and patience and for always believing in me; I was fortunate to have a supervisor who instilled a responsible model of anthropological research through mentorship while giving me the academic freedom to explore and learn more about myself—as a student, researcher, and an anthropologist. I will never forget when you visited me in Bali during my fieldwork. I hope you're enjoying your retirement with your family.

To Dr. Helen Vallianatos, thank you for taking me in as your student. Your mentorship since my undergraduate years is something that I value, and I am looking forward to working more with you in my PhD program; I am grateful. To Dr. Amy Kaler, thank you for being a member of my committee and for being a mentor inside and outside the classroom.

I am also grateful to other faculty mentors who have been supportive of my academic aspirations and research: Dr. Jean DeBernardi (Anthropology), Dr. Andie Palmer (Anthropology), and Dr. Carla Hilario (Nursing)—thank you for your guidance and encouragement, it is very much appreciated.

Throughout my Master's program, I was also afforded opportunities that led me to do collaborative work outside the University of Alberta. To the Chair in Transgender Studies, Dr. Aaron Devor, and Michael Radmacher, thank you for choosing me as one of the Fellows (2018) for the Chair and the Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria. My short but meaningful time in the Archives expanded my perspective on transgender research and issues.

My Master's program is in many ways my rite of passage to consider myself an anthropologist. This project brought me to many beautiful places and people in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia. To Vanessa and Sherry (Project X) and Arya (*Yayasan Gaya Dewata*), thank you for welcoming my research with open arms and for connecting me with the amazing community built by trust, hard work, acceptance, and love. I have so much respect for the work that you do and for creating a safe and inclusive space for everyone. Your dedication to the community is admirable. To my Singaporean (Dr. Kevin Tan Siah-Yeow and Hilary Ho) and Balinese (Ngurah and Ayu Wijaya) 'adopted' families: thank you for your generosity, kindness, and for feeding me the best meals and conversations during my fieldwork. I miss *rendang* and *Bintang* beer. Okay, maybe durian ice cream, too.

While I am coming out of my Master's program as a better researcher, I think the real treasures of this journey are the friends I've met along the way: Helena Ramsaroop, Paula Torres Peña, thank you for the hallway chats, I miss you both dearly; Anna Bettini, Xiao Zheng, I will never forget those late-night chats in our shared office and our coffee

runs; Deanna Joyce Neri, my academic sister and forever "Nay/Teddie"; Incy Aranas and Kris Soliven, for all the beer runs; John Wayne dela Cruz and Nicole Salvador, my amigas since undergrad; Maissie Hillman and Beatriz Rubio, my PhilSA babies, and Katherine Bishop, our food conversations will forever be my favourites, thanks for keeping me grounded and for being a constant source of support.

To Erica Yeung, my *sestra*, you've been supportive of me since day one of our friendship and I cannot wait for our next concert adventure, thanks for always reminding me to take it one day at a time. To Iván, I am thankful for your presence in my life and for your loud laughs that brighten and fill any room; thanks for being my prescription for happiness. I am proud of you.

In the last four years, I was also fortunate to have a supportive work-family: Ramona Czakert Franson, Denise Giles, Dr. Deanna Davis, Charity Slobod, Dr. Renee Polziehn, Medha Samarasinghe, Dr. Robert Desjardins, and Elaheh Alizadeh Rabiei: I learn so much from you all every day. To Lara Reynolds, Ian Nason, Erin Vinkle, the SATTVA Yoga community, Dr. Caitlin Laughlin, and Dr. Yatri Patel: thank you for always reminding me that balance is important and that health should always come first. I still can't do headstands but maybe I can work on it now the thesis is done?

This project will never come to fruition without the financial support from the following: *the Department of Anthropology and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta, the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the Faculty of Education – U of A, the Government of Alberta, the Chair in Transgender Studies and Transgender Archives at the University of Victoria, University of Alberta International, and the Edmonton Community Foundation.* Thanks for believing in my research and how important that the stories of these individuals are shared for knowledge dissemination and acceptance. To the *Alberta Global Council for Global Cooperation*, thank you for including me in your Top 30 Under 30 list for 2020, it's an honour that I will forever treasure. My family and community just got bigger.

To my students at NorQuest College and the University of the Philippines Baguio, carve your own stories and make sure to build communities and circles that nourish you. The world is your playground; I am rooting for you.

To my parents, especially to my Mama, and my siblings and best friends, Kathleen and Kenneth, thank you for your support, patience, and for listening to my never-ending questions and musings and for understanding my sometimes-stubborn life choices. I love you.

And lastly, to my 28 transwomen participants and now lifelong sisters, thanks for trusting me to tell your stories and for fighting to have a just and accepting society. This is for you.

In solidarity. Here's to many beautiful endings and exciting new beginnings.

A NOTE ON FOREIGN TERMS AND ITALICIZATION •••

Non-English terms used in this thesis are Singaporean (mostly Hokkien) and Indonesian and/or Balinese (Bahasa Indonesia) unless otherwise noted. I italicize all foreign terms in this thesis. For clarity, I use English plural markers on these terms—for example, *warias* as the plural for *waria*. Finally, all (common) translations are my own and my interpreter's (after which I translated again) unless otherwise noted.

LIST OF FIGURES •••

TABLE OF CONTENTS •••

GLOSSARY OF TERMS •••

The terminology of the transgender-identified population is culturally dynamic, where meanings and definitions vary and constantly change for personal and political reasons. I would like to outline some of these terms (employed throughout this thesis and associated terms for general knowledge) to frame the discussion accordingly. Moreover, I want to point out that I will be using commonly understood Western terminologies except for *waria*; however, this is not meant to exclude or render invisible the experience of persons who describe their experiences—or themselves—differently (particularly in other cultures).

- **Ah gua:** A Hokkien term that translates to "change gender."
- ***Bule*:** An Indonesian word for foreigners and/or non-Indonesian national(s), especially people of European descent ("whites", "Caucasians").
- **Cisgender:** A term used by some to describe people who are not transgender. A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with those typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth.
- **Cross-dresser:** Are usually heterosexual men who like to dress up in women's clothing. Considered derogatory by some.
- **Drag King:** A female performer who exaggerates male behaviours and dress for the purposes of entertainment at bars, clubs, or events. Some drag kings might identify as transgender.
- **Drag Queen:** A male (often gay) performer who exaggerates female behaviours and dress for the purposes of entertainment at bars, clubs, or events. Some drag queens might identify as transgender.
- **Gender:** Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender is usually conceptualized as a binary (girl/woman and boy/man) yet there is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience, and express it.
- **Gender Dysphoria:** Clinically significant distress caused when a person's assigned birth gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. According to the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the term—which replaces Gender Identity Disorder (GID)—"is intended to better characterize the experiences of affected children, adolescents,

and adults."

- **Gender expression:** External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person's name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behaviour, voice, and/or body characteristics.

- **Gender identity:** A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. One's innermost concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither — how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.

- **Gender Non-conforming or Non-binary:** A broad term referring to people who do not behave in a way that conforms to the traditional expectations of their gender, or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

- **Gender transition:** The process by which some people strive to more closely align their internal knowledge of gender with its outward appearance. Some people socially transition, whereby they might begin dressing, using names and pronouns, and/or be socially recognized as another gender. Others undergo physical transitions in which they modify their bodies through medical interventions.

- **Heterosexual:** An adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also straight.

- **Homophobia:** The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

- **Intersex:** A general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. Sometimes a female or male gender is assigned to an intersex person at birth through surgery if external genitals are not obviously male or female. Intersex babies are always assigned a legal gender, but sometimes when they grow up, they don't identify with the gender selected for them. Some intersex people are transgender, but intersex does not necessarily mean transgender.

- ***Laki-laki*:** An Indonesian term for male or man.

- **LGBTQ:** An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer."

- **Sex:** Refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals. It is primarily associated with physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone levels and function, and reproductive/sexual anatomy. Sex is usually categorized as female or male but there is variation in the biological attributes that comprise sex and how those attributes are expressed.

- **Sexual orientation:** Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to other people.

- **Tranny (sometimes referred to as The T-word):** While some transgender people use the word tranny to describe their gender, most find it highly offensive—a derogatory slur.

- **Transgender:** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth

- **Transphobia:** The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

- **Transvestite:** A person who wears clothes designed for the opposite sex. An older term for cross-dresser that is considered derogatory.

- **Transsexual:** An older term that originated in the medical and psychological communities. Still preferred by some who permanently changed (i.e., bodily). It is not an umbrella term.

- **Transwoman (transgender woman):** An individual who was assigned male at birth but identifies and lives as a woman.

- **Transman (transgender man):** An individual who was assigned female at birth but identifies and lives as a man.

- ***Uang*:** An Indonesian term meaning money.

- ***Waria*:** An Indonesian term for transgender women derived from combining the words wanita (woman) and pria (man).

FORAYS TO THE UNKNOWN: PROLOGUE AND THESIS OVERVIEW •••

I still vividly remember the night I arrived in Singapore.

This was to be the first time since my family moved to Canada that I would return to Southeast Asia, not to visit or for a vacation, but to embark on a journey: my first (international) ethnographic fieldwork experience.

By the time I arrived in my apartment located along Lloyd Road, a few blocks away from Orchard – Singapore's flashy shopping district – I was drenched in sweat. "I am definitely back in Asia," I whispered to myself. At that moment, I knew it had begun. I travelled from Canada to Singapore, and then to Indonesia, because there is a story I want to tell. And I believe it is an important one.

•••

For as long as I can remember, I have always been interested in people and stories. Storytelling is a powerful tool to connect, empower, and inspire change. This interest has led me to anthropology. For me, anthropology is, to put it simply, responsible and effective storytelling. As anthropologists, we tell stories of our own—our travels, encounters, and observations. In the process, however, we are also recipients of stories. We are trained to listen and observe and to find the beauty and ugliness in the mundane and the extraordinary—not to criticize, but to analyze every step of the way.

For my Master's thesis and research, I therefore wanted to tell the histories and stories of transgender women sex workers in Singapore and Indonesia. What does it mean to live a non-linear or "disrupted" life course? When circumstances and society deny someone's existence because of their non-normative gender and sexuality, by what means

do people reconstruct their lives, reclaim their identities and sense of being, and gather the strength to survive their everyday hardships?

These are the stories I will tell through this thesis and as an anthropologist.

This thesis is about transwomen. In brief, a transwoman is an individual who was assigned a male gender at birth, but this gender assignment is not consistent with her sense of self; consequently, she lives and identifies as female (Beemyn and Rankin 2011:1). Transwomen, or transgender people in general, exist across cultures and continents, and have appeared throughout human history—although the words we currently use to describe them are relatively new.

The argument of this thesis is a simple one: by speaking to the lives and experiences of transwomen, more specifically sex workers, in Southeast Asia, with Singapore and Indonesia as case subjects, the more we may learn about the intricacies and nuances inherent to the transgender experience, as well as the reality which informs and shapes our perspectives on gender and related categories. Moreover, by looking at the trajectory of their lives—with the view of transitioning as rebirth, then mid- to later-life, and ultimately, death and dying (including the possibilities of de-transitioning)—we can better advocate and assist these individuals as they strive for acceptance and equality. Using comparative anthropology to juxtapose similar yet strikingly different geographical locations with distinct cultures and social norms will enable us to think about the behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of sex that are not part of our own experiences and societies, and thereby challenge our intellectual understanding of what is deemed natural, normal, and morally acceptable and right.

Here is an overview of the chapters that will comprise this thesis. **Chapter 1** (***Ebb and Flow: Anthropology, Storytelling, and Reconciling Ethnography***) looks at the methodology and fieldwork outlining my data collection and analysis of 28 interviews, collected during an nine-week ethnographic fieldwork study in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia. Via discussions of the challenges inherent to fieldwork, including the often-contested definition of ethnography, I argue and call for responsible anthropological and ethnographic research. At the same time, I conscientiously situate myself within the context and social location of an external researcher, albeit one who continues to work with marginalized populations and communities.

Starting with **Chapter 2** (***In the Beginning: Disruptions, Transitions, and Trans-Form-Asians***), as the title suggests, the reader will experience their first foray into the lives of these transwomen. Looking at their transitioning histories, including the different types of transitioning procedures and models, in this chapter I argue that there is no "one size fits all" model for those wanting to transition their male bodies to ultimately "pass" in their new female body form. **Chapter 3** (***Between and Betwixt: Exposing Beauty and Bending Femininity through Non-Normative Professions***) presents the different subject positions and professions, particularly sex work, that transwomen in Singapore and Bali occupy to affirm their identities—that is, to survive and earn money amidst discrimination. I also cover and relate to their inability to penetrate the formal workplace and labour economies due to their gender identity, which is by many considered deviant and sinful.

Building on the previous chapter, **Chapter 4** (***Life Goes On: Money, Romance, Kinship Relations, and 'Happily Ever After'***) looks at the personal relations that

transwomen leave and build, their kinships by blood or choice, and the romantic affiliations – whether exploitative and/or nourishing – that often create long-term and highly toxic chains and models of relationships. **Chapter 5** (***Detransitioning: Religion, Ageing, and Dying as a Trans***) outlines briefly the controversial topic of detransitioning, in this case, via the connections of religion and faith, with unavoidable ageing and death seen as the primary motivations through which transwomen may reverse years of transitioning to return to their male (birth) form.

My concluding chapter (***Beautiful Endings, Exciting Beginnings: Conclusions and Future Directions***) is a call-to-action to other researchers who work in the same or similar areas of transgender research, specifically the reformulation of (gender) classifications and related categories. Through this research, I hope that I can contribute to critical discussions about transwomen, as well as how they negotiate their lives and gender in the face of differing cultural, religious, and social attitudes.

I EBB AND FLOW[1]: ANTHROPOLOGY, STORYTELLING, AND RECONCILING ETHNOGRAPHY •••

A week after arriving in Singapore, I met with Dr. Kevin Tan Siah-Yeow.

Dr. Tan Siah-Yeow obtained his PhD in Anthropology at the University of Alberta. I was introduced to him by my supervisor, Dr. Gregory Forth, in anticipation of my fieldwork in Singapore. After having dinner at Golden Mile Complex, also known as Singapore's Little Thailand, Dr. Tan Siah-Yeow offered to show me around the area (before driving me home), particularly the red-light districts that may be places of interest for my project. A few days later, we decided to return to Little Thailand to observe. This is a common practice in anthropological research. Anthropologists are keen and trained observers—we observe to have a feel of the place or the field, often unfamiliar to us initially, with hopes of finding preliminary information for our research or research project.

•••

Singapore is a place of contradiction. On one hand, it is an orderly, peaceful, and a modern city-state/island country in Southeast Asia. Singaporeans, including expats, follow rules and regulations imposed by those with power and authority. These laws, sometimes bizarre and odd to the outsiders, are put in place to keep Singapore's reputation as an impeccably clean and safe place. The most well-known of these laws is Singapore's chewing gum law—which prohibits the sale of chewing gum, importing or bringing chewing gum into Singapore, and even spitting it is considered a crime. Selling it can result in fines of $100,000 SGD or up to two years in prison. Other examples include

[1] An old idiom; meaning regular and repeated changes.

walking naked inside your own house, smoking, and not flushing the toilet. All are considered illegal, and violators are subjected to fines (if caught). Not surprising then, that homosexuality, including being a transgender, is also considered illegal in Singapore.

•••

In many ways, Singapore felt like New York City to me. With the hustle and bustle of city life, tension is felt when you look and observe closely. Everyone is rushing, and almost everything is available at your fingertips—that is, if you know where to look and if you have the (financial) means to spend. I mentioned this observation to my landlord one night, an expat working in the IT industry, and he mentioned to me that an average Singaporean (or those who worked in Singapore regardless of profession) are overworked. Even my landlord is overworked, admittedly. I am renting a bedroom with Charlie, and I barely see him at home due to his long working hours and many other side gigs. Even during the brief "hi, hello" in the morning when I make my breakfast and when I go home after doing fieldwork/interviews, he is often on his laptop working or with his phone making calls that are also work-related.

A follow-up conversation with another professor[2] *also echoes my initial observation on Singapore. This professor mentioned another tension that exists in Singapore—between academics and the government. For example, those who wish to write and research on controversial topics—including transgender people—are often discouraged or disadvantaged, and worse, their chances of getting tenure are slim to none. This confirms my earlier observation. Amidst its glorious attractions and sparkling*

[2] From a publicly-funded autonomous university in Singapore. I met this professor when I visited a Special Collections library on the history of Singapore, housed at the same university during my fieldwork.

skyline, Singapore, in some ways, is still an oppressive state. This is the reason why I chose Singapore as one of my field sites; I wanted to investigate how non-normative genders (and professions) are perceived by a society that relies so much on categories of what is "normal". What does it mean to deviate from the norms of a city-state whose reputation rests on strict codes of conduct and normalcy—particularly on issues and topics of gender? How do individuals who are "different" try to mediate their identities and livelihoods when they are unrecognized and not supported? These are all questions this thesis hopes to address by telling the stories of these individuals.

•••

Bali is a place of tradition. It is also a "traditional" field site for many anthropologists. For example, the work of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on Bali in the 1930s has put the island on the map as an anthropological "hotspot" for those who wish to study anthropology and Southeast Asia. My decision to study Bali (and Indonesia in general) is connected to my earlier interests in the region, which stem from my undergraduate studies and thesis research, and in many ways, the influence of my then-supervisor, Dr. Gregory Forth, who has worked in Indonesia for 40 years. Part of the appeal of doing research in Bali on transgender individuals, for me personally, is the connection on religion. While Indonesia is considered as the country with the largest Muslim population, Bali, on the other hand, is a Hindu-majority province and as such, views on gender and sexuality may differ, especially given that religion plays a powerful role in shaping public culture, including the acceptance, tolerance, and hatred of those individuals who occupy a space outside the gender binary subjectivity.

With my interest in the anthropology of tourism, in connection to the topic of sex work, Bali and Singapore became ideal field sites for me to work on my research topic. Anthropology, as a discipline, rests on the premise of comparisons, and looks for patterns of similarities and distinctions. It is no wonder, then, that these sites offered so much data and insight during my nine weeks of fieldwork in the region. Moreover, as a first-time ethnographer, I considered, and then ultimately chose, these sites due to their relatively close nature (by geographical location) yet contrasting ethnic and religious makeup. The area, in sum, bears several degrees of contact and influence from non-native, non-Singaporean, and non-Balinese outsiders.

•••

This section will give an overview on Singapore and Bali in general. This will include a brief overview on their colonization histories, including the laws—past and present—which affect and often criminalize the LGBTQIA+ communities in the region. When viewing my own positionality as an anthropologist and researcher in relation to my chosen field sites, I outline my process as a first-time ethnographer, and include the challenges and limitations of my research and methodologies, particularly in coming to terms with my position as a storyteller/ally to the transgender communities I studied. This thesis is therefore the end-product of these questions, my fieldwork, and the shared experiences, histories, and stories of the transgender communities I worked with and studied with in Singapore and Bali. I consider this work to be a personal contribution to the growing literature on transgender individuals in Asia.

WHY SINGAPORE AND BALI:
ANTHROPOLOGY OF TOURISM, SEX, AND GENDER

•••

The Night is Young: The Red-Light Districts of Singapore

Early versions of my research barely mentioned sex work. I was interested in the concepts of beauty and power[3], however, a few weeks into conversation with knowledge gatekeepers from the transgender community, doing interviews, and working with Project X, I found myself invested in the topic of sex work. By the end of the "Singaporean leg" of my fieldwork, most of my interviews and field notes revolved around sex work. This trajectory continued in Bali, where my interviewees often had experiences working in sex work and prostitution.

Existing on the margins of society, many transwomen in the region enter the sex trade. While Singapore has authorized the licensing of select brothels and locations, it still categorically bans transwomen from this system, and therefore subjects them to the full brunt of its criminal law. Many transwomen who work as sex workers are thus deprived of the protections afforded by licensed brothels. As this community is subjected more to abuse by the police (and the public, including the brothels for which they work), many have no recourse or safety net to protect them against such incidents.

Police violence targeted at transwomen sex workers exacerbates human rights and violence by further stigmatizing this already-vulnerable population and

[3] I was very much interested in continuing my research on themes of gender and power from my undergraduate honours thesis. My connection was that I was exposed to the world of beauty and vanity, as my mother was a professional hair and makeup stylist when I was growing up.

thereby facilitating further discrimination. Such violence also encourages the normalization and perpetuation of such violence, not only from managers or handlers (if they have one), but also from "Johns" or clients. Such violence deters these women from seeking assistance from law enforcement, even when they are put in life-or-death situations. Broadly, such systems not only violate human rights, but also undermine public health strategies and knowledge dissemination. Many transwomen sex workers, based on their experiences with police or law enforcement, often feel discouraged to seek help, even from healthcare and other social worker professionals, as they expect their experiences will carry over, and that their interactions with other individuals and organizations will be just as violent.

I have seen this firsthand in my work with Project X. During the nights where I helped distribute care packages or "red bags" (the contents include packs of condom, lube sticks, and wet sanitary wipes), there were a few times and instances when our group was intimidated by the police, since our team consisted mostly of transwomen sex workers themselves. Celina, one of the senior Project X volunteers and one of my interviewees, mentioned that the police try to "shoo away" organizations like Project X to stop them from talking to sex workers; indeed, non-profit organizations not only provide items such as care packages, but also a wealth of useful social support information for these workers.

Figure 1. A typical night volunteering and preparing the "red bags" at Project X in Hindoo Road, Singapore (2017). *Posted with permission.*

The main red-light districts of Singapore are the following: Geylang, Orchard Towers (also known as the “Four Floors of Whores”) shopping complex, Changi Village, Desker Road in Little India, and Woodlands parking lots. Interestingly, regardless of where you go, a significant number of sex workers are transwomen. Working with Project X located in Hindoo Road, I have gained access to transwomen sex workers “stationed” in the area through our nightly outreach programs, and through invitations from Project X’s programming and events for sex workers.

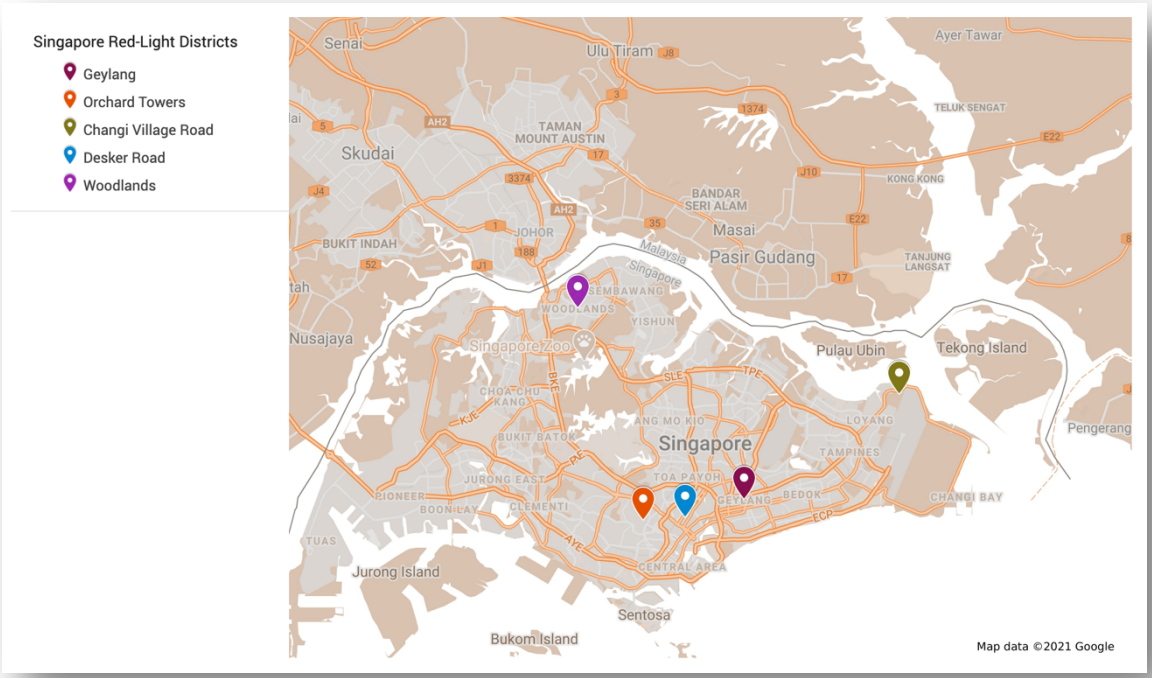

Figure 2. A map showing where the red-light districts of Singapore are located (2021). *Created by the author in Google Maps.*

While not surprising, I could not find any academic/scholarly or peer-reviewed materials or sources on transwomen sex work in Singapore. To address this gap in the literature, I read blogs and news articles on transwomen sex workers in the region. What I have presented so far, and will present in my thesis, is directly taken from my interviews and field notes, i.e., narratives from transwomen sex workers that I have met during my time conducting interviews and volunteering with Project X. While this lack of information was a struggle for me as a researcher, I do believe my commitment will position my work as an important contribution to the literature in Singapore on transwomen sex workers. I once asked a transwoman how sex work is different from cisgender sex work,

and to put it simply and crudely, she said: "Depending on the preference, sometimes we have to fuck the clients as well… because I still have a dick." This puts transwomen sex workers in sometimes difficult situations. Many of these transwomen sex workers are living their "true" gender selves; certainly, the quote stood out for me since many are left with no choice but to penetrate their clients in exchange for higher pay, even when they are not comfortable with that particular sex act or role.

The lack of scholarly material and research on this topic warrants increased research attention on this area and topic. It is an area that should and must be explored to learn more about these individuals and their experiences as sex workers in Singapore.

Section 377A of the Penal Code of Singapore

Section 377A of the Penal Code of Singapore is the main persisting piece of legislation which criminalizes sex between 'mutually consenting' males who are not below the legal age of consent (which is 16 years old in Singapore), even when the act is done in private. Also known as the 'gross indecency law,' this is interpreted to include forms of non-penetrative sex (e.g., mutual masturbation) between two males regardless of age (Hor in Yue and Zubillaga-Pow 2012:45). Titled as "Outages on decency[4]," it reads:

[4] Singapore Statutes Online Plus, "377A: Outrages on decency," A Singapore Government Agency, Accessed August 30, 2020, https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/PC1871?ProvIds=pr377A-#:~:text=377A.,may%20extend%20to%202%20years.

> **377A.** Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or abets the commission by any male person or, any act of gross indecency with another male person, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years.

In connection, its mother statute, Section 377 titled "Unnatural offences" (of the British colonial penal code), criminalizes any sexual act that went "against the order of nature":

> **377.** Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine. Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary to the offence described in this section.

Singapore is one of the few former British colonies which still clings and adheres to this legislation, with the likes of India, for example, repealing it in 2018. While Singapore no longer actively enforces the law, LGBTQIA+ rights activists argue that its symbolism encourages discrimination and, in many ways, undermines the principles of equality (Lynette 2014:153).

Bali as a haven for the Indonesian transgender community

While a lot of anthropological work has been done in and on Bali, research pertaining to transwomen, in the realm of sex work particularly, is little to none. This is similar to the lack of research on Singaporean transwomen sex workers mentioned earlier.

While there is a growing body of literature on transgender individuals as a whole, research is saturated with work on transgender individuals living in the West, thus, the focus is on the Western transgender subjectivity (Graham Davies 2010). My research in the region, along with the growing interest from other scholars, hopes to address and fill this gap. Research on gender deviance is often conducted in other regions of Indonesia (not Bali), such as Jakarta, Java, or Makassar, and often exclusively looks at gay men with only a chapter or two dedicated to *warias* (Boellstorff 2005, 2007). This is frustrating but also exciting for me as a researcher; this thesis and research hopefully will contribute to the body of knowledge about transwomen sex work(ers) in Indonesia, particularly on the island of Bali.

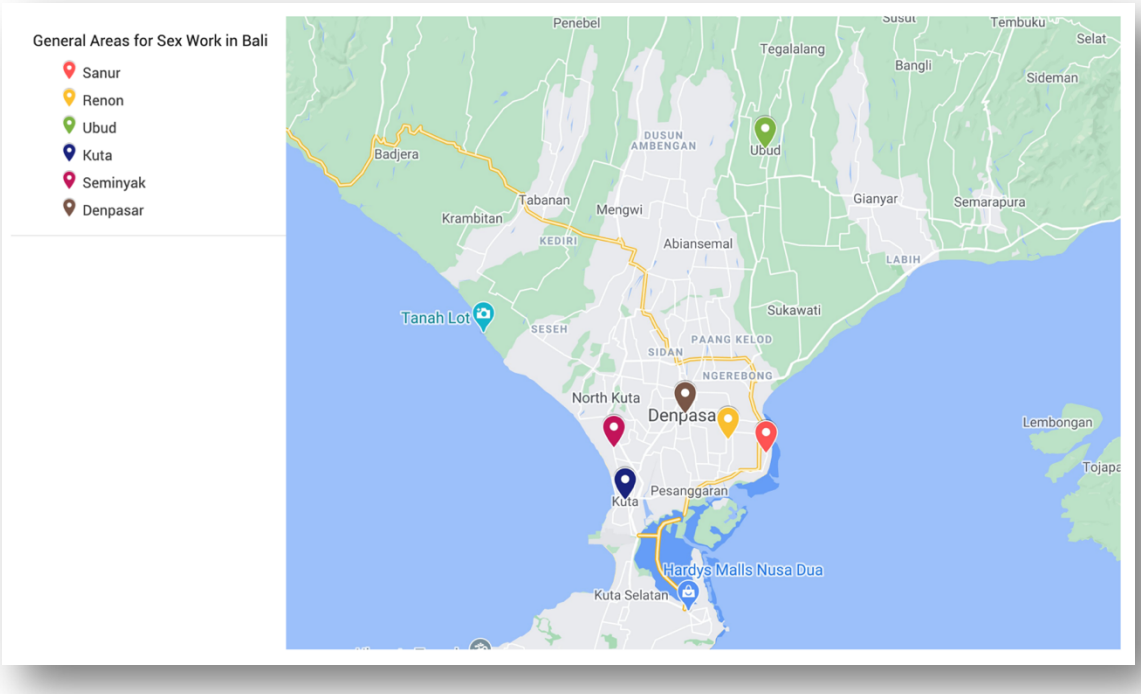

Figure 3. A map showing the areas in Bali where *warias* work and frequent as sex workers (2021). *Created by the author in Google Maps.*

Many of my informants expressed that living in Bali as a *waria* is safer compared to other parts of Indonesia. Shasha, a drag queen performer, shares:

> Living in Bali as a transgender is much easier than my previous place before. I can say that one, because from where I came from, religion is strong, and also discrimination is high in Java. Especially when they see a *waria*, they give us strange looks, that's why living in Bali is easier, because people here are so much open, they are open-minded and they accept *warias*.

Melati, a sex worker born and raised in Bali, echoes Shasha's sentiments on being a *waria* in Bali, as she says:

> I am happy that I was born and living in Bali as a transgender because, you know, based on my experience, sometimes I travel outside Bali to meet other transgender friends, and I feel staying there as a transgender is much more difficult. There's discrimination, and many are opposing transgender.

Another reason why Bali is an attractive "home" for *warias* is its economy and its reliance on tourism (Yamashita 2003). As the tourism industry occupies a very important place in its economy, Bali, known as the "Island of the Gods," with its distinctive culture based on Hinduism, the potential to earn an income especially as a *waria* is more fluid, as they participate in the economy and work as performers, entertainers, and sex workers for tourists.

Fieldwork and Methodology

Over the summer of 2017, I conducted participant observations and semi-structured interviews with 28 transgender women in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia (three in Singapore and 25 in Bali). I interviewed these women, with the aid of an interpreter for most of my Balinese participants, in the community centers of the non-profit organizations with whom I worked during my fieldwork. In some instances, I also

'worked' and volunteered with these women during community immersions, mostly at night, distributing 'care packages' and providing information through outreach programs in the red-light district alleys. Luckily, I was welcomed fully into the community, and was therefore able to do participant observation outside a formal interview setting (with consent of course). Apart from my transwomen participants and subjects, I also interviewed community members, including a psychiatrist who works with Singaporean transwomen to guide and help them prepare for sexual reassignment surgery (I call these "miscellaneous" interviews in my field notes; there are four in total), to learn more about these individuals outside their normal and usual circles.

To fully integrate and assimilate myself within the transwomen communities in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia, I did my best to participate in the community as much as possible during my nine weeks of fieldwork. However, this was no easy task (especially in the beginning of my fieldwork) as the communities I worked with were hesitant to even let me conduct interviews through them. Because of the nature of my topic, as with many researchers, particularly graduate students collecting data who leave with little to no post-research follow-up, the communities have grown tired and have felt betrayed with researchers who want to work with them. This meant extra efforts made to prove myself as a reliable researcher and a trustworthy outsider, since these very communities had felt 'used' by fellow academics who had previously worked on the topics of gender and sex work. As an anthropologist, it is important for me to build trust, rapport, and respect with the transwomen communities in which I worked. Since I am interested in their lived experiences, I had to make sure that I was not capitalizing on their trauma and histories of abuse to collect the data I needed. This process included re-listening to interviews and

reviewing notes (e.g., debriefing sessions with community leaders present during the interviews, or my translator) when the day was over to ensure the quality of interview questions and the research itself, but even more so, to create a safe space in which to share (from interviewees) and to listen and ask (for myself) throughout the interview time allotted.

Study Recruitment and Collaboration

Prior to my fieldwork, while writing my research prospectus, I mentioned to my then-supervisor, Dr. Gregory Forth, that I would like to ground my work and gain access to participants by working with an already well-established non-profit organization (or community) in the region(s) where I hoped to do my fieldwork. As it would be my first time traveling to and in both of my fieldwork sites, I wanted my research to be guided by trusted groups that work firsthand with the transwomen communities already in Singapore and Bali.

Months before I travelled to Southeast Asia, I initiated the process of relationship-building, and contacted multiple groups and organizations that I found online (and through referrals from other academics who had worked with the same region or topic, as well as acquaintances living in the region). This process was quite straightforward: I simply introduced myself, explaining who I am as a researcher, and mentioned the purpose and scope of my study, limitations, and expectations, to integrate myself from afar and to locate my actual field sites early on in my research (i.e., I originally wanted to do research in Jakarta, not Bali) (Spradley 1979:45). However, it is not until I arrived at my fieldwork sites that I found organizations who were willing to help me recruit and

connect with individuals who wanted to share their stories for my project. My actual presence as a researcher, in Singapore and Bali, gave me credibility and facilitated better conversations as to what my research hopes to accomplish, and what is expected from the organizations and interviewees should they commit to collecting data for my study.

In Singapore, I worked with Project X, the "only non-profit organization that provides social, emotional, and health services to people in the sex industry[5]." In Bali, I worked with *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* (YGD), which is "a community-based, non-profit organization providing HIV/AIDS education, prevention, care and support programs, sexual health and empowerment programs for the GWL [gay, *waria,* lesbian] community in Bali[6]." These two organizations accepted with open arms and in so many ways enriched my initial questions and overall research in ways I cannot quite capture or describe here (however I may try).

I had to be flexible with my participant recruitment. Given the fact that my initial attempts to connect with organizations prior to fieldwork did not produce the results I had expected, the project changed dramatically from its inception—a common experience for anthropologists (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:41). With limited time and funding, I had to adapt my study. This is most evident in the final demographic composition of my research. While I originally sought to conduct interviews which concerned power and beauty/vanity (e.g., participation in beauty pageants), I had to change my approach, including my evolving research questions, as most of my informants were sex workers and not beauty pageant queens (although they seem to be interested in the latter topic,

[5] "Project X | Singapore | More than just condoms," Website, Accessed August 30, 2020, https://theprojectx.org/.
[6] "*Yayasan Gaya Dewata*," Website, Accessed August 30, 2020, https://www.gayadewata.com/.

considering their work as entertainers and/or drag queens). This was definitely a challenge, but an exciting one; yet, I also knew I wanted my MA research on transwomen to expand on the work I had already completed for my undergraduate honours thesis (2016). Fortunately, I made the necessary changes, and reframed my questions and research in general to the benefit of this final research project.

Translation

As with any research, especially with multiple languages involved and in use, translation and transmission of knowledge (from interview material) can be problematic. Complex layers of meaning and nuances may be lost when people interpret what others are saying (especially when the interpreter is not also a native English speaker) (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:64). A translator may summarize what is said by the participant exactly, but there is also the possibility of statement omissions that may in fact reveal important information pertaining to the questions being asked and researched (especially when a participant's answer is long). In Singapore, my interview process was straightforward and seamless, as all participants spoke English (Singaporeans speak Singlish). However, in Bali, while I studied Bahasa Indonesia months before fieldwork (following my supervisor's recommendation), I decided to hire a translator for my interviews. On my first visit to *Yayasan Gaya Dewata*, Arya, a staff member, volunteered to be my translator for the duration of my fieldwork at the community center. I will be using translated material by Arya for my subjects from Bali[7].

[7] For clarity, I rephrased some of the translated material from Arya.

Arya was the only staff member from the organization who spoke English. Before my first interview, Arya and I had a conversation on the arrangement of the interviews, especially on how they will be translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English. Questions were to be translated on the spot, that is, I asked the questions in English, and Arya translated the question in Bahasa Indonesia to ask the interviewee. Arya provided English translations of the interviewees' answers right after their response. Probing questions were dependent on my instincts, and were based on the translated answers from Arya. In some instances, Arya probed the interviewee themselves. This usually happened in the beginning of each interview, when I began to learn about the person with whom I was speaking. As such, the quotes presented throughout this thesis are provided by Arya from the recorded interviews.

Data Collection

The data from this research project comes from informal and semi-structured interviews as well as participant observations conducted with transwomen sex workers in Singapore and Bali, Indonesia. I was flexible with my data collection, and I gave each interviewee the option to be audio-recorded (I took handwritten notes during the interview sessions as well). All interviewees consented to be recorded. Flexibility in many ways allowed me to build trust in the community and put my interviewees (and my interpreter in Bali) at ease; it further provided structure since, as an outsider, I wanted to make sure my methods were non-obtrusive and non-oppressive. I was also concerned with the safety of the interviewees, and created safe spaces to share lived experiences, and in many instances, stories of oppression and abuse (Devereux and Hoddinott 1993:32-34).

The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide, although I let the discussion and answers from the participants inform the flow of the conversation or the interview throughout (Skinner 2012:26).

As such, most my field notes are, as expected, also from the conducted interviews of 28 transwomen. These notes include observations from the interviews that were not captured orally, including gestures, mannerisms, hesitations, etc. These were kept in a notebook where I kept details about my participant observations as well. Participant observations for both of my field sites include volunteering with their outreach programs and immersions (see "red bags" story earlier), and attending group and staff meetings, including dinner events with members of the community (e.g., Project X's annual *Hari Raya* gathering).

Questions were left open-ended. I reviewed and adjusted questions as I progressed in my fieldwork, and as new themes emerged from the growing pool of informants and information, including questions that did not seem to work with informants (as I have mentioned, my initial research focus was not on sex work). Due to the language barrier, I tried my best to follow the order of my questioning for my Balinese interviewees as with the Singaporean. This, in part, was to benefit my translator (as I have noticed and he also mentioned himself that he gets lost sometimes when there is a lot of deviation from the interview guide/script that he follows during the interview). Interviews were generally relaxed. As expected, most of them were emotionally-charged when it came to discussing lived experiences working on the street as sex workers, and during conversations about familial relationships connected with abandonment and abuse.

I insisted to my interviewees that they choose where the interview take place. This was to ensure the comfort of participant-informants. Given the limited time I had with the informants, and due to the time constraints posed by their profession, I made sure to give them as much flexibility as possible. As most were already affiliated with my partner organizations, Project X and *Yayasan Gaya Dewata*, interviews were usually held in the community centres. Only one interview was held outside these premises in Singapore, whereas all interviews in Bali were conducted in *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* offices (in Denpasar and Kuta). I also met some of my informants outside the formal interviews, even after their interview session with me, during my volunteer shifts at the centres (e.g., during the *Hari Raya* gathering at Project X and an outreach event for *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* near Kuta Beach).

Figure 4. Project X's Annual *Hari Raya* gathering with volunteers (2017). *Posted with permission.*

Informants were given an honorarium. In Singapore, all interviewees asked for non-monetary tokens; I brought food and snacks for my interview visits. In Bali, in conversation with the *Yayasan Gaya Dewata*, we agreed to give a $10 CAD honorarium to the interviewees. This is a bump from the original $5 CAD honorarium outlined in my consent forms (i.e., $10 CAD is similar to the going hourly rate for sex workers on the island). While compensation might create friction between the respondents and the researcher (Devereux and Hoddinott 1993:21), I did not encounter issues connected to the honorarium with my interviewees during fieldwork.

Acknowledging Limitations and Reconciling Ethnography

While I still consider my research in Singapore and Indonesia to be ethnographic, I do acknowledge the limitations of my fieldwork. Looking back and upon reflection, I do find it hard to label the work as purely ethnographic. I have seen and met researchers and fellow students who claim their work as solely ethnographic when in fact it is not. Going to the field to conduct research does not make one's work automatically ethnographic. The main premise of ethnography is to employ participant observation as the main method of data collection. It is also centred around a researcher's conscientious immersion with the communities that are being studied. While I participated in the lives and realities of the transwomen communities in Singapore and Bali, much of the data used and employed for this thesis came from my semi-structured interviews, conducted with participants who were recruited with the help of established organizations—who had agreed to work with me. Indeed, Boellstorff (2007:11) argues that the term "ethnography" is misunderstood in humanities and social sciences, writing:

> Many researchers say they do work in ethnography, but in actuality they employ methods that would not be recognized as ethnographic by most anthropologists (for instance, conducting interviews in isolation from other activity, the transcribing and coding them according to predetermined values). Ethnography is both an epistemological approach and a linked series of methods, with "participant observation" as the key practice. This oxymoronic term refers to spending extended periods of time with the communities being studied, participating in the flow of daily life as much as possible.

While I initially hoped to conduct extensive participant observation studies with the transgender communities in Singapore and Indonesia, there were many barriers that prevented me from doing so. First, to work with transwomen sex workers, and be with them while they work, would hinder them from establishing the regular course of their business transactions with potential clients. In other words, a researcher's presence would be quite intrusive to their "business". For most, being that this work is their main source of income, I did not want my presence to limit that work, particularly when their testimonials would advance my research agenda, i.e., to collect data and material for my research. Second, while I did try to learn the language prior to my fieldwork, Bahasa Indonesia particularly, the language barrier proved difficult when trying to build a flow of conversation during interviews, between the participants and myself. However, I tried my best to immerse myself within the community whenever opportunities arose, or when I was invited to participate and given permission to observe. A researcher, especially in this community context, is still considered an outsider, and I stayed constantly aware of this fact during my observation phases.

In my case, this awareness and motivation manifested in my volunteer work, where I provided support at community centers in either location. For Project X, as already

mentioned, I helped with outreach programming, and distributed "red bags" to the sex workers in alleys—where they worked— at night. With a dedicated group of volunteers, I prepared bags to support that nightly outreach, and was invited to attend the project's annual *Hari Raya* gathering, where I cooked and cleaned, and was even given a chance to mingle with some transwomen sex workers outside of an interview setting. In Bali, for *Yayasan Gaya Dewata*, I observed several board meetings (conducted in Bahasa Indonesia) and was once brought along during an outreach effort in Kuta Beach. Otherwise, most interviews and participant observations were pursued in Denpasar, where the organization's main office is located.

Research Ethics, Anonymity, and Confidentiality

The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (REB) approved this project weeks before I flew to Southeast Asia. Given the sensitive topic of my research, risks for the study and fieldwork were high. As my project looks at the lives of a marginalized community, participants may experience and exhibit emotional distress during the interviews. Recalling childhood memories, non-existent familial and/or past abusive romantic ties and relationships, and unsafe work conditions among other testimonies, may trigger traumas that can be psychologically harmful to the participants. As a researcher, I worked to mediate these risks by being as prepared and attentive as possible (taking a Question-Persuader-Refer (QPR) training course in preparation, which is a certified suicide prevention training seminar) to the needs and state of my interviewees during observational interviews, always looking for potential cues or signifiers of distress. I also made sure to emphasize to my participants that they were not required to answer a

question if it made them comfortable. As well, there was a timeframe set out where they may withdraw from the study should they decide to do so, for any reason. Since interviews would cover difficult conversations—especially those that touch on issues of human rights and gender identity—my priority was (and is) the safety and emotional well-being of my participants. They have been kind and brave enough to allow themselves to be vulnerable, to open their lives and share daunting histories of alienation, abuse, and hardship. I am forever grateful for their insights, stories, and contributions to my research project.

The interview process was quite simple. Upon initiating an interview with a participant, I went over the contents of the informed consent process, and explained the research and its goals, as well as their rights as informants. All REB consent forms for all interviews were signed. Interviews were also recorded, and I obtained oral consent from my informants at the beginning of every interview session. I asked for oral consent before pressing "RECORD" on my audio recorder, and then mentioned it again during the first few seconds of the recording to make sure consent was similarly recorded (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007:147-148). Transcribed interviews resulted in ~400 pages of material in three languages (English, Singlish, and Bahasa Indonesia).

Due to the nature of their profession, I made sure that all data remained highly confidential and anonymous, while also respecting and honouring as much as possible respondent preferences per the presentation of their stories; these are their stories after all—I am merely borrowing and lending my voice (and analyzing these stories per specified, interconnected concepts and themes) to tell a coherent narrative. Topics surrounding sex work, especially in Asia, are considered taboo. I thus made sure that my

questions were not evasive; although I also recognize that myself, my translator, and my participants have their own biases. The names I will be using throughout this thesis were given by the participants themselves (these are their 'preferred' names they asked to be used for the write-up). Also, while all interviews were conducted in confidential settings (except for one completed in a busy food court), the identities of some of the informants may not be completely hidden even with all identifying characteristics stripped from the transcribed interviews and notes. This reality was explained to each interviewee very carefully. The information risks were also mentioned to participants.

Data Analysis

My field notes and interviews were transcribed and coded with grounded theory in mind; that is, themes emerge from the data itself even as I recognize and am conscious of my personal biases in my research (Glaser and Strauss 2008). I will therefore deploy a grounded theory approach throughout the rest of the study, which allows collected data speak for itself.

All collected interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe; this was however a laborious task that took almost a year (I had to listen to my interview files multiple times due to the different languages and translations, including editing). Still, this process made me more familiar with my own data during observation. This repeat listening similarly helped me locate and record the emergence of codes and themes from the data (Hahn 2008:76-77). The transcription process also revealed several other commonalities—subcodes and relationships—which allowed me to narrow the trajectory of the thesis and its corresponding themes and chapter breaks (Glaser and Strauss 2008; Hammersley and

Atkinson 2007). Afterward, the transcribed interviews were coded manually (using the traditional method of Post-Its and note-taking) and codes were arranged thematically. Thematic analysis is a method by which themes and patterns are identified, analyzed and reported within the data. It minimally organizes and describes your data in (rich) detail (Braun and Clarke 2006:76). Thematic analysis allowed a closer examination of the data to identify repeat themes and meanings, which facilitated the organization of that data into a cohesive and comprehensive trajectory, as further described in the coming chapters.

Conclusion

This opening chapter introduced my two field sites: Singapore and Bali (Indonesia), and sought to justify their anthropological appeal and relation to my research on transwomen sex workers in Southeast Asia. Given my positionality as an anthropologist, this chapter also outlines my research process, my fieldwork methodologies, and includes limitations and problems I experienced during data collection. I argue, through my own methodology, that anthropologists need to examine themselves throughout the research process and their fieldwork to more conscientiously address the ethnographic aspects of their work.

Broadly and thematically, this chapter looks at comparisons and patterns. At its best, anthropology works to place different ways of thinking and living into a holistic dialogue to ask what possibilities emerge from the notions of sameness and difference shaped by society, history, and power. As such, these next chapters will expand on this relocation, unsettling (and in many ways) challenging the assumptions and categories which seem dependent on time and place per this research topic.

II IN THE BEGINNING:

DISRUPTIONS, TRANSITIONS, AND TRANS-FORM-ASIANS •••

> I was in denial in my late teens because, at that point in time, I came from a very conservative family background so I'm a Muslim [and my] family they were very conservative and during that point of time it would take a lot of courage to, to declare who you are, who you are as a person and then you can't just walk like that, cross-dressing you know, it takes a lot of courage and people was still [name] calling me, other worries beside some religious obligation, I was thinking too much what would people think of me, right, because I can't do it right, I couldn't do it right, it's difficult to wear my sexuality on my sleeve, so to speak, so there wasn't much support and there was internal struggle so it was a very uncertain and gradual process at that point of time, that was during my late teens, I am approaching 50 [years old] now so, and I was worried about career, career options, I was worried about, there was emotional blackmail from my late mom so I didn't want to let her down, there was a lot of guilt, so it wasn't an easy process.
>
> Celina, 40 *ish*, Singapore

> ...I am different since I was [a] child but I didn't decide to transition because I have a dream of getting married, now I am married (with a woman), the other thing is that I don't want to embarrass my family with my transitioning because even though that I don't stay with them, I still go home regularly.
>
> Kimora, 28, Bali

> I start taking hormones last year when I transitioned to be a *waria*, when I was 18 [years old] and then I do injections and also take *kabi* pills and I do injection every week, 60,000 Rp, one time only and I also take some pill every day, 30 pills are about 120,000 Rp.
>
> Cuya, 19, Bali

Transitioning as "re/birth" or rite of passage

While genital surgery remains important for many, transitioning is no longer defined exclusively by those terms. We have also entered a chapter in history where people—especially those who identify as transgender or non-binary—transition more than ever (Gonzalez-Polledo 2017). Transitioning is the process of changing one's gender presentation and/or sexual characteristics to be treated and seen by others as that gender, and to manifest the internal sense of the gender by which they identify (i.e., physically, socially, legally, and medically, among others) (Ratnam et. al 1991). For many transwomen, transitioning is likened to a "rebirth" where they can finally live their "true" gender in the public sphere (Bolin 1988:48; van Gennep 1909).

As my previous[8] and current data suggests, transitioning early in life is the norm. Most of the transwomen I interviewed think of themselves as such by their early teens, even when they are still closeted or not presenting as feminine. As children, a lot of them engaged in play atypical for boys such as playing dolls; as Sherry, one of my Singaporean participants recalled, "I've been feeling like a woman since I was young because I don't do the male activities so I know there is something not right." Although some were discouraged by their family, eventually resulting in abandonment or disownment, many of my participants see these activities as formative; such environments allowed them to better understand themselves to become the transwomen they are now. However, it is important to note that there is no one size fits all model or process when it comes to transitioning. The process by which someone transitions and the actions it includes will be, like almost everything else, part of the individual's journey, which is unique to each

[8] My undergraduate honors thesis also looked briefly on transitioning among transwomen.

person. While transitioning for some happens over a short period of time (i.e., presenting and passing as a woman/feminine), for others, it is a long, ongoing, and arduous process. Transitioning is a rite of passage for many transwomen; it is their departure from their male birth persona and an entrance to their "true" woman gender role and identity (Bolin 1988; van Gennep 1909).

In this chapter, I utilize the traditional anthropological concept of rites of passage, attributed to van Gennep (1909). Moreover, using Bolin's seminal work on 'transsexual' (this is the term used in her book) rites of passage (1988), in connection to Becker's (1999) research on "disrupted lives", I will outline the multifaceted process involved when an individual decides to transition. I argue that transitioning is more than a simple switch of status—it is a becoming.

Transitioning as a Rite of Passage and "Disrupted Lives"

> Transitions from group to group and from one social situation to the next are looked on as implicit in the very fact of existence, so that a man's life comes to be made up of a succession of stages, with similar ends and beginnings: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death. For every one of these events there are ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined. (van Gennep 1909 [1960]:3)

van Gennep and Bolin's Rites of Passage

First outlined by van Gennep in 1909, the rite of passage scheme is a three-way and multilateral model which accounts for the ordering and patterning of the ceremonial life of, as observed by van Gennep, non-technologically complex

peoples—which often encompasses biological (bodily) and social (status) change. According to van Gennep, rites of passage in the complete form have three distinct phases, and each rite or stage could have its own three phases as well. The three distinct phases are separation, transition, and reincorporation. The rite(s) of separation refer to the symbolic removal of an individual from their previously occupied world. Rite(s) of transition, on the other hand, are the liminal (or threshold) stages wherein an individual prepares for their reunion or reintegration back to the society (after the separation). Lastly, rite(s) of incorporation are a form of social return to the individual's group (or village), from which they have become physically or symbolically removed. These changes and phases are marked, often dramatized, by symbolic components (for some, including supernatural) in the individual's change of status.

In her book, "In Search of Eve: Transsexual Rites of Passage," Bolin (1988) argues that transgender individuals are participating in an unusual rite of passage; more specifically, she speaks on the topic of transition(ing) per its own phases of separation, transition, and incorporation. This aligns with van Gennep's claim that each rite also has its own distinct phases or rites of passage. The rite(s) of separation during the transitioning of a transwoman comprise a series of events, whereby the individual is physically and symbolically removed in their 'former' world as males or a man. The next phase, the rite of transition, is marked by the shift, preparation, and 'taking on' of a new status role—as a woman—in anticipation of re-entering society legitimately accepted as a woman. Finally, the (rite of) incorporation is characterized through the conversion of their male

genitalia to a neo-vagina (if they decide to undergo sexual reassignment or realignment surgery). With this change in the physical appearance of their genitalia, which is often considered as achieving the unachievable by many, these individuals are more completely integrated into society as women—thereby fulfilling the cultural requirement which sees women as people with a vagina, and ultimately gaining access to the most intimate sector of a woman's social existence. Simply put, a transwoman's rites of passage to womanhood can be considered a symbolic death and rebirth: severing themselves from a male past, forging their identities as women, and feminizing their bodies and physicality through hormone interventions and/or medical surgeries.

In my research, the rites of passage schema (both in its original conception by van Gennep and in Bolin's application of it to transwomen) provides a crucial framework through which we may understand the dynamics and processes of transitioning from male to female. Via the application of this analytical and theoretical framework to the context of a transwoman's life course, we may reveal the cultural components and intricacies inherent to the social contracts of these women's unique passage to womanhood.

Becker's "Disrupted Lives": Navigating Discontinuity and Creating Continuity

Becker's (1999) phenomenological approach on "disrupted lives" also offers a useful perspective towards understanding the lives of transwomen as they shift and negotiate their identities (both physically and socially) within the places or spaces they occupy. Becker acknowledges the central role of disruption and

discontinuity in an individual's life course, and in connection, how people rework their ideas about themselves and their worlds to make meaning and eventually create some sort of continuity in their lives. She argues a "disrupted life" is comprised of three major elements: the disruption itself, a period of limbo (liminality), and a period of life reorganization (Becker 1999:2). Similar and in alignment with van Gennep's (and Bolin's) rites of passage theories, this framework provides a clear structure on how transwomen navigate disruption and meaning-making among themselves and the society in which they participate.

To best create continuity, Becker suggests looking at the body as a starting point through which we may understand the lived experiences of individuals and look at the activities and practices of everyday life; the body creates culture, and culture affects the life course where disruption and continuity occur. Moreover, our bodies create categories for social analysis. I strongly believe the lives of the transwomen I interviewed for this project perfectly encapsulate Becker's concept of a "disrupted life"; indeed, their growth demands a shift in identity as they continually negotiate their existence within their specific cultural location.

As mentioned, this chapter looks at transitioning. As such, it focuses on the body and its adaptability, particularly through medical intervention, to create order, alignment, and continuity in the lives of these transwomen. By looking at the different forms, types, and procedures associated with transitioning, we may better understand how location, as well as cultural and social institutions, can intersect to provide a glimpse into the communal lives of these individuals. In turn,

such a process may reveal how this population grounds their resistance to the power of social norms, specifically through bodily changes and experience.

Forms and Types of Transitioning

> Surgeons don't operate on desire or justice or fantasy or redemption or self-actualization or shame or any of the other things that surgeries might meant to trans-people. Surgeons procedures on body parts… How patients relate to those goals, how they contribute to their formation and make sense of them afterward are intimately linked to the technical work of surgery but are not the same as that work. (Plemons 2017:17)

Although transitioning can mean different things for different individuals, the ultimate outcome is to be recognized, treated, and respected as a woman in the course of everyday life. It is important to note that an individual's transitioning process (e.g., from male-to-female) is defined by that person alone. For many, transitioning simply starts with semi-permanent changes to their appearance (e.g., growing their hair and/or putting on makeup) or the way they dress. Others start to transition by simply coming out to their family, choosing their preferred pronouns, and changing their birth or legal names. For many, they view transition as life-long, while others consider and view transition(ing) as a 'phase' that has a defined beginning and end.

In this section, I outline four of the most common transitioning processes, as well as the intervention models by which transwomen transform their social identities—and ultimately feminize their social bodies. As the realm of gender research is dynamic, and since today's fields of technological and medicinal research are ever-evolving, this list is not exhaustive. In many ways, while these processes are independent from each other,

they are complementary towards a common goal: they help an individual become a woman.

Facial feminization surgery (FFS)

In the book "The Look of a Woman," a landmark ethnographic study published in 2017, Eric Plemons describes facial feminization surgery as "a set of bone and tissue reconstructive procedures intended to feminize the faces of transwomen". Facial feminization surgery is a fundamental aspect to the male-to-female transition. In fact, the World Professional Organization for Transgender Health (WPATH)[9] considers facial feminization surgery a fundamental and medically necessary process, integral to the well-being of transgender individuals and those who experience gender dysphoria.

FFS includes several surgical procedures to transform and give the face a "softer" feminine appearance. While everyone will have unique needs and thus will require different procedures, FFS typically includes bony and soft tissue surgeries of the face, neck, and thyroid cartilage, often complemented with laser hair removal. Popular FFS surgeries include brow lifts, nose reshaping, and cheek and lip implants. While there is no one feature that defines a "masculine" or "feminine" face, these procedures can offer a transwoman a degree of harmony between their true gender, can increase their confidence and self-esteem, and

[9] "Standards of Care Version 7," Online publication, Accessed August 30, 2020, https://www.wpath.org/publications/soc.

ultimately help them to “pass” more effectively in public spheres as a woman (Plemons 2017:148).

Hormone therapies and injections

Also known as transfeminine hormone therapy, transgender hormone therapy (male to female) is a hormone and sex reassignment/realignment procedure which facilitates the change of secondary sexual characteristics. The effects of hormone therapy are not just physical, yet research shows that these therapies also benefit the mental health of the transgender individual in question (Devor and Haefele-Thomas 2019:62).

As the existence of transwomen and gender non-normative individuals in Southeast Asia is still taboo, many do not have access to safe and medically-prescribed hormone therapies. In my interviews, many informants reported that they receive their “hormone supply” thanks to personal connections with a medical professional in their local community, at the local drugstore, or by ordering online from unregulated pharmacies, and bargaining on the black market. Many of these transwomen also self-medicate without the help of a practitioner. This is not surprising, since access to hormone therapy is different throughout the world due to varying laws, religion, or even prejudice. Another factor is the long wait times for transwomen who want to see a psychiatrist or a physician, as well as the high cost of hormones should they officially be prescribed by a practitioner. This is the reality for many transwomen in Southeast Asia, particularly in countries

where the medical system is underdeveloped compared to those in the West. As Cassandra, a Singaporean trans activist notes:

> ...the way I find hormones is online, from the Internet and just like shipped them from an online pharmacy and I actually took that for 5 months until I actually went to see a psychiatrist, an endocrinologist, and the psychiatrist convinced my mom that allowing me to take the hormones is the best course of action for me so my mom reluctantly consented and I've been on hormones since then so it's been about 13 months, coming to 14 months.

This is no different than from the ways in which Balinese transwomen access hormone therapy, especially without the help of a doctor or a specifically trained specialist or psychiatrist for trans management. For Yuni, choosing between hormones and having food on the table, including the side effects, made her stop her hormone therapy and injections, as she relates:

> ...I start using hormones when I was in Bali (originally from Java), when I was 15 years old I'm using both pill and injection and the *kabi* (birth control pill) but I don't like the side effects like decreased libido, it's not good when I'm using the pill so I just use injection of the *kabi* but… I don't use in the last 3 years because I do not have enough money to do the hormones but before when I was still young I'm using hormone like once a week and I pay like still cheap, 15,000 Rp to 20,000 Rp per injection but now maybe it's more expensive so that's why because I'm *haram* (forbidden), difficult to get customer now.

While hormone therapies are important to the reaffirmation of one's gender identity, and the improvement of a transwoman's overall quality of life, side effects as mentioned by Yuni are also common. Risks and complications include blood clotting, weight gain, liver malfunction, erectile dysfunction, and decreased libido

among others (Ratnam et. al 1991:50-52). Many are often unaware of the risks, and only learn of these possible harmful effects once they have started their hormone therapies.

Top Surgery: Breast augmentation and/or implants

While some individuals see results when they take hormones, many transwomen complement their hormone therapy via mammoplasty, since it further enhances one's appearance (i.e., improves chest shape; "passing") and it builds more confidence. Others seek mammoplasty to alleviate their distress due to gender dysphoria; they might not feel their resulting breast size (especially from hormone therapy) is adequate, and so, some continue to wear prostheses and pads. In my research, for many transwomen especially in Southeast Asia, this is the final step of their transition (or reconstructive surgery) as many do not want or cannot afford sexual reassignment surgeries.

Top surgery usually involves the placement of breast implants or tissue expanders beneath the breast tissue. In some cases, fat is taken from other parts of the body and injected into the breasts (Ratnam et al. 1991:60-63). Both techniques, depending on the case, might be used at once, where needed. Shasha, who chose to undergo mammoplasty, relates:

> ...and then 2015, I did the surgery for my breast. I did this surgery in one of hospital in Bali, the private hospital in Bali and then I spend like 35,000,000 Rp and it's like $3,500 CAD and the expenses that I spend is much more expensive than my actual hospital bill, I asked them to serve [me] with the good room and good service… at the moment, I really don't have a plan to do genital surgery because I think that even if I [do] genital surgery later, it doesn't change

> anything, I wouldn't have children from myself and also that I will not be able to marry a man legally in Indonesia.

As with any other type of a major surgery, mammoplasty poses risks and complications. Some of these include bleeding (hematoma), infection (implant displacement), fluid accumulation beneath the skin, adverse reaction to anesthesia, and dissatisfaction with appearance after surgery. The process of correcting such complications may require more surgery, and more money. Routine implant replacement is also needed, usually every ten years, as part of the surgery's upkeep regimen.

Bottom surgery: Sexual reassignment/realignment surgery

There is a saying which goes, "beauty is pain," and for many transwomen, physical pain is a necessary part of transitioning—particularly for those looking to approximate the ideals of female beauty and anatomy. Sexual reassignment surgeries, also known as "bottom surgeries," are medical and surgical procedures that a transgender individual may choose to undergo to match their "true" gender. As my thesis looks at transwomen, my discussion on this section will focus on vaginoplasty (i.e., an outer and inner vagina using skin and tissue grafts from a penis). The procedure is outlined below, in simple and non-medical terms (Ratnam et al. 1991:65-71):

1. The surgeon will use skin from the penis and scrotum to build the inner and outer labia of the vagina;
2. The surgeon will create a new opening for the urethra (to urinate); and,
3. The surgeon will use tissue from the foreskin of the penis to build the new opening of the vagina (also called the introitus).

While many transwomen consider their bottom surgery as the *magnum opus* of their transition phase, others do not feel that way when it comes to their sexual reassignment surgery. While many hope to receive such surgery in the future, Sherry, one of the Singaporean interviewees, describes her reasons in detail on why she will not opt in for that surgery herself.

> Kevin (K): Are you planning to do a sex [gender reaffirming] reassignment surgery?
>
> Sherry (S): For sex reassignment surgery, no. Because I don't see how it would provide [a] solution to my concern, no. Because I feel if people still look at me as a transwoman, then despite being a post-op, or pre-op, I don't want to spend thousands of dollars to change my gender [genitals] but then they still look at me as a transwoman, you know, because it takes a lot of preparation—mentally, physically, financial as well—all these things, a lot of consideration to be taken before you go for the surgery, so if you pass all these and then I've heard that, "oh, she's still a man," it only hurts me more and then I apply for a job but me bringing ID, female but actually a man before [becoming a] transwoman, see that's another problem, it's still a concern unless people are opening up.
>
> K: I know others do it to really affirm their gender identity, do you think it would help?
>
> S: For some, they do because they know that yeah I wanna be a woman, why do I still have a penis, that's why they do surgery, for some, but some they would do it because it's needed to complete them that's why they do, so those are the reason [as] to why they had the surgery done especially at the distant age, different ways you know, some do sex work, earning enough to…
>
> K: That's my follow-up question.
>
> S: They earn enough because it costs thousands of dollar for a surgery, or some do work a regular job for months even years and they maybe only can earn enough to pay, to afford for the cost you

> know so there's still a lot of things that we had to go through before [we] can finally head to, because it's not like "oh, I'm a transwoman, I think the solution is to have the surgery done," it's not as easy as that because as a society I feel pretty, put it in a way that to the youth transgender, they are sure, even if you're a woman, you have to have a breast, you have to have a perfect proper surgery, you have to have a beauty background, make-up, dressing, and things like that, because that's what society portrays for them because why? Woman is seen as having a breast, having a pussy, having a vagina, putting on make-up, putting on a dress, blah blah blah, you know, that's not the right way [as] to how someone should portray a woman you know, a woman could be of anything, a woman doesn't have to be someone who has a vagina, a big breast, good face you know because all these things are the things that you only put youth in a tough situation because as a youth you'll grow up thinking I still need to go to school, however, I wanna look beautiful, how do I look beautiful, I have to go for surgery, so where do they get the money? Some are interested in sexual industry and some drop out of school and they find other job because they want to achieve the facial feminization surgery, sex reassignment surgery fast, breast augmentation surgery fast and then they compromise the education because of that, because "yes, oh I'm a transwoman and I'm looking for [money] for breast so I'm gonna find ways to get it done as soon as possible" because that's what society put them into.

The literature also suggests that the constraints of workplace, culture, laws, and respect to their family or parents are the main reasons why transwomen will decide not to undergo a sex reassignment surgery (Winter et al. 2007:85). As well, religion also plays a role in their decision, such that one's holy body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and thus, altering it is unacceptable. Others say that they would not have the surgeries and operations even if they could afford it, citing the health risks, even though they identify as transwomen. Indeed, these women still see

themselves as male-bodied (explaining that gender is more internal and that physical manifestations are just part of the whole).

During my fieldwork in Singapore, I was also fortunate to interview Dr. Tsoi Wing Foo, who is one of the authors of "Cries from Within: Transsexualism, Gender Confusion, and Sex Change", a book published in 1991 which looks at early sex reassignment surgeries in Singapore. Dr. Wing Foo, who has worked with the trans community to manage referrals and recommendations in preparation for sex reassignment surgeries since 1970s, will be retiring soon, a concern shared by many in the community. In our conversation, Dr. Wing Foo said jokingly that there is no service (trans management) for transgender individuals in Singapore, and that "he is the service". However, he mentioned that trans individuals usually go to the hospital for counselling to ensure good mental health. He said that while there are some clinics in Singapore who offer sex reassignment surgery, many still seek services outside Singapore due to cost, particularly in Thailand where there are more options and the cost is less. Dr. Wing Foo also said many go "under the knife" in bogus clinics that offer cheaper surgeries, which are a concern, as the outcome can be fatal due to negligence and unsafe surgical practice.

As with top surgery, there are many risks associated with bottom surgery. These will be explicitly explained by the surgeon beforehand with a consent form to sign so the individual who will undergo the procedure fully understands any potential risks and complications. These include bleeding (internal and external), infection, poor healing of incisions, nerve injury, inadequate depth of the vagina, injury to the urinary tract, and painful intercourse, among others.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the effort to create order is what anthropologists study. An examination of the "disrupted lives" of transwomen therefore shows an effort to regain a sense of continuity while providing important social commentary on the cultural dynamics and expectations that lie at the very root of these disrupted experiences. For many transwomen, the choice to transition is the start of that life disruption—it separates them from their male persona, and creates a liminal space that is temporarily or permanently present while they build or improve the continuity of their identity and lives, and eventually reincorporate themselves into society as their true selves.

The following chapter will look further at the concept of order and continuity, since transwomen participate and create spaces for their talents and skills to survive (as a form of income), to show that they are much more than what meets the eye.

III BETWEEN AND BETWIXT: EXPOSING BEAUTY AND BENDING FEMININITY THROUGH NON-NORMATIVE PROFESSIONS •••

> I am actually working in a salon in Sumbawa and then when I moved to Bali 3 years ago, I also start working in salon and then realized that the money is not enough to stay here in Bali just working in the salon, my friend offered me to work as a sex worker in the street and then I try to work in the salon during the day but also working as a sex worker in the evening but my body can't handle it, that's when I decided to be a full-time sex worker and stop working in a salon because working as a sex worker, you can get so much more money than in a salon.
>
> Nabila, 27, Bali

> I'm so sad for these conditions, I am sorry for everyone because many transgender have talent and they can use it to live another way of life but maybe this is dependent on the mindset, some transgender like being a sex worker but there is also no chance to get out from "that business." Maybe in the future if I'm successful, I would like to open vacant jobs (in my business) for my transgender friends, they don't need to be a sex worker, they have to think about the future, they do not want to be a sex worker forever, they need to open their eyes."
>
> Katty, 26, Bali

> I don't blame the transgender sex workers, maybe there are a couple of reason that's why they do that one, maybe they don't have a choice, they do not have [a] job or they don't have any choice on the money and they don't have enough education but for me sometimes also the transgender who has high education also still go to the street as a sex worker, maybe because they need not only money but they have [other] need, they feel satisfied with a customer from there so there's many kind of reason of that one but I have a lot of friend, I don't blame them, that's up to them.
>
> Vira, 39, Bali

This chapter will look at the different non-normative professions in which transwomen participate for socialization and survival. The chapter follows three sections. First, I will explore the notions of beauty pageants as sites of power negotiations and performance. My interest in beauty pageants, power, and performance began in my undergraduate honours program, and I have decided to continue and expand on that work for my MA research. While the focus of this thesis is on transwomen sex workers, many interviewees participated in some form of pageantry. I will therefore take my next steps to summarize their participation in sex work, and lastly (in connection to both beauty pageants and sex work), will pay attention to their involvement and contribution to the world of drag and entertainment, including beauty work. Altogether, I outline the importance of their participation in informal, non-normative labour economies which ultimately aid in their transition process and in grounding their gender identity.

Liminality and the In-Between

Individuals who undergo some form of physical transformation (i.e., transitioning) may experience a temporary liminal state as they transition from one gender identity to the other. This includes their experiences when they occupy a certain social space through their participation in informal professions and labour economies. This phase illustrates the transient and complex nature of gender identity formation.

Victor Turner (1969/2008) described liminal individuals as people who inhabit in-between roles per specified customs and conventions. In the case of transgender individuals, the liminal state starts with their biology. For this community, liminality is transformative and is guided by symbolic rituals such as changing one's name, cutting or

growing one's hair, taking hormone therapies, and/or gender affirming surgeries. This experience gives transgender individuals the freedom to transcend cultural and structural constraints, and to refashion and re-establish their identities. It can be argued then, that liminality, as opposite to a more rigid binary, introduces and opens possibilities for eventual social change, especially when it comes to gender categories and identities.

Turner further argues that during the liminal phase or period, a community of support often emerges ("communitas"). As such, this theoretical lens lends itself to this chapter, since the professions I outline and list are community-driven, especially per the roles they play on the socialization of these individuals. Moreover, these "communities" include other outsiders who provide moral support for these individuals (such as anthropologists). The liminal phase for these individuals may in turn encourage creativity, freedom, and agency, and may inspire such individuals to learn more and dig deep to find their true selves and gender through their own, unique rites of passage process.

The liminality theory enables and illustrates how individuals transition from one gender identity to another; however, others remain somewhat liminal (as we can see in the detransitioning chapter); in these cases, individuals move along a continuum throughout their life course from feminine to masculine (for some, back and forth), and inhabit the places in-between (e.g., beauty pageants, drag, or sex work). During this process of "alignment"—of 'matching' their bodies with their mind', many become seen as second or lower class citizens with lesser status, particularly within social institutions. Indeed, these institutions are more likely than most to focus on binary gender conformity rules. While many researchers and theorists argue and frame gender as fluid, norms still exist to control and police gender roles in unlikely places, even when it is occupied by many

gender-fluid individuals. Because of their (gender) presentation, many are at risk of being reprimanded and "corrected" emotionally, mentally, and physically by those who expect gender conformity based on the rigid and familiar (gender) binary arrangements. For some, rather than remaining in a liminal or in-between status, they eventually align along either side of the male/female gender binary (Gagne and Tewksbury 1998).

Transgender Beauty Pageants

> I always thought it was very positive to dream… Many people do not have the information on what it means to be a transgender woman. To have a part of you which tells you that your identity is female. Identity is with us since we're born. To eradicate intolerance, I think it would be very important to foster those values from a young age. I'm here to represent diversity of humans in the world. My hope is for tomorrow, to be able to live in a world of equality for everyone. Simply for us all to understand that we human and that we must make all our lives easier together. That reality for many people is going to change. If I can give that to the world, I don't need to win Miss Universe, I only need to be here.
>
> Angela Ponce, Miss Universe Spain 2018

In 2018, Angela Ponce made history. She became the first openly transgender woman to compete at Miss Universe in the 66 years that it has been running. The ban against transgender contestants was officially lifted in 2012[10], but Ponce was the first contestant to compete since the lift. Ponce did not win but her participation was considered a landmark moment for LGBTQ history, particularly to the trans community.

[10] The Miss Universe Organization changed it rules to allow transgender women in the competition starting 2013 after a public outcry over the disqualification of Canadian beauty queen Jenna Talackova.

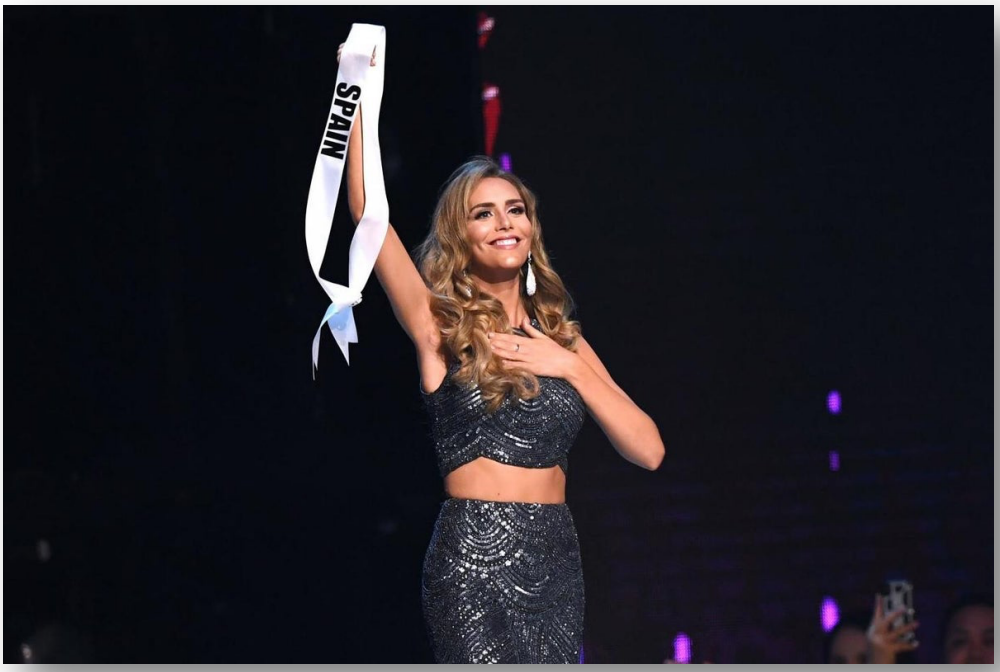

Figure 5. An image from Miss Universe's *"Celebrating Miss Universe Spain 2018 Angela Ponce"* (2019). Photo credit: The Independent UK.

Beauty pageants or contests have long been part of the transgender experience, particularly in the (Southeast) Asian context. These competitions were traditionally judged based on physical attributes of the contestants, and throughout the years have evolved to include other criteria or reiterations to "crowning" a winner. Arguably, beauty pageants are locations of construction, both for and of cultural meaning. Beauty pageants often resonate with the audience and encourage them to believe that any ordinary (trans)woman can become a "winner", in this case, in the contest, but symbolically speaking, in life. It depicts a community, and it claims to be inclusive, giving equal opportunities to those who are brave enough to join or participate (within a set criteria). The beauty queen is thus more than just the actor performing a ritual of collective cultural

identity, but also a shared system of elective representations, observers/audiences, and a means of symbolic production and/or social power (Alexander 2004).

All that being true, beauty pageants, no matter the stage (whether international or local), put the ideal image of femininity on display. In my research on transgender beauty pageants, just like cisgender beauty contests, body movements, gestures, and speech are extremely stylized, where even the simplest of action becomes a performative event of its own. These include waving to the audience, smiling to the judges and camera, and even clapping or wiping sweat while on the stage. This section will therefore examine meaning-making in beauty pageants. For transwomen, these pageants provide a space and opportunity for upward mobility and empowerment, and at the same time are a site rife with opportunities for oppression. From here, I will outline the types of beauty pageants in which transwomen participate. Such a review will provide an important commentary on how transwomen navigate beauty pageant norms while simultaneously creating a version of themselves that opposes what is considered traditional and proper in the face of contest-based gender performance.

Prestigious

These beauty pageants/contests are mainstream competitions exemplified by events such as Miss Universe and Miss World, both televised globally by mainstream media. These are the very beauty pageants in which many of my participants took part, where for others, these prestigious pageants are the ones in which they hope to one day participate. In these highly competitive contests, points are awarded for beauty, elegance, and intelligence, which is a nod to the cisgender

pageants we easily recognize. In Asia, even when the first language is English, the questions—often relating to politics, careers, and law—are more highly favoured when answered in English, which emphasizes the cosmopolitan and Western source of pageantry prestige. Still, these contests have become avenues through which many may talk about transgender rights—for example, earnest contestant calls for societal acceptance, or other issues, such as a Miss Earth calling to save Mother Earth (Johnson 1997). Moreover, these contests serve as avenues for transwomen to "expose" their beauty and to pass publicly as feminine and womanly to the greatest possible extent, while at the same time emphasizing their importance to society—that they are much more than meets the eye.

Biba, a full-time sex worker and an occasional beauty pageant queen, told me her motivations on why she is keen to join these contents. She recalls:

> I've only joined beauty pageants in Singaraja, Miss *Wargas* and also Miss *Kebaya* last time and I always win. Well, I got third place in Miss *Wargas* and last time with Miss *Kebaya* I got People's Choice Award… the reason why I enter [these] competitions [is] because I want to express myself and also to show my talents because… I also have a talent as a singer—live singer—I also sometimes receive work, jobs as a singer, same with Safa [one of my participants], usually with Safa because if Safa has a job, she also brings me sometimes.

Vira, a full-time make-up artist echoes the sentiments of Biba, as she shares:

> I'm really happy [joining beauty pageants] because I like the process of preparing the costumes and then I can [do] make-up and then show the people that I'm good in catwalk plus I will be very proud if I win the competition because I never lose in beauty pageants…

These beauty pageants serve as a kind of 'ticket' where transwomen may show their skills and educate the public on their everyday plight and existence. While scrutiny is part of these competitions as well, for some, this is the only way to challenge stereotypes connected to the trans community—through their magnificent transformations and reimagining of what feminine and "woman" really mean—not only amongst the broader social community but also among and within themselves.

Tragicomedy

In this type of beauty pageant, transwomen portray "exaggerated characterizations, parodies of the stereotypically self-absorbed, and sexually voracious, predatory transwoman" (Johnson 2007:219). Portrayal of womanhood is done with great exuberance and dramatic flair, sometimes, to the point that even I cannot be considered feminine (based on heteronormative ideals of femininity). Given the comic nature of these contests, there is always an anticipation that the "male will emerge accidentally from the female" or the beauty of the transwoman contestant will be "unglued" which is an occasion for catcalls, mockery, and laughter from the audience that are not always compassionate (Nanda 2000:84). These contests are in some ways then, the opposite of the prestigious kind.

Doing Drag and Sex Work and Performativity

> Everyone is born naked and after that, everything is drag.
>
> Ru Paul

While sex work and drag are two distinct professions for a lot of my participants, in this section, I will talk about them in connection with each as other, since many interviewees occupied both spaces as they negotiated (and continue to negotiate) their livelihoods and means of survival.

The worldwide success of the American reality TV show "RuPaul's Drag Race"[11] (first aired in 2009) has infiltrated and elevated the profile of drag culture and drag queens. Although drag shows on stage (e.g., often in comedy/entertainment/gay clubs) have been a popular form of entertainment for years, Drag Race made the practice more prominent and more accessible than ever. Since the show's inception, eight[12] transwomen have competed in Drag Race in America.

Drag is commonly associated with a gay man dressing up as a woman, and embodying a larger than life persona (Diaz et al. 2018). It is also used as a term to describe heterosexual men who don women's clothing for comedy[13]. Drag, in a way, breaks down the limitations of femininity (and masculinity for drag kings). While many transgender people are not interested in drag, a lot of transwomen perform it regularly.

---

[11] However, Ru Paul's comments about transwomen joining the Drag Race was met with controversy. In 2018, he admitted that he *probably* would not have admitted previous contestants that identify as transgender if they already started gender-affirming surgery. He said, "You can identify as a woman and say you're transitioning, but it changes once you start changing your body… it takes on a different thing; it changes the whole concept of what we're doing." This comment caused massive outrage in the drag community. Many of the shows former stars rejected this opinion, and some publicly turned against him. He later apologized: "I understand and regret the hurt I have caused… the trans community are heroes of our shared LGBTQ movement. You are my teachers."

[12] Sonique (Season 2), Carmen Carrera (Season 3), Stacy Layne Matthews (Season 3), Jiggly Caliente (Season 4), Kenya Michaels (Season 4), Monica Beverly Hillz (Season 5), Gia Gunn (Season 6, All Stars 4), and Peppermint (Season 9).

[13] This type of drag is considered satire on women, and it is not connected to gender exploration or presentation.

For some, taking on a female drag persona is also part of their transitioning—it socializes them on how to be "feminine"—in some cases by learning how to properly put on make-up and women's clothes, which ultimately helps them "pass" even when they are not performing.

In my interviews, the transwomen who identify as "performers" or "showgirls" are what we consider drag queens in the West. This conceptualization is an example of cultural borrowing—while they do not call themselves "drag queens", their performances meet that definition. As Francisca happily tells me during the interview:

> Kevin (K): Tell me about your participation in the entertainment—beauty pageants or drag.
>
> Francisca (F): Well, actually I'm starting to join competitions like a beauty queen or drag queen show in Bali, before in other city, I never join… I start doing some drag queen show in Bali then I also [join] some beauty contest in Bali… I think it is important for transgender community and also important for me, why? I join [them] because when I join this competition or shows as a drag queen I feel like a real woman.
>
> K: When you said showgirl (mentioned earlier in the conversation), is that different from drag queen shows, or is that the same?
>
> F: The same. I play all characters but I like Katy Perry, Jennifer Lopez.

For others, doing drag or working in the entertainment industry is also their way to look for sponsors who may help them financially as they transition. Shasha, relates her story of how a Swiss family who watched her show in Bali sponsored one of her surgeries, and treated her as if she was one of their children:

> The first time I did a surgery, this sponsor from the *bule* (foreigner) family but I don't have any relationship with them, it's one family, father, mother, and their children, sponsor for the surgery here in Bali so they think that I

> am their children, so this is good, I didn't have to give anything back to them like there is no sex… only if they are here I have to meet them and we hang out together, we have dinner together, so for the future I don't have any plan to do surgery again, I think this is enough… I [met] them in Sanur, in one of the hotels… they liked me and on that time that my stocking was broken and she said to me, the mother actually speak to me firstly and then she say she would bring some stocking for me… a few weeks later, they [came] back and bring lot of stockings in one box.

Also, for many of my Balinese participants, being a "performer" or a "showgirl" is their escape from sex work, while for others this industry can also be their first foray in sex itself. If an audience is interested in a particular performer, negotiation usually happens after the show, whereby a transwoman may offer sex or companionship for extra payment. As Fenita shares:

> Well, if I am performing in the bar, usually someone like me and then they will give me a tip and then from that one that we get a connection after [I] finish my show and then I try to say hi to them and then if all match and all sweet and then we have a negotiation first and then I will go to his hotel or he go to my place, usually if we match each other, the same also with online, we make a negotiation from dating application or online prostitution, there is so much online prostitution… that you can enter for that one and then we make a negotiation before we meet.

•••

Transwomen who engage in sex work face a double whammy. First, stigma attached to their gender identity (or to gender nonconformity in general) is compounded and heightened by the stigma attached to sex work. Second, many transwomen sex workers experience dysphoria as a result of the incongruence between their gender identity, their sex assigned at birth, and the need to affirm that identity. Sex work, at least initially, may provide such affirmation, and the economic hardship and prejudice these

women face in other industries and workplaces may further explain why there is a high proportion of transwomen who engage in sex work.

It is worth noting that transgender sex workers, compared to cisgender sex workers, suffer more abuse: they are paid less for their services, face more violence from clients, partners, family members, and law enforcement, are more likely to be HIV positive, and less likely to be reached by HIV and other prevention programs—especially those in countries where being a sex worker, let alone being a transgender person is a taboo, punishable crime (Nuttbrock 2018). By sharing these stories from my thesis, I hope to raise questions and create awareness especially for Asian transgender sex workers whose narratives and stories are often left out, particularly since the transgender experience that we know from mainstream and social media is often not representative of that experience.

Moreover, transgender sex workers are a diverse group—not all sex work is the same, but rather varies greatly in setting, power, risks, rewards, and factors of race or socioeconomic status. These are all related to the likelihood of sex work, or, the type and form of sex work that many transwomen undertake. Other factors that facilitate a transwoman's entrance into sex work include social stigma, rejection, homelessness, and the need for economic survival. As Corry, one of my participants, mentioned:

> Because the economy is very difficult in Indonesia and working as a sex worker, you earn fast money. And of course in sex work arrangements, [senior transwomen] can also influence and [mentor] you, for me, I got mentored by senior transwomen and she said to me that if you wanted to be more beautiful, you have to do surgery with your breast and do some injections, and of course, you can learn many other things from senior transgender women.

This vignette shows that, as sex workers, transwomen may also find a community on the street or in other sex work settings. As noted earlier, being admired and desired by male clients may also serve as a powerful affirmation of a transwoman's femininity.

Conclusion

As outlined in this chapter and throughout this thesis, transgender individuals can and do reconstruct gender through a process of remodeling or reinventing their bodies to match their knowledge of who they are regardless of their sex at birth. Transwomen, through their transition and participation in non-normative professions, open up all kinds of new possibilities in terms of identity formation and sexual expression. They are helping to redefine the binary system that is entrenched in social norms, particularly in Western cultures. As gender and sexuality continue to evolve, new identities are created and recreated.

This chapter illustrates the transient and complex nature of gender identity formation and liminality. Through their participation in beauty pageants, drag, and/or sex work, transwomen challenge gender rules and refuse to conform to the socially-prescribed ways of gender expression that often fall somewhere between male or female.

IV: LIFE GOES ON: ROMANCE, KINSHIP RELATIONS, AND 'HAPPILY EVER AFTER' •••

> Initially, it was tough, I know myself, I mean I do like the subject, but where I come from, I'm born as a male and I am a woman now so I do get used sexually, emotionally, and financially because of me seeking love as a transwoman… at the beginning stages so I mean talking about face off… I didn't want sex, monetarily or emotionally, no? And I'd say they would leave me so it has never been a very serious relationship when I was transitioning, that's the earliest, but something that I am proud of, something I'll never forget is when I met my longest relationship through sex work, it's my client so I met him and he asked me if I'm [single] like that and as a sex worker, I was early 20s you know, I met a lot of clients, many Malay, Chinese, Indian, young, old, you know, different background, smart, educated, middle class, low class, before, you know, so this man asked for my number and that's why I got [excited] 'cause for me that's, for me doing sex work, when men asked for my number, it makes me feel like a woman, 'cause they wanna know you… so I gave [my number] but thankfully he proved me wrong, and our relationship from friends… [to lovers] and together for 2 years… longest relationship I had with men.
>
> Sherry, 26, Singapore

> Well, I'm actually in a relationship, already two years with my *suami* (husband), he's actually from Java and we know each family already, on *Eid Mubarak*, I go to his house and he also go to my house and even that we are in a relationship, he gives me freedom to run my life as a sex worker so we have an understanding that eventhough we live together, he knows that in the evening, I am sex worker in the street.
>
> Kharisma, 35, Bali

> Love is important 'cause eventhough we are transgender, transgender is also a human who has a feeling.
>
> Corry, 35, Bali

Romance, Love, and Lust: Boyfriends, Suamis (Husbands), and Companionship

Many transwomen seek romance in the form of long-term boyfriends or "husbands" (*suamis*) who normally identify as straight, heterosexual men, and are accepted by their transwoman or *waria* partners as such (Boellstorff 2007). Although these relationships are not formalized, and in many ways not legal (same-sex marriage is not allowed in both Singapore and Indonesia, where homosexuality is also criminalized), their presence is in all likelihood as commonplace and ingrained as the subject position and gender identity of being a transgender person. One way that transwomen provide companionship to their male partners is by supporting them financially, or by showering them with gifts. Alena captures this perfectly in her response when I asked about her arrangements with her past relationships. As she shares:

> Yes, we have to realize that we are a *waria* or transgender and usually that we have a relationship with the local guys that are not gay and they are heterosexual who actually like women, we have to realize that we are trans, even [though] we are maybe beautiful but we are still transgender so the [way] that I try to make the local guy like me and close to me, yes… we have to give something that make them stay with us. Well, I cannot calculate actual money but at least in one day, [I] have to give him money for eating and then cigarette also at least 60,000 Rp to 70,000 Rp together for one day for eating and cigarettes but beside of that one I also sometimes give gifts, something, as long as I can express that I have money then it's okay.

Gifts range from cheap to expensive, and are dependent on the income of the *waria*, or how much they are willing to spend to spoil their boyfriends, particularly during special occasions. While others give "typical gifts" such as shoes, shirts, and cigarettes,

others go to the extreme where they buy their partners the latest mobile phone[14] on the market and sometimes even pay for a motorbike[15]. As Alena adds, candidly:

> The most expensive one [for me] is iPhone 6, which is much more expensive than [the one] I use. I use a cheap phone, but I give my husband [an] expensive one.

Another important dynamic in these relationships is the ability and willingness of the boyfriend or husband to "show off" publicly their transwoman partner. This is important, especially for *waria*, since for a man to take them out of the house and into the public sphere is a conduit which ultimately secures their recognition and acceptance by a heteronormative society.

A major concern among transwomen is the ability to retain their boyfriends after they are or have been married to a woman. This is particularly more common for those in Bali[16], since *warias* assume that all men – including their partners – will eventually marry; the goal is simply to sustain the relationship after marriage, with or without the wife's knowledge. Wives are often unaware of these arrangements (of husbands continuing a previous relationship or starting a new one with a *waria*), although those who seem to know are accepting of the matter, as the *waria* most likely will give money to the husband and not the other way around. Due to religion and laws, there is also no chance for the husband to take the *waria* as a second wife, nor is there fear of the husband having illegitimate children, since by their nature *waria* cannot be pregnant. This is an important

[14] During my fieldwork, iPhone 6 was the most popular brand and expensive phone in the industry; according to my interviewees, their boyfriends usually ask for iPhones, particularly iPhone 6.

[15] As there is no reliable public transportation in Bali, having a motorbike is a luxury and convenience for many to go places and do work in neighbouring towns or communities.

[16] I do not have enough interviews from Singapore for this claim.

acknowledgment since, regardless of how sexually desirable a *waria* is, the mutuality of their relationships with real men are limited due to this inability to bear children. Kathy Huang's documentary "Tales of the Waria" (2011) perfectly captures these arrangements. In the film, the wife (Ety) and the *waria* partner (Mami Ria) of the husband (Pak Ansar) have a good relationship, as Ety happily shares:

> Someone asked me if I ever get jealous of Mami Ria. Why would I get jealous if I never got jealous when Pak Ansar was with other women? Why would I be jealous of Mami Ria whose heart and actions I know so well? She wouldn't have the heart to hurt me. I ask you, what is there to be jealous of? Nothing.

In some cases, a *waria* and the partner live together as a conjugal couple and the man rejects heterosexual marriage altogether. Even though *warias* are rarely confused with women, even if they are fully passing, their external gender presentation is such that male partners are sometimes supported by their decision not to marry. These relationships are often accepted by the neighbours and certain communities, and in some cases, they also raise children who may be adopted from their relatives or from either party's previous marriage to a woman.

While there are positive steps when it comes to gender equality in (Southeast) Asia[17], same-sex marriage is still taboo, and homosexuality (including being a transgender person) is punishable by death in many countries across the continent. Many of my interviewees are hopeful for the enactment of laws which will legalize same-sex marriage in Singapore and Indonesia. Indeed, many mentioned that while there is a possibility that this may happen, they nevertheless acknowledge that it may not be during their lifetime.

[17] In 2019, Taiwan legalized same-sex marriage.

Sponsors and the Gaze of the Foreign Man

Most of my informants expressed a strong desire to be in a relationship with a local guy, however, many expressed that they are not 'closing their doors' for foreign men as well (in Indonesia, they call them *bule*). This is rooted in their hopes that a foreign man, with secure finances or who is perceived as rich, will help them escape poverty or even leave the country. Others hope they will do all this while also paying for their transition and surgeries. Corry, who is in a relationship with four foreign men (all at the same time) during the interview, shares:

> I have a dream that I will get married with my *bule* boyfriend or maybe with another *bule* because I wanna live abroad, not here in Indonesia. I like living in the West because it's more guaranteed in the future, compared to living here, it's too complicated.

While Corry's experience when it comes to having relationships with foreign men is generally good, many did not share the same experience. Fenita, a former sex worker from Bali, shares that *bule* are often rude, and that clients and have "crazy and weird" sexual fantasies that make her uncomfortable when asked to participate. She told me that one of her *bule* clients, without telling her beforehand, restrained her by tying her to the bed and taping her mouth shut; this experience left her traumatized and she is now more cautious before taking on a *bule* client:

> I prefer local [clients] because they are usually much more easy and not rude like a *bule*, and also with *bule* that they have a big one, I'm afraid of that one [laughs], at least they have bigger penis than locals and also sometimes *bule* have sexual fantasy more than I think about, they always ask for some things that sometimes I never think about… The craziest one was when I got a customer and he didn't tell me in advance about his fantasy and he closed my mouth with the rope, bondage with rope, all four legs… seduce me, that gave me trauma and I am now afraid… [chuckles].

For others who would like to try to have a relationship or a meaningful connection with a foreigner, the language barrier (especially their command of English) is a big hurdle to initiating a conversation or an interaction with a *bule*. As Safa adds:

> I don't usually sleep with a *bule*, but I have some relationship with *bule*, one time sex but not really sex, only a romantic thing with *bule*, the problem is because I don't speak English, that makes me having no confidence to try to look for a *bule* [sponsor].

Communities and Kin Recognition by Blood or Choice

As many are estranged from family, transwomen often look for a sense of community and family elsewhere. Organizations like Project X and *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* help facilitate and bring together individuals, and provide a safe space and sense of belonging for many transwomen. Having that sense of solidarity is what makes these transwomen and *warias* resilient in the face of adversity, ridicule, mockery, and abuse. When asked about the importance of transwomen or *waria* communities, all interviewees in this study agreed that communities are a welcome reprieve to the daily stresses of their lives and profession. For younger transwomen, it is also a place for socialization where they can learn the ropes and tricks of the trade for how to survive as a sex worker, and how to live their everyday lives as a transwoman.

Figure 6. My last day of interviews in the office at *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* (Denpasar, Bali) with staff and volunteers (2017). *Posted with permission.*

Olivia, an member of the outreach staff at *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* emphasized the importance of organizations that work with transgender individuals in the region. For her, being a part of an organization or a community puts a positive front, not just on the individuals they serve, but on the trans community as a whole:

> It is very important to join a community because people respect you more and they accept you more as a transgender because you not only speak for yourself but the community also speaks for you, you have a back-up, the community is the back-up for you, to speak to the people, to the general people.

For Project X in Singapore, similarly, this is exactly what they do for their transwomen sex workers—protect and advocate. During my participant observation

phase in Singapore, I experienced firsthand the work they do, and I was fortunate enough to participate and contribute to their outreach programs as a volunteer while I collected data in partnership with Project X. A few days before my departure, I sat down with Vanessa Ho, Project X's Executive Director to learn more about the organization, including her motivations, and the importance of advocate on behalf of the trans and sex worker community in Singapore. As she shares:

> We are a sex worker rights organization and we work with all sex workers regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation or nationality, we have outreach program so we go out, say hi to sex workers, distribute condoms, but more importantly we are interested to know if they face discrimination, any forms of abuse, any difficulties, any wrongful arrests, so on, so forth and then we work quite closely with the Law Society Pro Bono Services Office so we provide legal assistance, so either legal advice or just representation… we document any kinds of violence or abuse that happened to them, report on the situation and loosely the lack of access to justice of sex workers that we advocate.

For many transgender individuals who join organizations such as Project X and *Yayasan Gaya Dewata*, this is the first time they may have felt listened to, especially when it comes to their cries for justice, the everyday plight of living their true selves as transwomen, and their fight to a more just system that is accepting of their identities, regardless of that identity or gender presentation in the public sphere.

However, others are lucky, and are accepted by their families. To affirm this acceptance, some transwomen grow up to bring other transwomen friends home, and hope their parents will think it is not only them "who is like that". To those who are brave, they bring and introduce their male partners to relatives—the acceptance of whom is the definitive acknowledgment of their transgender status.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the ways in which transwomen navigate romance and kinship relations. These romantic relationships conform to the heterogendered nature of sexual relationships dominant in Southeast Asia, which is that transwomen have the "weaker" emotions of a 'biological' woman—an image based on sexual desire that has historically shaped the gender hierarchy and views of what it means to be a stereotypical female in an otherwise patriarchal culture. Moreover, in spite of their numbers and the "freedom" that they enjoy, they are still victims of their status, which marks them as male rather than female, or the way they want to be viewed—with this comes increased prejudice and discrimination. As such, organizations like Project X and *Yayasan Gaya Dewata* are important and vital to the community that continues to advocate for the needs and rights of these transwomen.

In brief, these relationship arrangements and deviations—although still not accepted by many—illustrate not only important moments of romance, affection, and sex, but also a linkage between a *waria's* subject position (even among Singaporean transwomen) and how they are perceived by others and society.

V: DETRANSITIONING: RELIGION, AGEING, AND DYING AS A TRANS •••

> I am afraid of getting old because I am afraid in the future that there is no one to take care of me, no one will manage my life later, I'm actually coming from a very poor family and village in Java and there is no one in my family with enough money, they all just work in the village, people work as farmers, and also I am not close to my family, and I also have to think about that one.
>
> Yuni, 35, Bali

> Maybe I'm a bit more radical than most 'cause I feel like a lot of transwomen have a certain conventionality to them especially a lot of transwomen in the sex trade and a lot of those who haven't unpacked gender properly and understood that doing this is just a way of yeah I feel best this way and I feel a lot happier this way and that's why I wanna do it and I don't necessarily meed to conform to anything or take the conventional view of anything because a lot of what I'm trying to do is to deconstruct these things, ageing to me is not an issue, if I don't end up dying in the next few years, I might grow old and that's just a thing that happens, so the biggest issue for me is that the voice will drop 'cause when you grow older your voice will drop, that's about it.
>
> Cassandra, 20, Singapore

Detransitioning: When is a Person Transgender?

As this is a fairly recent aspect of transgender research, much of the data and literature available on detransitioning comes from provider and/or clinician perspectives. Other narratives come from news, social media, and personal blogs, where most of the stories focus on Western and white transgender individuals. Following transgender research for the last five years, I have noticed that formal research into detransitioning is lacking, and often met with contention. There is an atmosphere of censorship in

researching the phenomenon. As I delve into this topic, the question that I often get asked is: *If someone transitions from male to female, and back to male, does that make that person transgender?* This is a loaded question and a problematic one too. An individual's gender identity and gender experience lie with the individual; it is their decision on how they identify themselves.

To assist in this definition, detransitioning is the cessation or reversal of a transgender identification or gender transition—socially, legally, and/or medically (Yarbrough 2018:134-138). As such, it is a controversial topic that highlights ambivalence. However, it should not be used as a tactic to discredit or delegitimize one's gender identification. Prior to my fieldwork, I did not read or encounter any literature about detransitioning. I was particularly interested in the topic of death and dying, and much of it is rooted in religion and how religion affects the later life of transgender individuals[18].

Much of the material that I synthesized and will present in this section of the chapter comes from my Balinese informants. Interviews from Singaporean participants mentioned their concerns about old age and dying, but none of them touched on their desires to detransition in the future. Part of it could be that my interviews in Singapore were the first ones I conducted for the research, and my questions and themes evolved and changed as I progressed in my fieldwork. Moreover, detransitioning as a terminology and a phenomenon is fairly new to both of the communities I worked with.

[18] At a conference I attended in Singapore, I had a chat with Dr. Philip Rozario (Adelphi University) and he connected me to Dr. Vanessa Fabbre (Washington University in St. Louis). Dr. Fabbre's research focus is on the intersections of ageing and gender transitions. With her partner, Jess T. Dugan, a photographer, they published "To Survive on This Shore" (2018) using photographs and interviews to show the diversity of experience when it comes to ageing and living as a transgender person or gender-nonconforming individual.

Alena, a younger *waria* who works as a performer in Bali and a casual sex worker, shared that although she is not worried about growing older and the later life, that she would still like to die as a man. When I asked what she meant by this, Alena shares:

> When I die later, I still want to be a man, I was a man first, I was born as a man so when I die later, I also want to be a man. I am not afraid of dying. I am open to my family and if I do surgeries, I want them to be taken out of my body (or reversed), I was to die as a man as mentioned before. Because of my faith (Islam), I believe in my religion, if you are born as a man, then you have to come back to the ground as a man. Because Muslim they don't burn them (the corpse), they just bury [the body] and put in a box (coffin) like how Christians do it."

Nabila, a sex worker, echoes the same sentiments, as she shares:

> There is a process and the [difference] between the [burial rites] for [a] woman or man in my religion so that's why I don't want that my family and people get confused when I'm dying later, I want them to stick that I am a man when I'm dead.

This is common, I find, with those who are still practicing their religion(s) – in the traditional arrangement or in their own ways – whereby they still consider their bodies as "temples" based on the teachings to which they subscribe. Others, with fears of embarrassing their family, and in anticipation of frailty and death, decide to detransition earlier in their old age. Many shared stories revealed that some who died as *waria* faced sad and tragic situations for how their bodies were treated by their family and relatives, especially during the burial rites of the traditional funeral ceremony. Cindy, an older *waria* and sex worker, relates:

> I am afraid that nobody will take care of me when I die, for the ceremony. I worry about that future because maybe when I die, my family will not take care [of me] because you know the ceremony for the cremation and the ceremony itself is very expensive and then maybe my family cannot afford to have that one. I have no savings and I have no children. I have no one

> responsible for that, that is my biggest worry later [in life], it's different for Muslim people, in Java, they just bury them in the cemetery, not like for Balinese [Hindu]. For Balinese, it is not just about the ceremony, but it is also who will come to your ceremony when you die. That's the reason why I am afraid because usually when a dead relative has their ceremony for their death, I never come because I am shy to come so maybe they will do the same. They will do what I've been doing while I'm alive [not coming to their ceremony] and they will also don't want to come if I die. That's why if I die later, I just asked my brother to just go to the public cremation and don't go to the family cremations because I always worry about that one."

This narrative from Cindy further confirms how *waria* and transwomen in general are viewed by their families even on their deathbeds. Others, anticipating frailty later in life prepare as early as they can, including a strong connection to their faith, as Fenita, emphasizes:

> I'm actually not afraid of being old or being un-take care when I am old later because I believe that God will have a good plan for me when I'm old. I also plan, I have some savings that I want to use for my old [age] and I know that it's difficult for me to come back to my family because I have no good relationship with my family so the money that I save from now I wanna use to (go to a) nursing home like orphan so that's usually we have to pay to enter the nursing home that one I'm using that one because u want to also spend my old [age] a transgender, I don't want to change.

Although in today's society many transgender individual are visible to the public and even media, this does not mean that their own families welcome them as a family member. Many are not accepted by their families initially, and for others, estrangement continues through adulthood, even in death.

Why Detransition?

In my interviews and analysis, I noticed two reasons that transwomen use as motivations to detransition later in life. While detransitioning has captured the attention of the media and the public in the last few years, substantial research has been absent from relevant academic literature. As such, and as I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, a true understanding of the issue is still limited to anecdotal evidence and personal testimonies shared on the internet, as well as the perspectives of the clinicians working with those undergoing detransition (often for issues of regret after a sexual reassignment surgery). Research on the phenomenon is scarce. I hope I can offer some insights with my own research.

As with the vignettes presented, many of my informants who mentioned the possibility of detransitioning later in life did so in relation to reasons beyond their control. Cindy, for example, anticipates detransitioning due to health concerns and a lack of societal, familial, and financial support in her later years. However, even though she plans to detransition, she will not cease to identify as transgender. She would not have to think or even decide to stop transitioning and living her authentic life were the circumstances different. As such, in this case, detransitioning is motivated by external factors that make transitioning even more difficult or too-heavy a load to carry. It can be argued then, that detransitioning is a temporary characteristic, since retransitioning would still be desired if given the chance and time in the future.

However, there are individuals who actually cease their identification as a transgender individual after having socially, legally, or medically detransitioned. For these individuals, this involves stopping or reversing the transition process (e.g., to stop taking

hormones), including a return to using their birth-assigned gender pronouns. If the detransition process starts early in a person's life course, however, retransitioning is also a possibility[19]. These detransitioning stories are however, the ones most prominently and readily available on the internet.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented possible trajectories on why transwomen decide to detransition. Being and becoming a transwoman involves an alteration of personal identity, social identity, and physiology. The long-standing Western conception of gender as ascribed, invariable, dichotomous, and permanent implies that transwomen need to occupy one gender identity at a time—which is entirely problematic. We have seen throughout this thesis that a transwoman's gendered, feminine identity is shaped by many factors—both internal and external—and that they shape and impact the entire life course of these individuals.

The relevance of detransitioning will depend on how well it encapsulates the experience of those who detransition or who are anticipating the procedure for themselves. As such, the process and surrounding ideologies demand more investigation. Whatever the findings of those studies, detransitioning stories and narratives should not be used to delegitimize the gender identity of individuals who identify as transgender—it is not something that is just fleeting, a phase, or simply make-believe.

[19] "I detransitioned because of transphobia, but I always knew I am a woman. Now I'm living as my authentic self," Online publication, Accessed August 30, 2020, https://inews.co.uk/opinion/comment/i-detransitioned-because-of-discrimination-but-i-always-knew-i-am-a-woman-now-im-living-as-my-authentic-self-286290

BEAUTIFUL ENDINGS, EXCITING NEW BEGINNINGS: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS •••

Where is home?

A simple question yet it often requires a complicated answer. Throughout my fieldwork, I was often asked this question and every single time, it made me stop and ponder. If people who are asking me are more specific questions – for example, where I was born— the answer is the Philippines. If they ask me where I currently live and where I am a citizen—it's Canada. But still, I had to wonder, if I ask the transwomen and warias I interview the same question, what would their answer be? If I always struggle to answer what others consider a simple geographical question, how would these individuals, who are displaced by their own gender identity, their family, their country, and the society in which they are raised answer when asked, "are you a man or woman?" When your body does not feel like home, where do you find refuge? Where do you find acceptance when everything that surrounds you tries to erase you for simply existing within yourself, and for making healthy choices for you?

In many ways that I could never have imagined and anticipated, this project is all about finding home. For these transwomen, the concept of home is as fluid as their gender identity. Home can be the place where they were born—Singapore or Indonesia. But for many, home is more abstract: it is where they became the women that they are today.

•••

I was sitting at the veranda after a long day of interviews when my Balinese host, Ayu, sat beside me and we started chatting about my travels and research. Ayu asked me how I'm feeling and I said, "I am tired physically, emotionally, and mentally from my

travels and doing interviews for weeks. They are difficult." The truth about fieldwork is that stories and experiences – good or bad – stay with you. Sometimes, shaking them off your system requires more than forgetting or sleep. As she was about to leave to prepare dinner for her family, she said, "You need to tell these stories, Kevin. Stories will keep these individuals alive."

Anthropology and Gender/Queer Studies: Call to Action

> No one cares about Southeast Asia. The Western world—they find it hard to comprehend how backward we are when it comes to LGBT and human rights. They don't understand the sophistication of oppression here.
>
> Jean Chong, Sayoni founder and LGBT activist, Singapore

Since 2015, I have been researched and written about the lives of Southeast Asian transwomen; I have read countless books and journals, have presented and listened in at conferences, and have sustained many a conversation about sexuality and gender. The work on Asia when it comes to transgender research is, in my opinion, still not enough. For this reason, my MA research hopes to shed light on the lives and realities of these individuals who have been marred by layers of oppression. In some ways, this thesis works to be a call to action. It encourages readers and the greater academic community to learn about the marginalization of these individuals and their disrupted lives, often unimaginable to those who are sheltered by privilege and opportunity. Anthropology, as a discipline, through ethnography and activism, can expose inequalities. In the past, such practices have yielded positive results, for example, improvements to sensitive and specific medical services, access to housing, amelioration of discrimination (in the school, workplace, etc.), and many other things and gains. Anthropologists are given the

sometimes rare opportunity to delve into these stories, and are privileged to be trusted by these individuals, who share access to their stories, and who are willing to expose their daily realities. Still, I do not believe we should be limited to story telling; the true challenge is to let our imaginations expand and incorporate this learning, and we must advocate for the social justice that many of these transgender individuals (among other racialized and oppressed communities) need and deserve.

Anthropology and anthropologists look at words, language, meanings, and categories to describe the cultures and people they study, and ultimately the world; yet, more than describing, we create it too. While every word we speak and every research article we produce and publish builds and creates new categories in our field, some of these works have the power to truly explain who we are, while others have the equal potential to limit similar actionable possibilities in the world. For instance, the emergence of the term "transgender", while limiting in some ways, does account for the endless stream of experiences and realities of those who identify as transgender all around us. The stories we often hear and read about, and the stories I present in this thesis—which focus on those who have suffered—are lessons not just for activists or anthropologists, and they are not simply data; they require and encourage us to reshape the frameworks we use to promote action, evolve our perspectives, and to categorize the information on transgender individuals that continues to grow and change today. Sociocultural anthropology, at its heart, involves attentive and ongoing listening, and it is my final opinion that this is not a difficult thing to accomplish.

The concept of self, identity and gender as a spectrum

My research illustrates an important cultural conception of gender—that being, transgender—a category and subject position that has existed for years, and which has now garnered more attention and controversy thanks to a modernized name. The transformation of transwomen, from male to female, is far more complex than just a change or switch of gender roles: it is a form of becoming.

Through intensive research, many studies explore gender categories that defy the Western conception of gender as permanent, invariable, and dichotomous. Cross-culturally, we have data on gender liminality and personas that individuals may occupy as they cross over to become a woman. Some of these include the *hijras* (India), *travestis* (Brazil), *berdache*/two spirit (North America), *bakla* (Philippines), and *xaniths* (Oman). The transwomen of Singapore and Indonesia are no different from these categories, and their lives offer new and improved insights on the topics and issues of gender gathered through years of anthropological research.

Moreover, I also argue that an association between sexuality and sex/gender cannot be assumed, but rather can only be examined within specific cultural and historic contexts. Anthropological studies on transgender and queer subjects are sites for contesting, critiquing, and reformulating classifications and categories. The meanings produced and created from anthropological research on gender, as a matter of fact, can act as the very modes and processes of cultural transformation.

The transwomen in this study are good examples for how individuals facilitate the process to "recreate oneself"—their lives are a product of different historical relations of power and resistance, through which these human beings and cultural subjects create and

recreate themselves. Their gender identities, and the gender systems in Singapore and Indonesia, are heavily influenced by rich cultures moulded by colonization, religion, and globalization. Examinations through the lens of these individual experiences therefore clarifies the many different ways that societies can organize their thinking about sex, gender, and sexuality. The lives of these transwomen have important implications for understanding gender and improving a sense of belonging for these women, not only in Asia, but also per the related issues prevalent in the West and beyond.

Hope(s) for the Future

The last question on my interview guide, asks: What changes do you want to see in the future? What are you hoping to see in your lifetime? Here are some of the answers:

> I think fundamentally the hope is creating normalization and acceptance because with these, everything else comes in, education about trans people and the knowledge about the medical procedures and improvement of conditions, anti-discrimination, all of these start to roll in when there is a normalization and acceptance of trans people, it's just fundamentally what I'm trying to do in terms of doing interviews, in terms of being a part of the projects I did, look, I just come and talk to you kind of thing…"
>
> Cassandra, 20, Singapore

> I hope that transgender can work in the formal economy, not only beauty work, entertainment, or sex work, I hope we can work like the normal people without taking off our (women's) dress or make-up."
>
> Awik, 22, Bali

> Of course I want transgender to be accepted in the society, especially looking for jobs and being in school, there will be no stigma or discrimination, no bullying, I also hope that there are no generalizations, the mistake of one is not the mistake of the whole community.
>
> Tariska, 44, Bali

These three vignettes capture what the community hopes to accomplish and receive in the coming years: equality and acceptance. Through research and advocacy, and by proposing new ways to solve problems and challenge social thinking, these possibilities (although seemingly far-fetched in our current reality) may happen in the foreseeable future. It also opens space for further questions, such as: *What calls must be investigated further? What are the implications for interventions and services, or for education and advocacy? How different is the trans experience across geographical locations and cultural settings?*

While my work is on transwomen specifically, I would also like to see growth in the research and exploration of the lives and experiences of transmen. The literature on transgender individuals is heavily concentrated on transwomen. Although not necessarily a bad thing, having enough information and narrative data from transmen will not only enrich the research on these individuals, but also improve our present understanding of the intricacies and nuances of the transgender experience as a whole.

EPILOGUE: ONE FINAL NOTE •••

I am often asked about what comes next after this thesis. This research required me to locate myself and my research practices in relation to the field that I was simultaneously studying and helping to document. In a community that experiences constant ridicule and disgust, it is important to note the significance of the author's positionality. I do not identify as a transgender person (hence, I am non-transgender) and therefore, I am outside the category. As such, I position myself in terms of contemporary understandings of what the term means, while at the same time I critically investigate myself and the credibility of my voice and my own gender identity in the telling of these stories. I hope that in the future many transgender individuals and their stories of survival are told from their own voices and community.

The last five years working with the transgender community in Singapore and Indonesia (including the Philippines) has been eye-opening, and has enriched me as a researcher, as well as instigated further personal growth. I am fortunate and thankful for the trust that the community offered over the course of this research. While I believe my research on the topic is important, I also consider it as my academic "first love"—I therefore think it is best for me to take a back seat and advocate for transgender individuals (researchers, community builders, and many others) to be a voice for their lived histories, stories, and experiences.

In closing, I am forever grateful. Thank you.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND READING LIST •••

A Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. *Notes and queries on anthropology.* 6th ed. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1951.

Adi Praseto, Stanley, Priyono, A.E., and Olle Tornquist, eds. *Indonesia's post-Soeharto democracy movement.* Jakarta: DEMOS, 2003.

Aizura, Aren Z. *Mobile subjects: Transnational imaginaries of gender reassignment.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2018.

Alexander, Jeffrey C. "Cultural pragmatics: Social performance between ritual and strategy." *Sociological Theory* 22(4), (2004):527-573. doi:10.1111/j.0735-2751.2004.00233.x

Anderson, Patrick. *Snake wine: A Singapore episode.* London: Chatto & Windus, Ltd., 1955.

Ballerino Cohen, Collen, Wilk, Richard, and Beverly Stoeltje. *Beauty queens on the global stage: Gender, contests, and power.* New York: Routledge, 1996.

Barnard, Alan. *History and theory in anthropology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Bateson, Gregory and Margaret Mead. *Balinese character: A photographic analysis.* USA: The New York Academy of Sciences, 1942.

Becker, Gay. *Disrupted lives: How people create meaning in chaotic world.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

Beemyn, Genny and Susan Rankin. *The lives of transgender people.* New York: New York University Press, 2011.

Benjamin. Harry. *The transsexual phenomenon.* New York: The Julian Press, Inc., 1966.

Blackwood, Evelyn, ed. *The many faces of homosexuality.* New York: Harrington Park Press, Inc., 1985.

Boellstorff, Tom. *The gay archipelago: Sexuality and nation in Indonesia.* Princeton: The Princeton University Press, 2007.

Boellstorff, Tom. *A coincidence of desires: Anthropology, queer studies, Indonesia.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Bolin, Anne. *In search of Eve: Transsexual rites of passage.* Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1988.

Boon, James A. *The anthropological romance of Bali, 1597-1972: Dynamic perspectives in marriage and caste, politics and religion.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Briggs, Charles L. *Learning how to ask: A sociolinguistic appraisal of the role of the interview in social science research.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Carpenter, Laura M. and John DeLamater, eds. *Sex for life: From virginity to viagra, How sexuality changes throughout our lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
Chua, Lynette J. *Mobilizing gay Singapore: Rights and resistance in an authoritarian state*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014.
Clammer, John. *Singapore: Ideology, society, culture*. Singapore: Chopmen Publishers, 1985.
Clifford, James and George E. Marcus, eds. *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1986.
Colins, Alan, ed. *Cities of pleasure: Sex and the urban landscape*. London: Routledge, 2006.
Covarrubias, Miguel. *Island of Bali*. Singapore: Periplus, 1937.
Dentice, Dianne and Michelle Dietert, "Liminal spaces and the transgender experience." *Theory in Action* 8(2), (2015):69-96. doi:10.3798/tia.1937-0237.15010
Devereux, Stephen and John Hoddinott, eds. *Fieldwork in developing countries*. Boulder, CO: Lynner Rienner Publishers, 1993.
Devor, Aaron and Ardel Haefele-Thomas. *Transgender: A reference handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2019.
Devor, Aaron. *Gender blending: Confronting the limits of duality*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989.
di Leonardo, Micaela, ed. *Gender at the crossroads of knowledge: Feminist anthropology in the postmodern era*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1991.
Diaz, Robert, Largo, Marissa, and Fritz Pino, eds. *Diasporic intimacies: Queer Filipinos and Canadian imaginaries*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018.
Djamour, Judith. *The Muslim matrimonual court in Singapore*. London: The Athlone Press, 1966.
Djamour, Judith. *Malay kinship and marriage in Singapore*. London: The Athlone Press, 1959.
Ekins, Richard and Dave King. *The transgender phenomenon*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2006.
Ekins, Richard and Dave King, eds. *Blending genders: Social aspects of cross-dressing and sex-changing*. London: Routledge, 1996.
Emerson, Robert M., Fretz, Rachel I. and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 2011.
Escoffier, Jeffrey, ed. *Sexual revolution*. New York, NY: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2003.
Evans-Pritchard, E.E. *The comparative method in social anthropology*. London: The Athlone Press, 1963.

Farrales, May. "Repurposing beauty pageants: The colonial geographies of Filipina pageants in Canada." *Society and Space* 37(1), (2019):46-64. doi:10.1177/0263775818796502

Firth, Rosemary. *Housekeeping among Malay peasants.* 2nd ed. London: The Athlone Press, 1966.

Fogg Davis, Heath. *Beyond trans: Does gender matter.* New York: New York University Press, 2017.

Frost, Mark R. and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow. *Singapore: A biography.* Singapore: Editions Didier Millet Pte., Ltd. And National Museum of Singapore, 2016.

Gagne Patricia and Richard Tewsbury. "Conformity pressures and gender resistance among transgendered individiuals." *Social Problems* 45(1), (1998):81-101. doi: 10.1525/sp.1998.45.1.03x0158b

Geertz, Clifford. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays.* USA: BasicBooks, 1973.

Gherovici, Patricia. *Please select your gender: From the invention of hysteria to the democratizing of transgenderism.* New York: Routledge, 2010.

Gingrich, Andre and Richard G. Fox, eds. *Anthropology, By comparison.* London: Routledge, 2002.

Glaser, Barney G. and Anselm L. Strauss. *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* New Brunswick: AldineTransaction, 2008.

Graham Davies, Sharyn. *Gender diversity in Indonesia: Sexuality, Islam and queer selves.* London: Routledge, 2010.

Gonzalez-Polledo, EJ. *Transitioning: Matter, gender, thought.* London: Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd., 2017.

Hahn, Christopher. *Doing qualitative research using your computer: A practical guide.* London: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 2008.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives.* New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Hammersley, Martyn and Paul Atkinson. *Ethnography: Principles in practice.* 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Hawley, John C., ed. *Postcolonial and queer theories: Intersections and essays.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Herdt, Gilbert, ed. *Moral panics, sex panics: Fear and the fight over sexual rights. New York: New York University Press, 2009.*

Herdt, Gilbert. *Third sex, third gender: Beyond sexual dimorphism in culture and history.* New York: Zone Books, 2004.

Herdt, Gilbert, ed. *Sexual cultures and migration in the era of AIDS: Anthropological and demographic perspectives.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

Herdt, Gilbert, ed. *Ritualized homosexuality in Melanesia.* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984.

Herdt, Gilbert and Cymene Howe, eds. *21st century sexualities: Contemporary issues in health, education, and rights*. London: Routledge, 2007.
Herdt, Gilbert and Stephen C. Leavitt, eds. *Adolescence in Pacific Island societies*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998.
Hill, Michael R. *Archival strategies and techniques*. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 1993.
Holy, Ladislav. *Comparative anthropology*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, Ltd., 1987.
Hunt, Stephen. *The life course: A sociological introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
Johnson, Mark. *Beauty and power: Transgendering and cultural transformation in Southern Philippines*. London: Berg, 1997.
Jorgensen, Christine. *Christine Jorgensen: A personal autobiography*. New York: Paul S. Eriksson, Inc., 1967.
Kemper, Robert V. and John F.S. Phinney. *The history of anthropology: A research bibliography*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977.
King, Dave. *The transvestite and the transsexual: Public categories and private identities*. England: Avebury, 1993.
Koh, Adeline and Yu-Mei Balasingamchow, eds. *Women and the politics of representation in Southeast Asia: Engendering discourse in Singapore and Malaysia*. London: Routledge, 2015.
Kuper, Adam. *Anthropology and anthropologists: The Modern British School*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
Lancaster, Roger N. and Micaela di Leonardo, eds. *The gender/sexuality reader: Culture, history, political economy*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
Leona, Lo. *From Leonard to Leona: A Singapore transsexual's journey to womanhood*. Singapore: Select Publishing, 2007.
Levin, Martin P., Nardi, Peter M., and John H. Gagnon. *In changing times: Gay men and lesbians encounter HIV/AIDS*. Chicago: The University of Chicago press, Ltd., 1997.
Lewin, Ellen and William L, eds. Leap. *Out in theory: The emergence of lesbian and gay anthropology*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002
Lund, Ragnhil, Doneys, Philippe, and Bernadette P. Resurreccion, eds. *Gendered entanglements: Re-visiting gender in rapidly changing Asia*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2015.
Lyons, Andrew P. and Harriet D. Lyons. *Sexualities in anthropology: A Reader*. UK: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2011.
Lyons, Andrew P. and Harriet D. Lyons. *Irregular connections: A history of anthropology and sexuality*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004.
Manalansan IV, Martin F. *Global divas: Filipino gay men in the diaspora*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

Miles, Matthew B. and A. Michael Huberman. *Qualitative data analysis*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications, Ltd., 1994.
Nanda, Serena. *Gender diversity: Crosscultural variations*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2000.
Nuttbrock, Larry, ed. *Transgender sex work and society*. New York, NY: Harrington Park Press, 2018.
Oliven, John F. *Sexual hygiene and pathology: A manual for the physician and the professions*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1965.
Parker, Richard, Barbosa, Regina Maria, and Peter Aggleton, eds. *Framing the sexual subject: The politics of gender, sexuality, and power*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2000.
Parkin, Robert and Linda Stone. *Kinship and family: An anthropological reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004.
Pisani, Elizabeth. *Indonesia, etc.: Exploring the improbable nation*. London: Granta, 2016.
Plemons, Eric. *The look of a woman: Facial feminization surgery and the aims of trans-medicine*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.
Peletz, Michael G. *Gender, sexuality, and body politics in modern Asia*. 2nd ed. Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Asian Studies, Inc., 2017.
Ramsey, Alexis E., Sharer, Wendy B., L'Eplattenier, Barbara, and Lisa S. Mastrangelo, eds. *Working in the archives: Practical research methods for rhetoric and composition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.
Ratnam, S.S., Goh, Victor H.H., and W.F. Tsoi. *Cries from within: Transsexualism, gender confusion and sex change*. Jurong Town, SG: Longman Singapore Publishers (Pte), Ltd., 1991.
Robben, Antonius C.G.M. and Jeffrey A. Sluka. *Ethnographic fieldwork: An anthropological reader*. 2nd ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2012.
Rossi, Alice S, ed. *Sexuality across the life course*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994.
Salzman, Philip Carl. *Classic comparative anthropology: Studies from the tradition*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2012.
Sarana, Gopala. *The methodology of anthropological comparisons: An analysis of comparative methods in social and cultural anthropology*. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1975.
Schensul, Stephen L., Schensul, Jean J., and Margaret D. LeCompte. *Essential ethnographic methods: Observations, interviews, and questionnaires*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1999.
Skinner, Jonathan, ed. *The interview: An ethnographic approach*. London: Berg, 2012.
Spradley, James P. *The ethnographic interview*. Orland, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1979.

Srivastava, Simpi. "Global production of a feminine ideal: Behind the scenes of beauty pageants." *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation* 1, (2020):1-15: doi: 10.12893/gjcpi.2020.1.1

Stryker, Susan. *Transgender history: The roots of today's revolution.* 2nd ed. Berkeley: Seal Press, 2017.

Tales of the waria, directed by Kathy Huang (2011: New York, NY: ITVS, 2011), DVD.

Taylor, Steven J. and Robert Brogan. *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998.

Travers, Ann. *The trans generation: How trans kids (and their parents) are creating a gender revolution.* Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2018.

Turner, Victor. *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.

Turner, Victor. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure.* 2nd ed. New Brunswick and London: AldineTransaction. 2008. (Original work publisged in 1969).

Valentine, David. *Imagining transgender: An ethnography of category.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Van Gennep. *The rites of passage.* Chicago: The University of Chicago press, Ltd., 1960.

Warner, Michael. *The trouble with normal: Sex, politics, and the ethics of queer life.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.

Weiss, Robert S. *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies.* New York: The Free Press, 1994.

Whiteside, Alan. *HIV and AIDS: A very short introduction.* 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Winter, Sam, Rogando-Sasot, Sass, and Mark King. "Transgender women of the Philippines." *International Journal of Transgenderism* 10, (2007):79-90. doi:10.1080/15532730802182185.

Yamashita, Shinji. *Bali and beyond: Explorations in the anthropology of tourism.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004.

Yamashita, Shinji, Bosco, Joseph, and J.S. Eades, eds. *The making of anthropology in East and Southeast Asia.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2004.

Yarbrough, Eric. *Transgender mental health.* Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2018.

Yue, Audrey and Jun Zubillaga-Pow, eds. *Queer Singapore: Illiberal citizenship and mediated cultures.* Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012.

Zimman, Lal, Davis, Jenny L., and Joshua Raclaw, eds. *Queer excursions: Retheorizing binaries in language, gender, and sexuality.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

TABLE SUMMARIES •••

CODE	NAME (Preferred)	AGE*	OCCUPATION*	RELIGION/ FAITH	ETHNIC/ GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGIN	INTERVIEW LANGUAGE	TRANSLATOR? (Yes - Y/No - N)
S'pore 1	Sherry	26	researcher; writer; non-profit organization (NPO) geisha	Islam	Singaporean-Malay	English (E)	N
S'pore 2	Celina	40	sex worker; freelance masseuse; part-time (PT) call center agent; NPO staff	Islam	Singaporean-Malay	E	N
S'pore 3	Cassandra	20	activist; university student	Atheism	Singaporean-Chinese	E	N
Bali 1	Olivia	19	NPO outreach staff	Hinduism	Singaraja, Bali	Bahasa Indonesia (BI)	Y
Bali 2	Garneta	26	performer; drag queen; PT sex worker; NPO officer	Islam	Central Java	BI	Y
Bali 3	Yasmine	38	PT sex worker; NPO coordinator	Islam	Singaraja, Bali	BI	Y
Bali 4	Dwix	28	freelance make-up artist; PT sex worker; NPO outreach staff	Hinduism	Bali	BI	Y
Bali 5	Awik	22	PT sex worker; NPO officer	Hinduism	Singaraja, Bali	BI	Y
Bali 6	Corry	35	performer; drag queen; casual sex worker	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 7	Cindy	40	full-time (FT) sex worker; former NPO outreach staff	Hinduism	Bali	BI	Y
Bali 8	Melati	23	FT sex worker; NPO outreach staff	Hinduism	Bali	BI	Y
Bali 9	Vira	39	FT make-up artist	Hinduism	Bali	BI	Y
Bali 10	Shasha	24	entertainer; performer; drag queen	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 11	Alena	25	performer; casual sex worker	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 12	Fransisca	21	showgirl; casual sex worker	Islam	Java	E/BI	Y
Bali 13	Kharisma	35	FT sex worker; NPO (FT) counsellor	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 14	Nabila	27	FT sex worker	Islam	Sumbawa	BI	Y
Bali 15	Erna	48	FT (street) sex worker	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 16	Yuni	34	FT (street) sex worker	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 17	Katty	26	businesswoman; drag queen	Islam	Sumbawa	E/BI	Y
Bali 18	Cuya	19	university student; Balinese traditional dance; make-up artist	Hinduism	Denpasar, Bali	BI	Y
Bali 19	Kimora	28	entertainer; NPO outreach staff	Islam	Jimbrana, Bali	BI	Y
Bali 20	Safa	28	entertainer; singer	Islam	Singaraja, Bali	BI	Y
Bali 21	Biba	29	FT sex worker	Islam	Java	BI	Y
Bali 24	Fenita	31	salon worker; drag queen	Catholicism	Surabaya, Java	BI	Y
Bali 25	Tariska	44	freelance driver; founder of a foundation; volunteer	Islam	Surabaya, Java	BI	Y

Note: * = time of interview

APPENDIX •••

(A) WRITTEN CONSENT FORM/CONTRACT

Please note: The consent form was later amended to update the honorarium amount from $5 CAD to $10 CAD.

STUDY TITLE:
Beings and Becomings:
Transwomen Transitioning in Bali and Singapore

Information Letter and Consent to Participate in Research

Primary Research Investigator:
Kevin Laxamana
HM Tory 13-15
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, Canada T6G 2H4
laxamana@ualberta.ca

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Gregory Forth
HM Tory 13-15
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, Canada T6G 2H4
gforth@ualberta.ca

Introduction and Purpose

My name is Kevin Laxamana and I am a graduate student at the University of Alberta (Canada). I am working with my faculty supervisor, Dr. Gregory Forth in the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Arts. I invite you to take part in my research study, which will analyze the diverse experiences and histories of transwomen in Bali (Indonesia) and Singapore. The research will help and shed light in understanding how transwomen in Bali and Singapore express their gender in multiple contexts in the face of different cultural, societal, and religious attitudes. The results of this study will be used in support of my thesis for the Master's degree program that I am enrolled in. You may request a copy of the thesis upon completion by contacting the primary research investigator at laxamana@ualberta.ca.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in my research, I will conduct an interview with you at a location and time of your choice. The interview will involve questions about your experiences regarding your transition as a transwoman. It should last for about 1-2 hours. With your permission, I will video and/or audiotape and take notes during interview. The recording is to accurately record the information you provide, and will be used for transcription purposes as well. If you choose not to be video/audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being video and/or audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I can turn off the camera/recorder at your request. If you don't wish to continue, you can stop the interview at any time. I expect to do one (1) interview only (and a follow-up interview if needed upon your approval). As well, I will conduct participant observation, that is, I will observe and take notes, photos, and/or videos on your naturally occurring interactions and conversations with other transwomen in the community, with people in your everyday life, and/or your participation in beauty work or pageants (if applicable). Participant observation will take place in situations or settings mutually agreed upon between the participant and primary investigator.

Benefits

There is no direct individual benefit to you from taking part in this study. It is hoped that this research will allow reflection on how traditional customs and foreign ideas have intermingled with gender systems and continue to influence notions of gender diversity today. Moreover, by studying the lives of transwomen, research findings have important implications for understanding the LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgender-Queer-Intersex-Asexual-+) community, gender and belonging, not only in Bali and Singapore, but also globally.

Risks/Discomfort

All information gathered in this project will be kept secured, confidential and anonymized. Your personal information (i.e., phone number and e-mail) will not be disseminated. However, other identifying information such as your name will be anonymized at your discretion.

As interviews will be centered around personal experience as a transwoman, there is a slight possibility that some of the research questions may make you uncomfortable or upset. You are free to decline to answer any questions you don't wish to, or to stop the interview at any time. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of information could be compromised; however, we are taking precautions to minimize this risk and to ensure anonymity.

To minimize the risk to confidentiality, we will store data in a secure filing cabinet where I, the primary investigator and my supervisor will be the only ones who will have access to it. As well, data stored digitally will be encrypted and/or password protected as a security measure. When the research is completed, I may save the videos, audio tapes, and notes for use in future research done by myself or others. I will retain these records for up to 5 years after the study is over. The same measures described above will be taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity of this study data. Please note: I may use the data we get from this study in future research. However, should this happen, it will have to be approved by a Research Ethics Board.

Honorarium

To thank you for participating in this study, you will receive $5 cash (in Canadian dollars or its equivalent in your currency) after you complete the interview.

Rights

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to take part in the project. You can decline to answer any questions and are free to stop taking part in the project at any time. Whether or not you choose to participate in the research project and whether or not you choose to answer a question or continue participating in the project, there will be no penalty to you or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Upon withdrawal, data collected will not be used in the final thesis report and it will be destroyed accordingly. Should you decide to withdraw from the study, e-mail me at laxamana@ualberta no later than August 31, 2017.

Questions

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at laxamana@ualberta.ca. The plan for this study has been reviewed by for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For further questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at + 1 (780) 492-2615. The office has no affiliation with the researchers.

Re: Beings and Becomings: Transwomen Transitioning in Bali and Singapore. I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature Date

_____ _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

☐ **Check this box if you would like to remain anonymous in the interview. A pseudonym will be used. Please tell the primary investigator if you would like your real name to be used.**

(B) INTERVIEW THEMES/GUIDE

Opening Question: *What does the term "transwoman" or "waria" mean to you? How does it make you feel?*

THEME 1: Transition histories (from male to female)

THEME 2: Experience (living as a transwoman in a specific country, culture, and/or religion)

THEME 3: Performance (participation in any form of gender performance such as beauty pageants, drag queen shows, or even sex work)

THEME 4: Medicalization (connected to transition and performance - e.g., hormone therapies [pills or injections] and sexual realignment/reassignment surgeries [SRS])

THEME 5: Belonging and acceptance (how are they accepted by their own culture and/or family, affiliation (or lack of) with communities/religion, future hopes for transgender individuals in their own culture/country)

(C) TRANSCRIPTION GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS[20]

TEXT FORMATTING
The transcriber (PI) shall transcribe all individual semi-structured interviews using the following formatting:

- Spectral 11-point front face
- One-inch top, bottom, right, and left margins
- All text shall begin at the left-hand margin (no indents)
- Entire document shall be left justified

LABELING INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
Individual interview transcript shall include the following information:

Header (right-justified)
MA Fieldwork Interview Transcriptions & Notes – *Summer 2017*
PI: Kevin Chavez Laxamana | laxamana@ualberta.ca
Ethics ID: Pro0007234

Cover Page (organized (in a table)

- Interview Code
- Preferred Name
- E-mail
- Phone Number
- Affiliation
- Age
- Occupation
- Religion/Faith
- Ethnicity/Geographical Origin
- Date/Time of Interview
- Location of Interview
- Length of Interview
- Transwoman/Transman
- Honorarium
- Consent
- Interview Language
- Translator
- Transcriber
- Updated
- Note(s)

[20] Adapted from University of Washington Department of Global Health Master's Thesis Manual (Link: http://courses.washington.edu/thesis/Manual%202/8_Data%20Entry/Instructions_Transcription.doc)

START/END OF INTERVIEW & RECORDING CHANGES
The transcriber/PI shall indicate when the interview is partitioned into two recordings and include information for each of the recordings being transcribed. This information shall be typed in uppercase letters.

[time marker][START OF INTERVIEW]
[time marker][START OF FIRST RECORDING]
[time marker][END OF FIRST RECORDING]
[time marker][START OF SECOND RECORDING]
[time marker][END OF SECOND RECORDING]
[time marker][END OF INTERVIEW]

DOCUMENTING COMMENTS
Comments or questions by the Interviewer (PI) should be labeled with the first name, i.e., Kevin, in the first use/entry in the transcript and then followed with the letter K in brackets. Subsequent entries should be labeled with by typing **K:** at the left margin and then indenting the question or comment. This will be the same protocol for the interviewees/participants. A response or comment from a different participant (if present) should be separated by a return (following the same labeling protocol outlined above) at the left margin.

Kevin (K):	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog?
Participant (P):	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
K:	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.
P:	The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

CONTENT
Recordings shall be transcribed verbatim (i.e., recorded word for word, exactly as said), including *some* non-verbal or background sounds (i.e., laughter, sighs, chuckles, etc.) if relevant to the context of the interview.

- Non-verbal sounds shall be typed in parentheses.
- If interviewer or interviewee mispronounces words, these words shall be transcribed as the individual said them. The transcript shall not be *cleaned up* by removing foul language, slang, grammatical errors, or misuse of words or concepts.
- If an incorrect or unexpected pronunciation results in difficulties with comprehension of the text, the correct word shall be typed in square brackets. A forward slash shall be placed immediately behind the open square bracket and another in front of the closed square bracket. E.g., [/correct word/]

For this project, filler words such as *hm, huh, mm, mhm, uh huh, mkay, yeah, yuhuh, nah huh, ugh, whoa, uh oh, ah,* and *ahah* shall not be transcribed (unless pertinent to conversation).

INAUDIBLE INFORMATION
If the transcriber (PI) identify portions of the audiotape that are inaudible or difficult to decipher, the transcribe shall type "inaudible" (or put the uncertain transcribed word with a question mark inside a front and back slash) in square brackets following the inaudible section.

*For *overlapping speech, pauses, questionable text,* and *sensitive information,* please follow the protocol under inaudible information but putting comments and notes in square brackets following the portion or section in question.

REVIEWING FOR ACCURACY
The transcriber (PI) shall check/proofread all transcriptions against the audiotape and revise the transcript file accordingly. All transcripts shall be audited for accuracy by the interviewer (PI) who conducted the interview.

(D) TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS [OVERVIEW][21]

Adapted from Jefferson (1979), Du Bois (1991), and Schriffin (1987a)
Punctuation attempts to capture characteristics of speech delivery rather than conventional grammatical units.

Speakers

- Speaker identity turn/start :
- Overlapping speech [indicate "overlapping speech"]

Transitional Continuity

- Final .
- Continuing ,
- Rising inflection (questions and uncertainty) ?
- Animated tone (not only exclamation) !

Accent, emphasis, lengthening

- Emphatic stress *italics*

Speech characteristics

- Vocal characteristics (laughter, sighs, chuckles)

Pause

- Short or long [short or long pause]

Transcriber's Perspectives

- Uncertain hearing [/words/]

Inaudible utterances /?/

[21] Adapted from my time as student intern/transcriber for the Canadian Obesity Network and the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Alberta in the summer of 2016 under the supervision of Drs. Arya Sharma, Denise Campbell-Scherer, and Thea Luig (Project 5AsT-SDM).

E) RECRUITMENT POSTERS

Three different versions of posters were created and were sent to different not-for-profit organizations and possible collaborators before and during fieldwork.