RE-VISIONING FAMILY:
A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT WITH TRANSGENDERS
AND THEIR FAMILIES IN HAWAI'I

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
SOCIAL WELFARE

AUGUST 2008

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Dedicated to R. Wells
Sept. 2, 1926 — June 7, 2006

and to those who
made this story of stories possible
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have materialized without the efforts of a number of people who lent both specialized assistance and much encouragement. I want to especially acknowledge Ann Rosegrant Alvarez for agreeing to work with me and for chairing the dissertation committee. Had she elected not to do so, this particular study would not have been. I'm grateful, also, for her knowledge of and experience with the method and approach (photovoice and community-based participatory research), thoughtful suggestions, patience, and many careful readings.

I'm indebted, too, to my committee members: Meda Chesney-Lind, for staying with me through several changes of topic, her insights and insistence on the practical, and her commitment to women and girls; Peter Mataira, for his kindness, guidance with regard to a foundational perspective (empowerment research), and cultural knowledge and suggestions (e.g., it was Peter who recommended that participants retain ownership of their photos); Susan K. Hippensteele, who helped to shape early drafts and made many critical suggestions with regard to the theoretical material, and kept me bolstered and forward-moving during times of discouragement; and Lana Sue Ka‘opua, for her sensitivity to the population, knowledge and understandings of the Hawaiian language and culture, and close reviews and comments. It was, I think, an exceptional committee and one that sustained the project, and me, even as it sought to move me in directions I sometimes resisted.

I'm grateful also to Ceighbree Watson for her guidance and suggestions for approaching the topic, e.g., recommending the use of Foucault and Barthes. Even more, it was Ceighbree who suggested both diligence and a lighter touch—a balance I tried to
bring into every aspect of the study. Thanks, too, to fellow social worker Cheryl J. Majka for her many years of support and assistance, belief in my ability, ready humor, and help with the food (especially when she prepared it herself); to independent filmmaker Connie M. Flores for her help with the projector and organizing of photos; and to Kathy Ferguson and S. Charusheela of Women’s Studies, for exposing me to postmodern/postcolonial feminist thinking, and their encouragement to wrestle with these, despite my initial frustration.

Additionally, this project relied heavily on the assistance of community leader Maddalynn (Maddie) Ashton, who handled recruitment and retention of participants and much of the logistics. More important, it was Maddie who helped to create the atmosphere of safety and trust that enveloped the project and the photos and stories that ensued. I would like also to acknowledge my mother who provided great support and taught me much about different ways of being and knowing (though I think this would come as a surprise to her), and my (late) father who always encouraged and took pride in my academic achievements.

Thanks also to Ashliana Hawelu, Kylee West Williams, Taffy Ashton, and Harley Davidson for their encouragement and help with securing meeting space, and Lynda Brown for lending credibility to the project through her very presence. Finally, and most of all, I want to express my deep appreciation to the 16 persons who served as participants for their time, courage, and generous sharing. Your pictures rocked and your stories were ova (outstanding)!
ABSTRACT

This project is an exploration of local transgenders and their relationships to family. This seemed necessary given the misunderstanding, fear, and negative reaction towards transgenders, despite the continued evolution of professional and public views. This situation has resulted in attention to matters of illness and disease—e.g., Gender Identity Disorder and HIV/AIDS—to the exclusion of those of wellness or wellbeing; inadequate and ghettoized services for transgenders and other sexual minorities; and misunderstanding about and neglect of the role and significance of family.

This project begins to address this inattention through inquiry of transgenders with regard to family, at the same time contextualizing some of the larger issues facing this population. This is accomplished theoretically through integration of constructs from critical consciousness, structuration theory, feminist standpoint theories, and culturally anchored intervention research. Methodologically, this is achieved through the use of photovoice—a participatory research strategy involving the provision of cameras, not to professionals or specialists, but to members of the community being studied.

This project, then, relied on photographs, taken by 16 participants. All resided in Honolulu, self-identified as transgender, and were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander mixed. Their photographs served as springboards for narratives, which were collected during a series of four focus groups. Narratives were transcribed verbatim and coded both theoretically and by way of an emic approach (in vivo). Results revealed biological; adopted or hanai; chosen, drag, or work-related; and blended family forms. Data were conceptualized as belonging to one of two main domains—kinship or collectivity, and melancholia (trauma, grief, and hardship, especially as these related to status loss).
Melancholia was further understood as communal, serving to bring people together and provide a common understanding and shared mission (e.g., the sparing of the younger generation)—an understanding that linked the two main domains. An argument was made that attention to transgenders and their families is highly relevant to social work and to the discipline’s promotion of social justice, and that social workers would do well to allow for, if not appreciate, transgender expression—on the level of the individual as well as family.
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RE-VISIONING FAMILY: A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT WITH TRANSGENDERS
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

While professional views of transgenderism may be generally shifting from “perversity to diversity” (Warren, 2008), there remains much misunderstanding, fear, and negative reaction. While not exclusively the case, this has resulted in attention to matters of illness and disease—e.g., Gender Identity Disorder and HIV/AIDS—to the exclusion of those of wellness or wellbeing (Griffin, 2000; Treichler, 1999); inadequate and ghettoized services for transgenders and other sexual minorities (Harper & Schneider, 2003; Raj, 2002; Ryan, 2002); and misunderstanding about and neglect of the role and significance of family (Weston, 1991).

This project, then, is one of beginning to address this omission and inattention through examination of transgenders and their families, at the same time contextualizing some of the larger issues facing this population and others that diverge from normative expectations. The following section touches on the motivation for the project, some of its theoretical bases (i.e., temporalspatial issues as these relate to the production of culture), and the relevance of a visual narrative approach to both the population and the focus of study.
Background

This project—of examining family-making among transgenders in Hawai‘i and the significance and meaning of these families—came out of a recently developed community-wide (Honolulu city and county) needs assessment for local transgenders and “MSM” (the Centers for Disease Control [CDC] term for men who have sex with men). The focus of the needs assessment was on persons at high risk for—or already affected by—substance abuse, HIV, and/or hepatitis. This needs assessment was requested by Kulia Na Mamo, a community based non-profit that required this as a condition of a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant.

In the process of putting this needs assessment together, I could see clearly how a particular community or subculture had come to be identified and construed as the source of the problem(s), pathologized by both popular and medical discourses, and perceived and depicted as potentially diseased or as transmitters of disease (Treichler, 1999). At the same time, I could see that little to no attention had been paid to the circumstances or environment that, through limiting their choices, had shaped or affected both this population and their health status—i.e., the many links between social mobility and health related to structural factors such as income, education, housing, employment, and conditions of work; and to behavioral factors such as healthcare practices and diet (Nunn, Johnson, Monro, Bickerstaffe, & Kelsey, 2007).

These links—between economic inequality and health disparities, work and wellbeing, and poverty and opportunity; as well as differences in access to and experiences with health and social care provision—reflect some of the broader and multiple components
of social disadvantage related to processes of social exclusion (Acheson, 1998; Giddens, 1998). Viewed together, these links help to explain how the condition or state of disadvantage is, in the end, about much more than the poverty of simply income. It is, in fact . . . shorthand . . . for what can happen when people or areas face a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown. These problems are . . . mutually reinforcing so that they can create a vicious cycle in people's lives. Social exclusion is thus a consequence of what happens when people do not get a fair deal throughout their lives, and this is often linked to the disadvantage that they face at birth (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004, p. 7).

Though presented here in a UK context, this understanding of social exclusion surely has relevance to what I was seeing locally, in its recognition of unequal opportunities and unequal voice (Laird, 1998), and of subsequent diminished life chances (Weber, 1978). While this understanding helped to put the health disparities faced by local transgenders into some perspective, still it fell short and could not account for the whole of what I was seeing. Clearly, there was evidence that many had suffered or were suffering the effects of poor health, homelessness, depression, under- and unemployment, limited educational attainment, limited work skills, substance abuse and addiction, commercial sex work, and histories of arrests and incarceration (usually in connection with the drugs or sex work), as well as related issues and problems. At the same time, however, there was evidence that many individuals had managed to prosper—despite their marginalization and the constellation of
statistics that suggested they would fare otherwise. It was this group that sparked my curiosity and, in part, prompted the study.

What sustained this group of individuals, in the midst of such an inhospitable environment (Muñoz, 1999)? How did they become or remain healthy, functional, and, in some cases, even community role models? How, despite the social stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to sensitive care—especially as they were transitioning—had they managed to cope? Had they been faced with issues related to mental health (e.g., depression), substance abuse, or problems related to housing or employment (Bockting & Avery, 2005, p. 1), or with the adversity of sex work, an economic necessity for many transgenders who cannot obtain work, or interpersonal violence? Even more, what of their daily life struggles (Namaste, 2000; Nemoto, Operario, & Keatley, 2005)?

My search into the literature initially failed to provide acceptable responses to these questions. I readily found an abundance of public health and related materials on transgenders in relation to illness and disease, e.g., studies that quantified particular behaviors and practices related to sex, types of partners, level of risk, and the like (Bockting & Avery, 2005; Center for AIDS Prevention Studies, 2006; Xavier, Bobbin, Singer, & Budd, 2005). I also encountered many theoretical examinations of drag, gender, performance, and issues of transition (Butler, 1990; Hausman, 2001; Hubbard, 1996; Raymond, 1979; Wilchins, 1997) and eventually found references to social context, such as studies indicating the effects of low economic and social power, or drug use and its connection to unsafe sex practices (National Coalition for LGBT Health, 2004). There was little, though, that informed me specifically of transgenders with regard to wellness or relatedness to others, although I
could find such literature with reference to gays and lesbians (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001; Calhoun, 2000; Muraco, 2006; Stacey, 1996; Weston, 1991).

After extensive search, however, I ran across several, sometimes unpublished, works on alternative forms of family, including ballroom culture and houses (Bailey, 2006; Garber, 1989; Livingston, 1990), and found these fitting for my project—in their logic of kinship that exceeded gender and sexual norms, age, race, biology, and traditional domestic space. My focus, then, became one of family, in the best and broadest sense of the word. As a fellow hybrid or world traveler (Lugones, 1994), I chose to center my attention on belonging and identity and their connections to health and human potential. Within this focus, I aspired to capture the humanity of a group of people that has been much maligned, at least since the time of imposition of Western religion and law (Blaisdell, 1997; Kame‘eleihiwa, 1999; Merry, 2000; Silva, 2004)—my own move towards a corrective gesture.

This project, then, is one of posing questions about sustenance, family, and care—not to persons who might speak on behalf of local transgenders, but to local transgenders, themselves. Such an approach represents not only an attempt to recover the repressed stories and social memories of “the other,” it also holds the possibility for rendering visible the ways in which

. . . Western knowledge is encased in historical and institutional structures that both privilege and exclude particular readings, particular voices, certain aesthetics, forms of authority, specific representations, and modes of sociality (Giroux, 1992).
For hybrid subjects (which includes multiracial or mixed; transgender, transitioning, or queer), such an approach allows also for critique of “heteronormativity,” as well as of “homonormativity” (Duggan, 2002; Gopinath, 2005; Muñoz, 1999). To elaborate, the approach can reveal the expectations, demands, and constraints produced when heterosexuality is taken as normative, and heterosexual relationships are legitimized and privileged as fundamental and “natural” (Warner, 2000). Similarly, the approach can challenge the increasingly prevalent practice, on the part of gays and lesbians, of embracing agendas that vie for acceptance within normative and family-oriented formations that marginalize other sexual minorities (e.g., transgenders, bisexuals, and intersex persons, among others). Such practice not only fails to contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but, by default, upholds and sustains them (Duggan, 2002; Muñoz, 1999). Finally, the approach allows for the “possibility” of what has been a silenced and invisible, or alternatively, hypervisible subject (Gopinath, 2005; Namaste, 2000)—at least from a standpoint of health, wellness, and relatedness or connection to others.

As such, this project draws from much recent work in postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial, ethnographic and feminist research and theory, though it remains very much a social welfare project—in its focus on social justice and attendance to friendships, and to the health, safety, and community contexts in which families find themselves (McGoldrick, 1998). Also consistent with a social welfare perspective is the focus on culture—understood as a system of symbols and meanings manifest in social relationships and practices, and as constituted through language, narrative, story, and social discourse (Laird, 1998, p. 29).
Culture and Temporalspatiality

The issue of culture turns out to be highly complicated, especially with regard to transgenders. This is the case because culture cannot be disentangled from space and time—both of which arguably develop differently for “minoritarian” or queer (non-normative) subjects (Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1999). Space, for example, refers not only to terrain or regional differences related to geography or locale, though these are important (especially for those of us residing in an island state); it refers also to social or geopolitical space, defined by its relationship to power and the resultant socially produced “set of relations between individuals and groups” (Soja, 1989, p. 120). Region, or place, then, is recognized as shaping people, even as people shape region. Further, it follows that the racially and sexually marginalized (transgender, transitioning, queer) occupy a different kind of space than do “dominant subjects”—due to the differing effects of racism, classism, colonialism, and religion on their lives (Inness, 1997).

Similarly, time develops, or is experienced, differently for the sexually marginalized, primarily in its opposition to the institutions of the conventional heterosexual family and its related life schedules (e.g., marriage, births, child rearing, and inheritance). This occurs also in reaction to the impact of AIDS, which has resulted, for instance, in the rethinking of the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity; and in accommodation of other ways of being that exist outside normative logics of labor and production—e.g., punk rock, riot grrls, and drag kings (Halberstam, 2005). In Western cultures, this difference in temporality challenges the conventional understandings of time.
... that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all our modes of understanding, from the professions of psychoanalysis and medicine, to socioeconomic and demographic studies of which every sort of state policy is based, to our understandings of the affective and the aesthetic (2005, p. 152).

Given this Foucauldian understanding of different operations of time and space, transgenders may have no alternative but to imagine themselves, assessing what they can and cannot change—whether bodily, internally, or outside themselves—then putting their best efforts (or face) forward (Halberstam, 2005; Mayeda, 2005; Muñoz, 1999).

The issues of gender and identity complicate matters further, insofar as these “intersect with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities,” thereby making it “impossible to separate ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (Butler, 1990, p. 3). The “minoritarian subject” then (Muñoz, 1999), in order to formulate identity and create institutions in the face of often inhabitable and antagonistic environments, must become adept at “invention—a commitment to making up one’s own world, or part of it, anyway” (Trebilcot, 1994, p. 138, cited in Inness, 1997).

It is against this backdrop that I embarked upon this project, a move towards exploration of the role and meaning of family for one segment of the local transgender population. This project took place in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, with data collection beginning and ending in Fall 2007 and participant checks taking place in Spring 2008. Throughout, I sought to challenge the notion of “them and us”—whether in reference to gender, identity, sexual
orientation, or culture. Towards this end, my queries touched on the most critical relational issues, i.e., survival and life, mortality and death, and modes of relatedness and affiliation. Ultimately, however, I hoped that the images (photographs) and narratives (stories) would offer a glimpse of liminality and, more important, of possibility.

Overview

This section highlights and provides a summary of the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This is a review of the literature defining transgender and placing the term in historical context. This is followed by a brief summary of the status of transgenders nationally and locally and discussion of the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender contributing to this status; of stigma and discrimination, as related to status loss and other material effects; and of displacement from civil society, i.e., the exclusionary processes whereby transgenders are rendered impossible or invisible (Calhoun, 2000; Gopinath, 2005; Namaste, 2000).

As a beginning response to my questions about sustenance, family, and care, I examine the literature on social supports including relationships with family or kin, as well as alternative methods of alliance, including ballroom or house families. Finally, I touch on the topics of memory and meaning, in part to account for the new spatial and temporal logics (Halberstam, 2005), but also to open up to the “business of the visual,” including images, gestures, and group stories “where the story gets developed by several people interacting” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 637).
Chapter 3: Theory

This section touches on the multiple theoretical constructions, approaches, and orientations that informed the project, including structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), feminist standpoint theory (Haraway, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987), and culturally anchored intervention research (Fraser, 2004). These are understood to rest on an empowerment model perspective (Fetterman, 1994), of which Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), and therefore photovoice, are a part. This is followed by discussion of a constructivist approach to the use of cultural narratives, in general, and of visual narratives in particular (Pink, 2001; Clandinin, 2007).

Figure 1: Readying for a show on Maui (camera in hand)

Chapter 4: Method

This section addresses the community-based participatory research (CBPR) orientation to the framework that was developed for photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), a
method that: 1) enables people to record aspects of their daily lives from their own perspectives, 2) provides opportunities for people to attend to aspects of their lives or communities they take pride in or have concerns about, and 3) uses photography to catalogue social issues in the hopes of influencing social policy (McIntyre, 2003). By putting cameras in the hands of (16) local transgenders, I hoped to invite and enable them to tell their stories about themselves “in their own images, words, and reflections.” In turn, these images became points of entry into “seeing beneath surface issues, relationships, community events, and the extent to which place informs identity” (McIntyre, 2003, p. 48).

These goals of photovoice are consistent with the approach of Bach (2007, p. 289), who states that one intention of visual narrative inquiry is to “uncover the visuality around the evaded” by reference to photographs of everyday stories typically not seen or heard by those outside the community. From this perspective, the visual materials are not, by definition, strictly material, and may include the intangibility of an image that exists as verbal description or as imagined (Pink, 2001, p. 23). This opens a space for an analytical process of making meaningful links between photography, audio recordings, notes, and the like, making it possible to address cultural knowledge—a knowledge that can be understood only in the context of a

... narrativized past, a co-interpreted present, and a wished-for future; ... always contextual, emergent, improvisational, transformational, and political;  
... meaning-defined and itself, definitional and constitutive (Laird, 1998, pp. 28-29).
This section also addresses issues of human subject protections and ethical concerns, the data collection process, and the research questions that were posed to participants during the group sessions. This is followed by discussion of the data analysis procedures, as well as some of the limitations of the study approach and design.

Chapter 5: Results and Analysis

This section presents the narratives and images produced by the participants, in response to questions around family making and the meaning or significance of family. To guide this discussion, this section also provides a model based on key concepts that emerged from the data—namely, collectivity and kinship, identity making, melancholia, and genealogy. In short, these concepts pertain to family making in response to—and a function of—shared identifications, as well as shared or collective grief. Further, family is understood as self-generating and self-maintained, in part through care for the elderly and young, as well as care for other transgenders (or the "drag family").

Chapter 6: Discussion/Implications for Social Work

This final segment addresses: 1) the reflexive turn and its implications for practice and policy, 2) reflexivity's call for flexibility, 3) flexibility's link to the role of emotion, 4) the problem of exclusion and its link to homonormativity, and 5) disidentification and its link to worldmaking. These suggest that both social work practice and policy be guided by openly ideological and advocacy based research. This is followed by plans for bringing the project into public awareness, suggestions for more sensitive and inclusive practice and more responsive social policy, and discussion of everyday cultural practice.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter tells of the many ways that transgenders have been pushed to the margins, but have survived, nonetheless. This includes the defining of transgender, itself a contested term. This is followed by a brief discussion of transgenders’ societal status and some of the factors that account for this, and of kinship arrangements (both conventional and alternative) and their significance.

Statement of Problem

Transgenders face severe discrimination in virtually every aspect of social life—education, employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, marriage, parenting, and law enforcement, among others (Currah & Minter, 2005, p. 35; Bockting & Avery, 2005; Moulton & Seaton, 2005; Namaste, 2000; Raj, 2002; Rudacille, 2005; Ryan, 2002). The persistence and severity of the discrimination directed against transgenders, however, goes largely unnoticed, as do transgenders, themselves, apart from the “spectacular” (Namaste, 2000). One example of this is the exclusion of transgenders from equal protection in the courts. For the most part, this is not due to “conceptual or philosophical failures in legal reasoning” but to: 1) the perception that transgenders cannot be classified as either men or women and therefore do not fall into a protected category under sex discrimination laws; and 2) the conclusion that transsexualism is distinct from sexual orientation, thereby excluding transgenders from protection under nondiscrimination laws, as well (Currah & Minter, 2005, pp. 36-38).
Exclusionary practices extend far beyond the legal system, however. According to Namaste, much of the existing clinical, psychological, and sociological social science scholarship, and even queer theory, not only fail to consider transgenders, but actually render transgenders "literally impossible" (2000, p. 3):

... erasure is a defining condition of how [transsexuality/transgenderism] is managed in culture and institutions, a condition that ultimately inscribes [transsexuality/transgenderism] as impossible (2000, p. 5).

Further, these practices extend not only from institutions down, but on a day-to-day level, from the bottom up. Rejection of a transgender by a friend or family member; failure to rent an apartment, give a job or a promotion, or provide a service; as well as the “thousands of small, everyday acts” which serve to create and destroy gendered meanings in every moment (Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002, p. 26)—all function to exclude transgenders while bolstering heteronormative expectations.

To begin to address this erasure, Namaste states the necessity of theory development that is “pertinent” to the members of the given population, to include:

- description of how the individuals under investigation are situated in the world and the sense they make of this location;
- critical examination of how their life experiences are shaped and ordered through specific social, cultural, economic, and historical relations; and
- explicit linking of this theory to social practice (2000, p. 28).
It is theory and understandings of this type that this project aims to extend, with particular focus on the material and social conditions under which transgendered people and their families live—clearly concerns for social work.

Defining Transgender

The definition of *transgender* has been highly contested (Namaste, 2000). Some (Raymond, 1979; Hausman, 1995) define transgenders in relation to medicine and psychiatry, arguing that transgenders/transsexuals seek to align their biological sex and social gender, now a possibility through medical practice (Namaste, 2000).

Others define transgenders relationally, in terms of society and culture. Shapiro, for instance, suggests that the term *transgender(ist)* "has come to be used to designate a career of gender-crossing, which may or may not be directed toward an ultimate physical sex change" (2005, p. 140). This gender crossing is complicated, however, by the relationship between gender identity and forced binary gender assignment; the relationship between gender identity and sexual orientation (having to do with hetero- or homosexuality, with most transgenders identifying as heterosexual); and the ways that these constructions enter into those of personal and social identity.

Prossner, for example, explains that transgender needs to be "read" in relation to, but not reduced to, transsexual and queer narratives (1998, p. 176). The question, then, is one of identity alongside one of performativity—that is, gender identity (including the possibility for a cross-gendered identity) coupled with sexual orientation (e.g., straight or queer).

While the term *transgender*, which originated in the 1980s, was initially used to describe "a subject with a commitment to living as the 'opposite sex' more substantially than
that denoted by a cross-dresser," the term today has come to include not only these persons, but "those from whom the term was originally invested to differentiate against" (Prossner, 1998, p. 176). In its most inclusive sense, this term encompasses

... pre-operative, postoperative, and nonoperative transsexual people; cross-dressers; feminine men and masculine women; intersexed persons; and more generally, anyone whose gender identity or expression differs from conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity (Feldblum, 1996; Green, 2000, cited in Currah & Minter, 2005, p. 47).

This definition makes for an overlapping and intersection with transsexuality and queer, as well as a marking out of a specific location apart from both. For Feinberg, a transsexual lesbian, for example, who both started and stopped transitioning (through both hormones and surgery), this location becomes "an uneasy borderland between man and woman in which she fails to pass as either" (Prossner, 1998, p. 178). For some transgenders, however, ambivalence is the desired state—not passing (as male or female). Passing, in fact, and the push to pass, can be experienced as "masquerade," serving to "trap" as much the body in which the person was born, if that is how the body is experienced. Becoming, then, and sustaining ambivalence, make for this third location—distinguishing some transgenders from those wanting to assimilate, either as male or female or straight or queer (1998, p. 184).

Consistent with this umbrella use of the term, Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins (2002, pp. 58-59) state that the term transgender came out of the search for a name for people who don’t want to change sexes (as transsexuals do) or occasionally change to clothing of another sex (as cross-dressers do), but who want to change their genders and live full-time as another
sex without medical intervention. Over time, then, *transgender* came to be used for anyone who “transgressed” gender, though postoperative male-to-female transsexuals remain the most widely represented, among these.

For the purposes of this study, and for clarity and convenience, the term *transgender* will be used in accordance with the definitions provided and used by the National Center for Transgender Equality (Moulton & Seaton, 2005), as follows:

- **Transgender.** The term *transgender* has come to mean a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most would expect—either in terms of a gender that does not match natal sex (male or female) or through physically changing their sex. This includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers, and others who are gender non-conforming. (See below.)

- **Transsexual.** A transsexual is someone who has changed, or is in the process of changing, his or her physical sex to conform to his or her internal sense of gender identity. This term can also be used to describe people who, without undergoing medical treatment, identify and live full-time as a member of the gender opposite their birth sex.

- **Cross-dresser.** Cross-dressers wear the clothing or accoutrements, such as makeup and accessories, that are considered by society to correspond to the “opposite sex.” Cross-dressers can be either male-to-female or female-to-male. Unlike transsexuals, they typically do not seek to change their physical characteristics permanently, or desire to live full-time as the opposite gender.
• Gender non-conforming/genderqueer. There are many people who are not transsexuals or cross-dressers, who still express a non-standard gender identity or don't conform to traditional gender norms. Often, these individuals identify as gender non-conforming or genderqueer.

Number of Transgenders

Attempts to estimate the number of transgenders have been problematic, as such efforts have been based, primarily, on the number of persons requesting sex reassignment surgery or clinical assistance (Ryan, 2002). While definitive data on the number of transgenders are lacking, particularly in the US, international estimates are 1 male-to-female transsexual per 11,900 persons, and 1 female-to-male per 30,400 persons (Feldman & Bockting, 2003). As more research is conducted, however, it seems that the actual ratio of male-to-female and female-to-male transgenders may be closer to 1:1 (Landén & Wålinder, et al., 1996).

Status of Transgenders

A recent (2001) needs assessment conducted in Washington, DC estimates that the median life expectancy of a transgendered person in the nation’s capital is only 37 years (Xavier & Bobbin, et al., 2005). A number of factors are cited to account for this, including poverty, substance abuse, HIV infection, violence, inadequate health care, involvement in sex industry work, and persistent employment discrimination (Xavier & Bobbin, et al., 2005; Rudicille, 2005, p. 12). Though estimates at life expectancy were not included, needs assessments of transgenders conducted elsewhere (e.g., San Francisco, Chicago, Houston,
and Boston) produced similar findings (Bockting & Avery, 2005), as did a study conducted out of Honolulu (Ellingson, 2004).

Based on needs assessment studies from transgender communities across the US, of which the DC study was a part, it appears that ignorance, insensitivity, and discrimination toward transgenders are commonplace. This “overall picture of marginalization and disenfranchisement” makes it difficult for visibly transgendered or transsexual people to gain an education, decent work, housing, or health care (Bockting & Avery, 2005, pp. 1-2) and leaves them at high risk for addiction, depression, and suicide (Rudicille, 2005, p. 12).

While this collection of needs assessment studies was focused largely on unmet health concerns, with particular emphasis on HIV prevention, it also attended to issues of mental health. It is noteworthy, then, that within the population, those most likely to report depression and suicidal ideation were those with the lowest levels of social support, including support from family and peers. For the most part, these persons were not only male-to-female transgenders, but male-to-female transgenders of color (Bockting & Avery, 2005, p. 3).

Status of Local Transgenders

It is this subset of the transgender population, male-to-female transgenders of color, primarily Native Hawaiian and other Asian and Pacific Islanders (API), on which the current project focuses. This particular group comprises up to 80% of those seeking social service assistance in Hawai‘i (Ellingson & Hawelu, 2006). As APIs comprise, in general, just over half of the state’s population (Hawai‘i Dept. of Health, 2005, p. 8), this percentage indicates an over-representation of Native Hawaiians and other APIs—an over-representation that may
be linked with other historical and societal factors contributing to diminished status, including

... Kanaka Maoli [indigenous Hawaiian] depopulation and minority status from continuing foreign transmigration, colonial exploitation [resulting in] landlessness and economic dependency, coercive assimilation, cultural conflict and despair, adoption of harmful foreign ways, and institutional racism (Blaisdell, 1997).

That is, the reasons behind this over-representation of Native Hawaiians and other APIs among those seeking social service assistance may be related to history and colonization, as much as to problems connected with stigmatization related to sexual minority status.

*Traditional Gender Roles*

To elaborate, when examining traditional Hawaiian culture and history, it could be argued that the question of sexual orientation and gender identity is an artificial construct imposed by the West. It is widely accepted that gender roles were more fluid in traditional Hawaiian society and that the stigma currently attached to same-sex intimacy or transgenderism did not exist before the arrival of Captain Cook and the spread of Christianity throughout the islands (Bettinger, 2007; Kameʻeleihiwa, 1999; Silva, 2004).

The word *mahu*, for instance, has a long history deriving from legends and myth, denoting much more than transvestism. The first mahu (transgenders) were said to be true hermaphrodites who came from an unknown place and arrived in what is now Waikiki. These persons had special healing knowledge and were respected as priests, and were instrumental in preserving Hawaiian traditions, including hula chants. Decades of
colonialism, however, have degraded the status of mahu from one of respect and social value to one of shame (Bettinger, 2007; Kame‘eleihiwa, 1999).

*Interlocking Oppressions*

It may be helpful to conceive of race, gender, and class oppression as interlocked, rather than disparate entities. While different sociohistorical periods have "increased the saliency of one or another type of oppression," this concept of the simultaneity of oppression is central to black feminist thought and is significant in its shifting of focus from one of prioritizing oppressions, to one of focus on the "interaction, itself" (Collins, 1999, p. 161).

This conceptualizing of oppressions as interlocking, rather than additive, may be especially relevant in the attempt to explain the multiple oppressions experienced by transgenders, especially those of color and those transitioning or transitioned from male to female. Rodriguez-Madera and Toro-Alfonso (2005), for instance, in a study of male-to-female Puerto Rican transgenders, found that in addition to rejection—by their families, the general community, and the gay community—and their social vulnerability related to their marginalization, this population was subject to increased vulnerability related to feminine presentation and gender identity (arguably, a form of sexism).

Not only are racial/ethnic and sexual minorities the target of rejection, they also may be especially vulnerable to exploitation. hooks, for instance, has spoken of the desire for contact with "the primitive" or Other "through affinity and use" (Foster, 1985, cited in hooks, 1999, p. 181):

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as
constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, [and] sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other (hooks, 1999, p. 180).

Commodity culture in the US furthers this thinking by making seductive the idea of racialized sexual encounters. This, however, is not racist domination or white supremacy in its traditional form; this is the transgression of racial boundaries in the quest for pleasure, for difference, and for cultural spaces beyond whiteness. Yet ultimately, these transgressions do not lead to the challenging of systems of domination, but to reinscription and maintenance of position sameness—"blackness as the backdrop of otherness" (hooks, 1999, p. 193).

On a broader level, Tuhiwai Smith, with reference to indigenous populations, describes a direct link between the expansion of knowledge, of trade, and of empire. Though now understood in market terms (e.g., globalization), there exists a vast industry based on the positional superiority and advantages gained under imperialism. In this, the "people and their culture, the material and the spiritual, the exotic and the fantastic" are "not just the stuff of dreams and imagination, or stereotypes and eroticism," but constitutive of "the first truly global commercial enterprise: trading the Other" (1999, pp. 88-89).

Surely these forms of commodification are factors in the marginal status and exploitation of transgenders, especially of indigenous male-to-female transgenders and those of color—both in Hawai‘i, as in other parts of the US.

Stigma and Discrimination

Given the marginalization and status loss experienced by transgenders, and because the marginalizing processes can affect multiple domains of people’s lives, the topic of stigma
warrants discussion. According to Link and Phelan (2001), research since Goffman’s seminal essay (Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, 1963) has been prolific and productive, leading to elaborations and repeated demonstrations of the impact of stigma on the lives of those stigmatized. Much of this research, however, has veered towards the psychological and away from the sociological, largely through reliance on the social cognitive approach to gain insight into the ways people construct categories and link these to stereotyped beliefs.

This is critical in that stigma research has mainly focused on the perceptions of individuals and the consequences of these perceptions for micro-level interactions. At the same time, or perhaps as a result, “research examining the sources and consequences of pervasive, socially shaped exclusion from social and economic life are far less common” (Oliver, 1992, cited in Link & Phelan, 2001). Though even Goffman initially advised “a language of relationships, not attributes,” subsequent practice has drifted toward the latter (1963, p. 3). The unfortunate consequence is one of stigma coming to be seen as something inherent in a person, rather than a tag or label affixed by others (Fine & Asch, 1988, cited in Link & Phelan, 2001).

As a result of this process, the labeled person is subject to status loss and discrimination, often leading to very concrete forms of inequality in wider society. Further, these types of discrimination may not be readily apparent and may work to the disadvantage of entire groups, even in the absence of individual prejudice or discrimination (Hamilton & Carmichael, 1967, cited in Link & Phelan, 2001). This understanding helps to account for the disadvantaged position occupied by transgenders with regard to a general profile of life
chances—as measured by income, education, and psychological wellbeing, among others. This situation of diminished life chances is the case because the status, itself—now one step removed from the labeling and stereotyping—becomes the basis of discrimination. In this manner, status loss can result in a “cascade of negative effects,” and in ways that do not involve obvious forms of discrimination or devaluation (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Resistance to Stigmatization

One of the more troublesome issues in the study of stigma is the inadvertent portrayal of members of stigmatized groups as helpless victims, in part, as this only adds to the list of undesirable attributes affixed to the individual or the group he or she represents (Fine & Asch, 1988). It is important, then, to be cognizant of the multiple resistances to stigmatization exercised by the stigmatized. At the same time, it can be argued that the “amount” of stigma that people experience, and its impact or consequences, is shaped by the relative power of the stigmatized and the stigmatizer (Link & Phelan, 2001).

Displacement from Civil Society

Calhoun has argued that, beyond the material costs of discriminatory treatment, gays and lesbians suffer from displacement from civil society. Though not in specific reference to transgenders, she argues that gays and lesbians are stigmatized on two counts: 1) their failure to be either real women or real men, and 2) “their possession of an excessive sexuality” that “makes them fundamentally unfit to participate in the foundational institution of society—the family” (2000, p. 16). Perceived as neither fully men nor women, gay men and lesbians cannot be counted on to properly raise gendered children; viewed as possessing excessive
sexual desires, neither can they be counted on to sustain stable relationships or refrain from seducing or molesting children (2000, pp. 18, 121).

As a result, “all citizens are required to adopt a real or pseudonymous heterosexual identity as a condition of access to the public sphere.” Further, heterosexual society gets reproduced generationally through legal, psychiatric, educational, and familial practices that aim to ensure the continued displacement of lesbians and gay men (2000, p. 82). Through linkage of the images of the gender deviant and the sex pervert, gay men and lesbians have been constructed as “outlaws to the family” (2000, p. 132).

Similarly, Weston states that “by shifting without signal between reproduction’s meaning of physical procreation and its sense as the perpetuation of society as a whole,” the characterization of gays and lesbians as nonreproductive beings links their supposed attack on the family to attacks on society. It is but a short step, then, from positioning them as “unencumbered by relations of kinship, responsibility, or affection” to portraying them as a “menace to family and society” (1991, pp. 23-25).

Yet, we know these to be misrepresentations. Gays and lesbians have and create families and kin—families that include primarily, though not exclusively, their partner, or partner plus children; sometimes former partner(s); children or people with whom they share, or have shared, residence; and biological or adoptive relatives, among others. Gays and lesbians, however, may elect not to talk about their families, to relatives or friends, as this reveals their sexual identities and such disclosure, given dominant cultural perceptions, could likely be met with rejection, physical and verbal abuse, or disownment (Weston, 1991).
The symbolic mediation of kinship by sexuality is one reason that gays and lesbians are unable to confine their identities to their bedrooms; while sex may not be an everyday topic of discussion, “references to kinship are omnipresent.” Everyday conversation about where one will spend a holiday or a weekend, or even seemingly innocuous questions like, “What did you do last night?” are not for the sexually marginalized “casual,” as it is at these points that sexual minority persons must decide whether to “claim their identities” or “remain closeted” (Weston, 1991, p. 67).

The pressing question, then, seems to be not one of identity, but rather, one of belonging (Freiwald, 2001). Citing hooks (1996), the real task may be

... to conjugate self and other; to create a place to call home; to make oneself at home in the world; to find ways of being at, or when necessary, leaving home—the home that is one’s body, the physical, affective and social spaces inhabited by that body.

Though it is important to reiterate that most transgenders identify as heterosexual and not gay (Shapiro, 2005), these processes of displacement, and the risk and consequences of rejection if identities are revealed, seem equally to apply.

Social Supports and Family

Social Support Research

Social support research, since the 1970s, has examined a person’s linkage to the social environment at three distinct levels: the community, the social network, and intimate (or confiding) relationships (Lin, 1986, cited in Vaux, 1988, p. 14). Building upon this research are studies attempting to distinguish actual from perceived elements of support.
This, however, has necessitated clearly subjective appraisals of involvement or satisfaction, as well as considerable "idiosyncrasy" in specifying or interpreting "network members," such as "significant relationship" or "friend" (Vaux, 1988, p. 16).

Further, these studies have attempted to distinguish activities (what people do, however subtle) and functions (the consequence, or purpose of, the activities)—again, through examination of subjective appraisals, i.e., the person's "cognitive-affective condition" (Vaux, 1988, p. 18). Increasingly, then, social support has come to be viewed not as a feature of the person or environment, but as a complex transactional process involving the person and network, the occurrence of supportive behaviors, and the development of support appraisals (Vaux, 1988, p. 53). From this perspective, additional studies have attempted to tease out the specific role of gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, education, occupational prestige, illness, and other variables—often against age or stage of life. While most of this research has focused on the stress process, support is also understood to have direct effects on wellbeing.

Despite this large empirical literature, however, relatively little is known about variations across subgroups. Further, what is "known" has tended to emphasize the divergence of family and social life among (racial, ethnic, and sexual) minorities from that of a majority (white, heteronormative) standard (Vaux, 1988, p. 176).

*Relationships with Family or Kin*

The critical importance of social relationships for health and wellbeing has been well established (Turner, 1994). Key among these relationships are those with family or kin. Not everyone, however, participates in identical sorts of kinship relations (Weston, 1991, p. 22);
“as experienced, family life often diverges from normative definitions” (Muraco, 2006, p. 131).

Despite great changes in family demographics and patterns, when people speak of “the family,” it is basically the 1950s nuclear, heterosexual arrangement they have in mind (Levy, 2005). This conception of the family as one of a legally married couple with gainfully employed adult male, care-taking (unemployed) adult female, and children residing in the home (the Standard North American family or SNAF, as described by Smith, 1987) holds a “sacred place in the American psyche and is embedded in most major social and legal institutions” (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 2). That this should remain the case, however, is puzzling, given the fact that this conception represents only 3% of US households (Stacey, 1996). Further, not only is the SNAF predicated on a heteronormative order, thereby constraining or otherwise excluding sexual minority families (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001), but any deviations are understood as substandard or defective.

Yet clearly other familial forms have existed alongside “traditional” families—as evidenced by family forms of immigrants, poor families, families of color, and by those formed by and with sexual minorities (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001). There is also, among black families, a history of “fictive kin” (Stack, 1979), and among gays and lesbians, the development of “chosen families” (Weston, 1991). Additionally, among incarcerated women, there is the making of the “prison family” or “play family”—sometimes revolving around a core dyad, which may or may not be romantic (whether husband/wife or wife/wife), and involving the development of close ties and the taking on of family relations, e.g., “youngsters,” “kids,” mothers, sisters, etc. (Owen, 1998, p. 135).
Alternative Methods of Alliance

Halberstam has pointed out that we have become adept at talking about “normativity,” but are far less able to describe the multiple “practices and structures that both oppose and sustain conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification.” In opposition to the traditional institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction, multiple subcultures have developed as alternatives to kinship-based notions of community. Among sexual minorities, these subcultures produce both alternative temporalities and spaces, by allowing for “futures” that can be imagined according to logics beyond those of the “conventional, forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2005, p. 4).

Such an alternative development can be located in the emergence of drag families, with roots in the drag ball culture that surfaced in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s. Despite “racial oppression, economic hardship, and homophobic persecution,” black lesbians and gays of this period created a language, social culture, network of institutions, and new kind of art, infused with social consciousness (Garber, 1989). One important feature of this period, and of this culture, was the drag ball.

Referred to as a “spectacle of color” by poet Langston Hughes, the drag ball was a large and extravagant costume function, where both men and women dressed and danced “as they pleased.” One such ball (held at the Savoy Ballroom) featured a beauty contest, in which “the fashionably dressed drags would vie for the title” of Queen (Garber, 1989, p. 325). These functions, along with other “parties, speakeasies and buffet flats,” in combination with the sexually tolerant “predominantly heterosexual entertainment world,” provided an arena
for homosexual interaction and for the development of homosocial networks, which soon attracted white homosexuals, as well (Garber, 1989, p. 329).

Hughes wrote of this Harlem Renaissance period as a time “when the Negro was in vogue” (1994). Decades later, the term *vogue* reemerged in the visibility of the Harlem drag ball and of drag practices, owing largely to Madonna’s hit single *Vogue* (1990) and its accompanying video, and to Jenni Livingston’s independent film, *Paris is Burning* (1991) (Halberstam, 2005).

*Drag Ball Houses as Family*

Though this visibility of the drag ball is used by Halberstam as an example of an “uneven exchange” between the dominant culture and subcultural artists—resulting, as it often does, in absorption into the mainstream, it is mentioned here in reference to the gay black and Puerto Rican “children” of the Houses of Chanel, Xtravaganza, and LaBeija—featured in the video and film. In offering support that was lacking in the family of origin, these “club spaces” became home and peers became family (Buckland, 2002, p. 108).

According to Cunningham (2002), the houses started in the late 1960s, in connection with the drag fashion shows staged by white men several times a year in gay bars, with prizes awarded for the most outrageous costumes. Black queens sometimes showed but were expected to whiten their faces and “rarely won a prize.” In reaction, some started holding balls of their own, turning out costumes “bigger and grander than Rose Parade floats.” Gradually, as the Harlem balls became an underground sensation, the drag queens split into factions, with houses sponsoring their own ball events.
During this period, some queens took to naming their houses after themselves, others took the names of established designers (e.g., Chanel or St. Laurent), and still others legally took their house names. Houses came to be ruled by their biggest stars, who were known as mothers (or fathers, regardless of gender) and who exhorted their “children” to accumulate as many prizes as possible for the glory of the house. Though they no longer attract the numbers of spectators they once did, drag balls continue to take place throughout the country, with many remaining “intricate, searingly competitive affairs.”

Memory and Meaning

We dedicate this . . . to the legendary houses of New York: Chanel, Christian, Corey, Dupree, Ebony, LaWong, LaBeija, Magnifique, Ninja, Omni, Pendavis, Princess, St. Laurent, and Xtravaganza. And to the truly legendary mothers, may they rest in peace: Dorian Corey, Pepper LeBeija, Avis Pendavis, and Angie Xtravaganza (House of Diabolique, 2003).

Within years of the release of Livingston’s documentary, five of the queens in the film had died, and 2006 saw the passing of Willi Ninja, the vogue dancer in Madonna’s video, due to AIDS-related causes at age 45.

The new temporal logics, as discussed by Halberstam, have come about, in part, in response to “the threat of AIDS, by rethinking the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity, and by making community in relation to risk, disease, infection, and death” (Bersani, 1996; Edelman, 1998, cited in Halberstam, 2005, p. 2). These logics not only challenge conventional notions of family, reproduction, labor, and production; they also place a
renewed emphasis on the here and now. Through these, they hold potential for new possibilities.

To trace, document, and gain insight into ball houses and other alternatives to kinship-based notions of family, then, is to allow for new understandings of "agency, style, liminality, community, and history" (Halberstam, 2005). In keeping with this spirit of new understandings, this project examines local drag and other forms of transgender families in their development, presence, and workings—not as "other" or as spectacle, but as a challenge to hegemony.
CHAPTER 3
THEORY

Theoretical Frameworks

Figure 2: Y. and her Poppa at Ice Palace

This is not theory. This is my life (Vazquez, 2004, p. 697).

This project is guided by multiple, interconnected theoretical constructions, stemming from structuration theory (Giddens, 1984); feminist standpoint theories (Haraway, 1991; Reinharz, 1992; Smith, 1987); and culturally anchored intervention research (Fraser, 2004). These rest on an empowerment model perspective, of which Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003), and therefore photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), are a part. This framework—in its recognition of the politics of self, identity, and "other"—calls for the situating of one's own identity, as well as that of the research, including its disciplinarity and "subjects." At the same time, it is understood that these positions cannot be presumed to be stable and may be especially complicated for those
researchers and subjects who occupy many locations shaping their identities and notions of self (Lal, 1999). These theoretical constructions are briefly addressed here.

**Structuration Theory**

The profession of social work has been characterized by a deep divide between macro and micro theories and practice, including controversy and debate over the purpose and focus of “real” social work (Abramovitz & Bardill, 1993). Further, despite multiple efforts to bridge the divide, e.g., the development of various systems perspectives and ecological frameworks, this tension persists (Kondrat, 2002). Current person-in-environment perspectives, for instance, treat macro and micro realities as separate and distinct arenas that “interface.” Conversely, constructionist theories treat macrostructures as apart from—yet influencing—identities, relationships, and meaning (Laird, 1993, cited in Kondrat, 2002).

There is, however, a framework that challenges this macro/micro dualism, through a critical view that posits social structure as both medium and outcome (Giddens, 1984; Kondrat, 2002). Known as structuration theory, the emphasis is on the everyday processes and interactions that mutually maintain and reproduce both the individual action and the structures of the social environment (Giddens, 1984). Within this theory, the individual is not so much “in” the larger social system as a smaller box resting within a larger, but rather, “the way dancers are in a ballet or a . . . team is in a game.” The dancer and the players, then, co-constitute the dance and the game (Kondrat, 2002).

This framework helps to account for the function and role of routine activity and daily forms of social behavior and communication in impacting and co-creating structural properties. Further, (e.g., through Foucauldian poststructuralism), it becomes possible to see
the social scientist/researcher as part of this structure, in her/his role not only as investigator, but also as a partial constructor of social reality. These theoretical perspectives challenge the intractability of social structures that are unjust or constraining and allow us to move away from more essentialist and fixed notions towards an understanding of culture as potentially performative and fluid (Laird, 1998)—a primary objective of this project.

Expanding the Construct of Positioning

Positioning is a rich construct in structuration theory, dealing with how individuals are differently constrained and enabled within systems and structures (Rose, 2006). Though this construct, for Giddens, was borrowed from the work of time-geographers (Hagerstrand, as cited by Rose, 2006), this notion is not unlike Smith’s “positionality” (1987) or Haraway’s “situated knowledge” (1991), in that all allow for the linking of different knowledge/resources to one’s physical, spatial, and temporal aspects of positioning.

With regard to transgenders and other sexual minorities, this construct helps to explain notions of “queer time” and “queer space,” as developed in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction; and as manifest in certain “subcultural practices, alternative methods of alliance, and forms of transgender embodiment” (Halberstam, 2005, p. 1). This construct also helps to reveal and make understandable the notion of “displacement from civil society” as experienced by gay and lesbian (queer, minoritarian) nonlocated subjects who are dislodged from the: public sphere (e.g., education, employment) via the requirement that they adopt “at least the appearance of a heterosexual identity;” the private sphere (e.g., marriage and family) via legal restrictions;
and even the future ("control over the character of future generations") via legal, psychiatric, educational, and familial practices (Calhoun, 2000, p. 76).

**Empowerment Models/Intervention**

Empowerment models are rooted in the progressive social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, founded to transform oppressive conditions among particular groups (e.g., blacks, women) in the US. This version of empowerment rests on the principle of self-determination—i.e., that individuals and communities have the right to determine their own fates. From this perspective, empowerment denotes both micro (individual) and macro (institutional) interventions to effect changes in the lives and communities of subordinated peoples, with these interventions geared ultimately toward progressive social transformation.

In social work practice and policy, one of the goals of empowerment is to increase the actual power of the client or community so that action can be taken to change and prevent the problems that clients/communities may be facing. In keeping with this model, work with rape survivors, for instance, would include assistance to victims (microlevel), alongside efforts to affect laws or the courts, as well as society's tolerance of men who violate the rights and integrity of women (macrolevel) (Gutiérrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998, p. 60). Likewise, in the area of policy, an empowerment approach might strive to take policy practices and advocacy to the state and local levels so that providers and consumers (in the best scenario) could actively influence and help shape local services, collaborate more strongly with the community, focus on family outcomes, and develop community governance and ownership of programs and initiatives (Weil, 1996, p. 494).
Extending from empowerment practice and policy, then, is an empowerment approach to evaluation research that uses multidimensional and multimethodological concepts and techniques to foster self-determination. This approach encourages program stakeholders to examine their program from differing perspectives and to redefine their roles within program structure, with the aim of helping them to help themselves (Fetterman, 1994). Similar to other social work empowerment strategies, this type of evaluation is particularly applicable to programs that serve oppressed peoples or groups, or that attempt to further social justice—the defining feature being the intent to transfer research evaluation knowledge from the researcher/“expert” to the program stakeholders, for the explicit and ongoing use of the programs serving the disenfranchised (Ford, 1999).

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)

CBPR is not a model, so much as it is a research orientation, in its drawing from critical theory, interpretive, and postmodern approaches to research. CBPR and related community-based strategies have arisen out of an awareness that service providers, researchers, and academics have often pathologized people in communities, contributed to individually oriented rather than community oriented solutions, and fostered dependency rather than enhance interdependence (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, cited in Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998).

This orientation offers more reflexive and pluralistic modes of inquiry, and may be especially well suited for research with oppressed and marginalized populations that historically have been left out of the research process and, consequently, may have little trust of outsiders (Hall, 1981). This description may well characterize local transgenders, though,
according to Valentine (2000, cited in Halberstam, 2005, p. 21), transgenders may hold more suspicion and mistrust for academics than for providers of social services.

*Culturally Anchored Intervention Research*

Fraser (2004, p. 10) has argued that the essence of social work research is the study of intervention. Research of this type, however, is decidedly difficult to accomplish, in part because of its multiple demands of researchers.

At once, intervention researchers must be clinical, substantive, and methodological experts. They have to have good street sense. They have to be skilled in building partnerships with clinicians and with agencies. Similar to good practitioners, they must be able to encode social cues, interpret social information, and regulate their own behavior to be effective in a variety of settings (2004, p. 212).

Even more, research of this type is complicated by the need for development of constructs—constructs that are tied to cultural values, norms, expectations, and behaviors.

Additionally, this cultural aspect requires attending to the social processes relevant to the population of focus. As culture influences our conceptualizations of social and health problems, and thereby participants’ responses, it becomes impossible to develop methods that are culture-free. We have little choice, then, but to anchor our methods in culture, or to root them in social experience, despite our inability to establish “true” linguistic equivalence or cross-cultural relevance.

Partly in response to these challenges and limitations, a trend has developed, with broad theories (e.g., ecological and learning theory) giving way to highly specified
microsocial theories (Fraser, 2004, p. 213). Focus on a particular community, in a particular place and time (as offered here), may well be one way to meaningfully approach culturally specific elements and measurement models.

Constructivist Approach to Use of Cultural Narratives

... no one is ever one of these stories without at the same time all of the others, although one story, one self, may be more salient in one context and time than in another (Laird, 1998, p. 26).

Positionality of Approach

Given these understandings, this project approaches culture as neither measurable nor generalizable. It is not possible, then, to decontextualize or hold up for examination (at least, in a meaningful way) ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, or other aspects of identity, for the simple reason that these are not things. As a "narrativized cluster of meanings drawn from past, present, and future that is itself definitional and constitutive," information can be provided only situationally. Using this approach, it is the cultural questioning processes, not cultural characteristics, that have transferability across cultural categories (Laird, 1998, p. 23).

Positionality of Method

Consistent with this approach that centers on process, rather than data, is a method explicated by Pink (2001, p. 18). This method views ethnographic research as a process of creating and representing knowledge—about society, culture, and individuals—that is based on ethnographers' own experiences. While this may involve reflexive, collaborative, or participatory methods; and may engage with issues of representation that question the right,
or ability, of the researcher to represent “other(s),” this perspective suggests that the sense we make of respondents’ words/actions/images is, in the end, “an expression of our own consciousness” (Cohen & Rapport, 1995, p. 12; Pink, 2001, p. 18). Beyond the subjectivity of the researcher and issues of “bias” or distortion, then, we are confronted with the social embeddedness, not only of the researcher, but of the research, placing both into sociohistorical context.

**Positionality of Researcher**

... Differences do not only exist between outsider and insider—two entities, they are also at work within the outsider or the insider—a single entity (Trinh, 1989).

As research, itself, is rooted in culture, it becomes necessary to explicate the position of the researcher. For Collins (1991), a black woman in academia, there are advantages to being an “outsider within,” given the status this provides for a special standpoint on self, family, and society; and for allowing for a particular way of seeing reality. Trinh (in *Outside In Inside Out*, 1989) complicates this standpoint, in her perspective that is one of neither privilege nor indigeneity, but a hybrid state in-between; and (in *Cinema Interval*) asks, “Why follow only the vertical and its hierarchies when the oblique and the horizontal in their multiplicities are no less relevant and no less fascinating for the quest of truth and knowledge?” (1999).

As a hapa (“of mixed descent,” in my case, Japanese/American), transplant to Hawai‘i, and nontransgender—I relate to the notion of hybridity and to its marginalizing effects, and all that these suggest, in terms of my own position—both as insider and outsider
(e.g., difference, resistance, and even affiliation). It is from a position of simultaneous privilege and marginalization, then, that I approached this study—the learner and the learned, separate from the community, yet a part of it.

To elaborate, I was both helped and hampered by this position. While it offered flexibility, allowing me to place myself between the population of focus and the university, thereby providing a view of/from either side, at the same time, it required that I be responsive to each/either side. This is an example of the grounding objectivity described by Haraway (1991)—a position that is partial, specific, and embodied; not the false vision that transcends all limits and responsibility. This position, then, called for a fair amount of juggling, so as to maintain some sort of balance. Further, given my nontransgender status, it required much reliance on the goodwill of the community leader and participants, not only for access but also for meaningful engagement.
We listen people into speech (Josselson, 2007, p. 547).

There has been a tradition, within the social sciences, of privileging the numeric over the written word (Trochim, 2006), and the written word over the visual record (Harrison, 2002). This privileging, however, may make little sense, especially in reference to the current project. When one considers, for example, the critical role of metaphor in positivistic research, particularly in the process of making meaning “of the phenomenon of interest,” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 18); or the common and arguably necessary practice of quantifying qualitative data, as evident in any type of categorizing or even aggregation across individual cases (Trochim, 2006), “the divide between quantitative and qualitative research . . . may not be as wide as commonly thought” (Bruner, 1986, cited in Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 18).
This divide is bridged also with the recognition that most research, to date, deploying either visual images and/or technologies, has also deployed, in some capacity, a transposition into words. Whether words are viewed as the focus of study, with the visual as a means of accessing this information; or the images as central, with the words bearing only limited relationship to the visual—there remains an appreciation for visual methods as a way of coming to understand experiences that are not only essentially visual, but possibly those that extend beyond what can be viewed or seen (Harrison, 2002).

*Everyday Lives/Everyday Approach*

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) position narrative inquiry alongside, but distinct from, postpositivist, Marxist, and poststructuralist forms of inquiry. While clarification of these distinctions are beyond the scope of the current project, it is important to note the “commonplace” commitment to the study of experience and, within this focus, the attention to temporality, sociality, and place. In these, there is consistency with Dewey’s notions: of continuity in experience—that is, that every experience takes up something from the present and carries it into the future; of interaction—that people (including researchers) are always in interactions with both their personal and social conditions; and of place—that all events take place in some specific, concrete, physical and topologically bound place.

*Everyday Lives/Everyday Photography*

For individuals and researchers, photographs provide a basis for narrative work; “there are stories about photographs, and there are stories that lie behind . . . and between them” (Harrison, 2002, p. 105). For people in everyday life, photographs have been used to preserve their memories, illustrate their lives, and provide a way of communicating who they
are and from where they have come. For researchers, such images have served not only as a form of representation, capable of narration in their own right, but also as a “trigger” or invitation to narration (2002, pp. 89-90).

Also, it may be important to note that everyday photographs can be more complex and diverse than the term suggests, and ironically may be little concerned with the “everyday” (Harrison, 2002). Consider, for instance, the desire or tendency, on the part of many amateur photographers, to capture special moments (emotions), places (tourism), or occasions (e.g., holidays, celebrations)—often, to the exclusion of the ordinary or routine. Though this feature is not addressed here, it is noted as a factor affecting the content of everyday photographs.

Relevance of Approach

Clandinin and Rosiek cite Dewey’s pragmatic ontology of experience, or of ordinary lived experience, as a well-suited framework for narrative inquiries. Further, they remark on its particular relevance to the service professions (e.g., teaching, public health, social work, etc.), as these have been affected by the imposition of “narrow standards of effectiveness” on undertakings whose significance to those involved is both “nuanced and manifold” (2007, p. 42). As a result of this imposition, the meaning of that service is “drained,” with this “drainage” suffered by both recipients and providers:

The most serious indictment to be brought against non-empirical philosophies is that they have cast a cloud over the things of ordinary experience. They have not been content to rectify them. They have discredited them at large. In casting aspersions upon the things of everyday experience, the things of action
and affection and social intercourse, they have done something far worse than fail to give these affairs intelligent direction. . . . To waste of time and energy, to disillusionment with life that attends every deviation from concrete experience must be added the tragic failure to realize the value that intelligent search could reveal among the things of ordinary experience (1981, pp. 40-41).

Though not all use of cameras and photographic images as forms of data fall within a tradition of narrative inquiry (e.g., photo-elicitation, photographic and video journals, and photobiography), photovoice, as deployed in this project, does. Given this approach and particular use of visual narrative inquiry, the project includes "attention to relationships among participants, the move to words as data, focus on the particular, and recognition of blurred genres of knowing," or a valuing of different ways of knowing (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007, pp. 3, 16).

Background and Purpose

While many have recorded aspects of the lives of transgenders residing in urban Honolulu (for example, Matzner, 2001, who photographed and interviewed several prominent mahuwahine, or male-to-female transgenders), few have paid attention to the formation of community or family life, despite the centrality of these to health and wellbeing. As a result, we have much information about the novel and "spectacular" (Namaste, 2000), but know little about transgenders and their everyday lives (Smith, 1987), particularly with regard to practices of survival.
For Muñoz, these practices are nothing short of staggering, “the armaments” used “to withstand the disabling force of a culture and state apparatus bent on denying, eliding, and in too many cases, snuffing out . . . emergent identity practices” (1999, p. 37). Further, these practices are not intrinsic, but learned; and not learned in isolation, but informed by the examples of others. It seems critical, then, that attention be paid to the importance of mentors, guides, or even “heroes” (Muñoz, 1999). Finally, this method allows for the emergence of counter-narratives: “for the probability that what people themselves regard as important in their lives and social or cultural worlds may be different [from] how others may have viewed them” (Harrison, 2002, p. 94).

This project seeks to fill a knowledge void, then, in its attending to the invisibility around transgenders in their making of community or family. In so doing, this project seeks also to challenge both stark (e.g., impoverished, bleak) and glamorous (e.g., exotic, tropicalized) renderings, in favor of the ordinary, day-to-day, and mundane (Namaste, 2000).
This project explores the narratives (stories) of 16 transgender participants with regard to family, with photographs of family (visual images) serving as a springboard for discussion. Participants entered into the project with the understanding that they were serving as spokespersons for the local community, charged with the mission of helping program planners and lawmakers, as well as other nontransgenders, become knowledgeable, or more knowledgeable, about their special concerns. Using a focus group format (a series of four sessions), questions were posed regarding family composition and role, significance of family, issues with family regarding participant’s transgenderism/sexual identity/sexual
orientation; and finally, solicitation of participants' thoughts on how information should or could be conveyed to those involved in service delivery or lawmaking, or to the general public.

The following sections address the photovoice method and its development, human subjects protections, the sample characteristics, and study procedures—i.e., the design, research questions, materials, and instruments used. Also covered are the procedures for data analysis and limitations of the method and approach.

Photovoice

This project relied on the use of photovoice. This method, or approach, was first articulated and codified by Wang and Burris (1994, 1997). As a Freirian-based process (1970), photovoice has three main goals: 1) to engage people in active listening and dialogue, 2) to create a safe environment for introspection and critical reflection, and 3) to move people toward action (Carlson, 2006). This approach to participatory appraisal is built around the knowledge put forth by the population of study—a knowledge that is valued as a vital source of expertise. With this at its foundation, photovoice confronts a fundamental problem of community assessment—the distortion of fitting data into a predetermined paradigm, resulting in a mismatch between the objectives of the participants and those of the researcher(s).

Through providing a space for prioritization of concerns and discussion of solutions, as viewed by participants, photovoice invites the community to promote its own wellbeing. This method has been adopted as a tool for assessing grassroots needs and assets, and for evaluation, by diverse populations, both nationally and internationally (Wang et al., 1998).
**Development**

As a necessary first step, I sought support for the project from community members (e.g., key leaders of local non-profits and community groups serving or otherwise involving transgenders) and, over time, secured the backing and assistance of a community leader—an individual who was/is highly regarded and trusted, if not admired by local transgenders and others who know her. This approach, of reliance on a community leader (in this case, for recruitment and participant retention), was borrowed from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) as a means of enlisting participation from an otherwise difficult-to-reach, and possibly even harder to retain, population.

Additionally, I had worked closely with the community leader (who had served as Coordinator on a project I had been directing, in a different capacity) for a period of roughly two years; and through that work, had had the opportunity to meet and get to know many of those who elected to participate in the current project. This set of circumstances helped to facilitate access and build trust, both of which were essential and critical—not only for enlisting participants, but for their engagement and participation in the project.

**Human Subjects Procedures and Ethical Issues**

*Protection of Participants*

All study participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality, to the extent allowed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and law. Participants were informed that they would likely be identifiable through the images/photographs they agreed to release—through signed release forms—for project purposes. Focus group sessions were digitally audiorecorded, with the understanding that these recordings would be securely held
and destroyed or erased, once transcribed. All participation remained voluntary and all participants maintained the right to withdraw participation at any time, without negative repercussion. (See Appendix A: Consent to Participate in Study.)

Protection of Persons being Photographed

The initial meeting, or orientation, included not only the technical aspects of the camera or of photography, however brief, but a discussion of the overall goals of the project and of ethics. Participants were instructed to use their own best judgment in order to maintain good relations and outcomes and to protect themselves and the persons photographed—who also signed consents and, if willing, releases. In the case of minors being photographed, signed consents and releases were sought from parents and legal guardians. The resulting photographs remained the property of participant photographers, who voluntarily released select photographs for purposes of the study, as they deemed appropriate. (See Appendix B: Consent to be Photographed and Appendix C: Release for Use of Photographs.)

Consents

Wang (2006) has recommended the use of three kinds of consents for photovoice:

- Consent 1: participants sign consent to participate in project; this details participant’s rights and responsibilities;
- Consent 2: participants sign consent to be photographed; this is obtained prior to having any photograph taken;
- Consent 3: participants give signed permission for release of photos to be published or disseminated to promote the project’s goals; this is usually given after the photos have been selected and discussed.
Though not routine, this project included, as part of consent to be photographed, signed permission to be photographed on the part of any person identifiable in the images (or, in the case of minors, the signature of a parent or guardian). These signatures were obtained by participant photographers. Further, without signed releases for use of photos, photos were neither published nor otherwise disseminated, though they may have served as a basis for focus group discussion.

Sample

Recruitment

The project was conducted in Honolulu (city and county) out of an area with a fairly large (relative to the population) concentration of transgenders, i.e., Chinatown in downtown Honolulu, with many participants originating from the rural area of Wai‘anae (roughly 30 miles east). Recruitment was purposive (or theoretical) and conducted through word of mouth (snowball technique), in order to convene two groups of eight (total of 16) local, self-identified transgenders and queen mothers (or fathers).

All group participants were known to the community leader (responsible for recruitment), over 18 years of age, and actively networked within the local transgender community. In addition, participants were selected on the basis of their willingness to commit to the four sessions and to share personal information about themselves, and their connection to drag families (a point of focus for researcher).

Sample Characteristics

Based on responses to the Participant Survey (see Appendix D), all participants were either transgender, born male and living as women, or men who identified (at least, part of
the time) as female. Of the 16 persons identified for the project, 10 self-identified as Hawaiian/part Hawaiian and 6 as Pacific Islander/mix (mainly Samoan); 14 as male-to-female transgender and 2 as male ("butch queens"). Average age was 33 (across both cohorts). All lived locally, with 94% \((n=16)\) residing with a partner, family member(s), or friend(s), or in a residential facility (i.e., clean and sober house). Only one (6%) had completed college, though an additional 18% \((n=16)\) held an Associates degree or equivalent. Average income could not be meaningfully calculated as several participants did not provide a response, though income levels (for the 81% who indicated employment) ranged from $800 to $3,833/month.

Procedures

Design

This project entailed the convening of a total of nine sessions—four sessions for each of the two cohorts (dubbed black and silver, based on the color of their cameras), plus a final session for the purpose of participant reviews and checks. These were held concurrently (staggered between the two cohorts), with data collection taking place from September through December 2007, and participant checks taking place in March 2008. All sessions were held at times and places convenient for, and accessible to, participants and included food/meals.

These sessions took place at one of two local organizations, both in downtown Honolulu—Kulia Na Mamo (the state’s only nonprofit focused on transgenders) and Life Foundation (the state’s oldest and largest AIDS organization, which operates a special
project targeting transgenders). Each session lasted approximately two hours, excluding time allotted for food or meal breaks, with the focus for each session planned as follows:

- Session 1: orientation; discussion of overall purpose, discussion of possible themes for picture-taking; (two to three weeks allotted to take photos);
- Session 2: joint selection of those photographs that most accurately reflect themes (thereby defining course of discussion);
- Session 3: narration/stories about photographs and meanings of the images; discussion of emergent themes or issues;
- Sessions 4: discussion of how participants care to use or display photographs in order to inform awareness, policy, or planning; discussion of impact of project.

Research Questions

Questions posed to participants were designed to illuminate their understandings and relationships to family, however they perceived these.

- During the initial session (session 1), participants received cameras and instructions.
- During the next session (session 2), participants were encouraged to describe the people in their photos, their relationships and responsibilities to/for those people, people missing from the photos, and the significance of the people and of place.
- In subsequent sessions (sessions 3 and 4), they were asked to talk about their families with respect to (their own) transgenderism, and about the information
service providers and policymakers should have about them and their families in order to be more responsive to their issues and needs.

A more detailed explanation of the content of these sessions follows.

Session 1. The orientation session allowed for discussion of the project's overall purpose, as well as discussion of possible themes for picture taking. Participants were informed that they would be given a camera and would be asked to take pictures of and talk about their families, in order to help program planners and lawmakers begin to understand what is special about and important to them. They were apprised of the format of the project and the time it would take (i.e., four sessions, including the orientation, plus the time to gain consents and photographs); the risks (e.g., to their anonymity and perhaps privacy, through identification by way of the photographs); and the benefits of participation (e.g., the opportunity to influence program development and, potentially, to help create more healthful and fitting social policy).

This first session was also an opportunity to stress the importance of confidentiality (e.g., of holding in confidence other participants' sharing and stories); to establish ground rules for participation, through discussion of standards for ethical picture-taking (e.g., stressing of the importance of photographing only willing participants, the need for attention to safety and security issues, etc.); and to gather signatures for consents to participate and allow for completion of the Participant Survey. (See Appendix D: Participant Survey.) The orientation also provided an opportunity for distributing the cameras—which participants understood were theirs to keep, in lieu of compensation, regardless of level of participation—and to provide brief instruction on camera workings and use.
Finally, participants were asked to consider who, really, comprised their families and how these persons could be distinguished from those who were not family (e.g., friends). Care was taken to avoid predefining family, so as to be inclusive of all persons recognized as family by participants—including partners, children, biological relatives, adoptive relatives, hanai (informally adopted) relatives, drag relations, close friends, and others.

Session 2. This session focused on selection of photographs and beginning discussion of topics and emergent themes. Participants were asked to select two to three photos and to discuss these in relation to the following questions:

- Who is this person/persons who appear/s in your photo?
- What is this person’s/these persons’ relationship to you?
- Describe your relationship to this person/these persons.
- Describe your responsibilities to/for this person/these persons.
- Describe this person’s/these persons’ responsibilities to you.
- Who is missing from photographs? Why?
- Where was this photo taken?
- What is the significance of this place?
- What is the significance of this particular photo?

These questions were posed to the group at large (i.e., written on a white board or easel and delivered verbally) and to individual participants, by way of a handout. Though there was no expectation of participants responding to all these questions, or of their responding to questions in any particular order, the researcher (and on occasion, other
participants) took the liberty of probing when the stories were unclear or "overly" brief or when certain key points appeared to have been overlooked.

Session 3. Discussion, at this point, was shaped by issues defined by the group, with the focus remaining on family—as family affects participants and as participants shape family (including broader understandings/conceptualizations). There was also the attempt, during session 3, to connect information—as gleaned from the narratives and group discussion—to the realm of the practical, through recommendations for service providers/program developers and policymakers/legislators. Questions for this session included the following:

- How does being transgender affect your relationship with family?
- How does being transgender affect your family's relationship with you? (a slightly different question, from that above)
- What should nontransgenders, including service providers and policymakers, know about you and your family?
- Why is this issue/information (response to preceding question) important?
- If service providers/policymakers understood this, what might they do differently?

Session 4. This session entailed discussion of use or display of photographs in order to inform awareness, policy, or planning; and closure by way of discussion of the impact of the project (on participants). Questions posed to participants included the following:

- What is important and needs to be remembered? What needs to be changed? (Wang & Burris, 1997).
• How would you like to convey this information to the community/service providers/policymakers? (It was mentioned that photos and narratives, for example, could be exhibited by way of easels or panels, web pages, written materials or publications, etc.)

• How has this project affected you?

• Should this work continue? In what ways/how?

Finally, hope was expressed that the photovoice process would not only make participants “visible/audible,” but would provide support and a new or different sense of community, if desired by the group, through collective action.

Materials

During the first session (orientation), each participant was provided with a 6MP digital camera, camera case, and 1GB xD (media storage) card, to keep as (or in lieu of) incentive. Alternatives included disposable digital, 35mm reloadable, or 35mm disposable cameras. Nondigital photographs, however, require scanning for import; and disposable digital cameras, though inexpensive, are generally of low quality and produce inferior pictures.

In order to display the images—stored either on media cards, compact disks, or flash drives—it was necessary to secure a computer, photo printer, and/or a projector and screen. In order to record the sessions, the researcher relied upon both a digital audiorecorder and an assistant notetaker.
Instruments

*Participant survey.* A brief single-page survey was developed to capture demographic and background information (attribute data) on participants, with focus on level of education, employment, and housing. (See Appendix D: Participant Survey.) This information was collected during the orientation (session 1).

*Discussion questions.* Discussion questions were designed to prompt and promote the telling of stories (narratives). Participants were encouraged to work their stories around the questions, but were not expected to address the questions directly (though this remained an option). (See Appendix E: Anticipated Discussion Questions.)

*Researcher.* In qualitative research, the researcher is understood as a research instrument, both during the process of data collection (Patton, 1990), and in the process of data analysis (Cohen & Rapport, 1995; Pink, 2001). Acting as a participant observer for this study, I had been involved in this community since 2005, serving for a brief period as a program evaluator and later as the director of a health prevention project. Prior to these, I had done clinical and administrative nonprofit work in the areas of domestic violence and rape, clinical work with the suicidal and self-harming in a hospital setting, and program evaluation for several small nonprofits (usually, as part of a team). I had also worked in hair salons for a period of 13 years, both as an undergraduate and a graduate student—a work history that brought me into contact with a different subculture and aesthetic. All these served me in my efforts to facilitate the sessions and to make sense of the stories and images that ensued.
Data Analysis Procedures

Two steps have been recommended by Wang and Yi (1998), in the analysis of photovoice:

1) Contextualizing or explaining the meaning of the photos through the taking of a critical stance. This can be accomplished by the framing of narratives (stories) in terms of the acronym SHOWeD:

- What do you See?
- What is really Happening?
- How does this relate to Our lives?
- Why does this (problem or strength) exist?
- What can we Do about this? (Shaeffer, 1983; Wallerstein, 1987, cited in Wang & Yi, 1998), and

2) Codifying or identifying the issues or themes emerging from the photos and discussion in order to yield multiple meanings for selected images. Both these steps were incorporated into the project, as follows.

Sources

This project relied upon thematic relational content analysis. Data included the narratives accompanying select photographs, as verbally delivered by participants, in conjunction with material (including the visual images) from the group discussions. Data also included memos and fieldnotes, containing reflective remarks regarding categorization of data and possible relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All narratives and discussions were digitally audiotaped and transcribed (verbatim), then imported into QSR NVivo 7
Transcriptions were produced by the researcher in order to be "close to the data," with the aid of an assistant who had been present during some of the group sessions.

Transcribing was time-consuming and complicated by the group format (allowing for multiple voices), as well as the use of pidgin (Hawai'i Creole English) and mahu lingo and other slang—all of which were unfamiliar, though comprehensible, to the researcher. Transcribing was hampered also by the often overwhelming emotion surrounding the narrative, making it difficult to continue. (This aspect of the project is addressed more fully in Chapter 6.)

**Coding**

All coding was done by the researcher, for the sake of consistency. This began with the use of sensitizing concepts generated from the literature (Patton, 2002), then reformulated through the use of codes derived directly from the data (reflecting an emic approach). These codes were initially stored as free nodes, and later organized into relational tree nodes. This process is similar to the constant comparative method used to group subthemes under major themes while, at the same time, identifying new themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were also auto-coded by participants (as cases) and each case included attribute information (the information drawn from the Participant Survey, included as Appendix D). Once the coding was complete, directional relationships were hypothetically established and models generated to present connections in the data.
Modeling

Though more conceptual than visual, I began with a static model that was designed to capture the content, and spirit, of the images and stories. Initially, this model was based on factors that enhanced or diminished family (sort of a public health type approach). In rethinking this and in keeping with the understandings of the literature, however, I ended up with just two categories of markers (or nodes):

- kinship/collectivity/belonging/home (modes of collectivity and kinship that reject heteronormative or homonormative models of sexual alterity [Gopinath, 2005, p. 20]); and
- melancholia (communal mourning, related to the process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of the minoritarian; not self-absorbed mood but rather a mechanism for (re)constructing identity and “taking our dead with us” [Muñoz, 1999, p. 74]).

Having just two categories helped to simplify coding. Further, this particular understanding of melancholia helped to emotionally ground the project and “contain” some of the sense of loss, with the idea of the missing and deceased not only existing within the drama of day-to-day life, but helping to formulate it (Muñoz, 1999). The model, itself, was understood as dynamic, with the markers and even the categories (of kinship and melancholia) presented as in relation to each other. (See Chapter 5, Results and Analysis.)

Technical Issues

This study made use of digital or digitized photographs, leaving open the opportunity to manipulate the images (through cropping, changing of hue or brightness, etc.). This
technology has invited new forms of “scrutiny and critique” related to the “truthfulness” of the image. Pink has pointed out, however, that techniques of manipulation have been available long before digital photography. Also, there is little evidence to suggest that this technology has brought about “dramatic shifts in approaches to uses of photography for ethnographic representation” (2001, pp. 160-163). Further, the potential problems related to using digital media are arguably outweighed by their allowing for new means of producing, storing, representing, and viewing ethnographic materials; and making possible nonlinear, and more reflexive, approaches (2001, pp. 155-157).

Study Limitations

Ristock and Pennell (1996, cited in Alvarez & Gutiérrez, 2001) have suggested attention to the value, as well as the validity, of research. In this, they recommend flexibility, reflexivity, and the capacity to energize (Lather, 1991). Flexibility and reflexivity are discussed here, in relation to the current project.

Flexibility

Qualitative researchers often use the term flexible with regard to method. This term has been used so diversely, however, that its meaning is not always clear. Here, flexibility is understood against its seemingly opposite term, rigidity. Because what we learn, in part, shapes where we next look and what we next ask, qualitative designs are, by necessity, flexible and emergent. This means that research of this type often requires researchers to actively give up control, in order to gain or understand a local or emic point of view (Demerath, 2006).
To gain this perspective, the interpretive qualitative researcher would not only ask what is happening, but what those happenings might mean, particularly to those who are engaged in or affected by them. Further, a critical researcher (such as a participatory action researcher) would pose a third question, having to do with the justness of those happenings and whose interests they might serve.

This particular project required attention not only to the accuracy, precision, and breadth of the data (stemming from multiple influences), but to meanings, beliefs, values, and intentions—all in the effort to understand local context. Further, these were attended to in a way that followed the emergent twists and turns of the data, rather than adherence to the original formulation of the problem (as recommended by Blee, 2004, cited in Demerath, 2006).

**Reflexivity**

In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art (Barthes, 1981, p. 13).

Rather than the translation of visual evidence into text (the scientific approach to visual research), Pink suggests a reflexive exploration of the relationship between the visual and other knowledge—including text, verbal knowledge, notes, sociological understandings, and their relevance to the wider academic debates. Such analysis produces not a “complete” record, but a set of “different representations and strands of it” (2001, p. 96). This can be approached by way of issues, themes (patterns), or theories. Participants may also develop
theories that are grounded in data already gathered and collectively analyzed/discussed
(Wang & Burris, 1997).

Throughout, this project entailed attention not only to the stories being told, but to those behind them, as well. Towards this end, I read widely and immersed myself in the data (e.g., was present when the narratives were first delivered; personally transcribed the sessions and coded the transcriptions; viewed the data both within and across [participant] cases; contemplated and discounted patterns, only to contemplate them again, etc.). While this immersion gave me a “closeness to the data,” it also took a great deal of time and possibly jeopardized other, alternative “ways of seeing” (Berger, 1977). Also problematic, this process pushed me into seclusion and away from the people who had so openly shared with me—an awkward position for documenting a participatory action project.

Cost

Another limitation, rarely mentioned in the literature, is cost (Alvarez and Gutiérrez, 2001, p. 11). For this project, roughly,

- $2,080 went towards the cameras ($100 per camera, $20 per xD card, and $10 per case/batteries x 16 participants);
- $2,000 to the community leader ($100 for recruitment/retention of each participant and $50 for each of 10 sessions [3 orientation sessions, 6 group sessions, plus final session for participant checks]);
- $750 towards food and beverages (excluding the $300 to $400 in food donated by one of the assistants);
- $350 for the qualitative and photo management software and accompanying texts;
• $250 for computer memory upgrades in order to run the qualitative software; and
• $200 for the photo printer and accessories (e.g., toner, paper).

These resulted in a total outlay of approximately $5,630 without grant support—as opportunities appeared limited, and the grant processes, themselves, cumbersome.

At the same time, much was donated to the project. The two assistants volunteered their time and skills and one provided use of both the projector and digital audiorecorder, as well as donations of food; local nonprofits (Kulia Na Mamo and Life Foundation) provided meeting space; the community leader—and other participants, as needed and appropriate—did much of the participant transporting; and participants, themselves, did much in the way of preparing for sessions and cleaning up, afterwards (in addition to their contributions by way of stories and photos).

Validity

There is much debate around the validity and reliability of participatory research, given the need to relinquish control over to participants. A risk faced by researchers is that of marginalization within their own institutions, if the strategy or approach is perceived as lacking in rigor or scientific basis. In response to this, however, is a different perspective that recognizes all research as inherently value-laden. Turning control over to participants, then, is one way to give explicit priority to the community’s agenda over that of the researcher. From this perspective, it is the non-participatory process that is found lacking—for researchers, institutions, and the community, alike (Wang & Yi, et al., 1998, p. 84).

Participatory research also considers, as a means of assessing validity, not the theoretical interpretations of the participants’ narratives, but the rigor of the process.
Ultimately, then, validity may be based on participants' concurrence with the findings, and with the usefulness of the findings for future theory, research, and practice (Carlson, 2006). These (concurrence and usefulness), however, may be difficult to measure, and the slow and often incremental nature of policy change may make it difficult to demonstrate the degree to which the photovoice process contributed to improved policy outcome (Wang & Pies, 2004).

With reference to this particular project, while participants largely concurred with findings, there was little time to develop action steps for change. Also, while there was strong agreement about the value of getting together (i.e., the group process), this seemed to be more productive for data gathering than for the generation of material particular to influencing policy.

Reliability

Information gleaned from photovoice is subject to dilemmas of interpretation and representation, e.g., about who should control the narratives and photographs, or who should determine if and how these should be made public or otherwise used. While researchers can do their best to faithfully represent the themes identified by participants, photovoice as a participatory methodology requires a new framework and paradigm allowing for the analysis to be participant-driven. The issues raised, then, will be those of a particular group at a particular time and place, and will likely differ from issues raised from other groups, including even their broader cohort(s) (Wang & Pies, 2004). It is understood, then, that the findings cannot be generalized to other groups in other locations, regardless of similarities or shared characteristics.
Evaluation

As a naturalist method, qualitative content analysis differs from the conventional paradigm in its fundamental assumptions, research purposes, and inference processes. To address this gap, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have proposed four criteria for evaluation: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (considered equivalent to internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity).

To improve credibility, they advise data collection strategies that not only solicit the representations, but that make accurate (trustworthy) inferences from the raw data (e.g., transparent coding schemes). To improve transferability, they suggest the provision of enough data sets and descriptions to apply the “working hypothesis” to another context. To improve dependability and confirmability, they recommend audit—for internal consistency of the process and coherence of the research product (data, findings, interpretations, and recommendations).

These, however, are ideal suggestions, which may or may not be entirely applicable to the current project. With regard to this project, the thematic groupings (data sets) were relatively strong and consistent, suggesting accurate inferences. Having only one or two transcribers and a single coder was also helpful, from the standpoint of internal consistency. Problematic, however, is the idea of transferability, given cultural aspects of the findings that may be particular to locale, alongside broader aspects that appear to be consistent with transgender populations on the continental US.
General Limitations

There is danger of social roles, community norms, and institutional inertia constraining people's behavior. Participants' desired or expected outcome of the project, then, may not be attained, which can lead to feelings of disappointment and powerlessness, as opposed to empowerment (Wang & Yi, et al., 1998). Finally, this study was time, cost, and labor intensive, for both researcher and likely participants; as well as challenging, given its interdisciplinarity and lack of conventionality.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Every narrative contains multiple truths. All selves are multiply voiced. Therefore, whatever narrative emerges in the final report is a construction of the interpreter, and the writer needs to make this plain in the presentation of results (Josselson, 2007, p. 551).

What was once the participant’s story now becomes a co-constructed text, the analysis of which falls within the framework of the interpretive authority of the researcher (Smythe & Murray, 2000).

Figure 5: Picture-taking
Many stories and images were shared by participants, any and all of which could be multiply understood and presented. While participants assured me that they wanted their stories to be told and images shared, the dilemma was how best to accomplish this. How best to faithfully represent what had been shared (the images and narrative texts) or, if faithful representation could not be achieved, how best to use the stories and images in the attempt to touch upon, or reach, some other level of understanding?

With the aim of achieving some level of faithful representation (understood here as a product of a co-constructive process), the following images and stories are presented in their natural state—i.e., photos as taken/provided by participants, untouched other than cropping and minimal effects, such as blurring of background; and verbatim narrative excerpts, occasionally abbreviated for the sake of clarity. For the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, no names are used and images may or may not be presented alongside the narratives that accompany them. Finally, with the goal of achieving "some other" level of understanding, I attend to the meaning of family and use the data to begin to respond to the questions posed at the onset, before the formal picture-taking and story-telling began.

Research Questions

- What are the practices of transgenders, with regard to alliance and family (e.g., who composes the family; how does it function; what are its norms, obligations, and reciprocities)? [microlevel]; and
- How has family shaped transgenders, and how have transgenders shaped the family (including contemporary conceptions of the institution of family)? [macrosocial, recursive]
Here, then, are some of participants' responses, depicted initially by way of an overall conceptual model, followed by a topical breakdown of the stories and images that served as the basis for its development.

Conceptual Model

Figure 6: Kinship.overall
Key Conceptual Markers

Collectivity and kinship. Collectivity and kinship, the point of focus of the model and of this study, are defined as those forms of family that are borne out of blood connections (e.g., biological/nuclear/family of origin), arranged or legalistic connections (e.g., adopted/adoptive or hanai), or common values or goals (e.g., chosen, drag, or work-related families). These are understood as closely tied to identity, seen both as the force that drives people towards families and family making, as well as a product of family.

Figure 7. Identity

Identity. Identity, as used here, touches on aspects of the self related to transitioning and acceptance as one is transitioning or “transitioned,” drag and appreciation for drag and for the stage, sisterhood, and respect for self and others. At the same time, identity touches on reliance on others to become or remain grounded or humble (especially important given the “loudness” of performance and drag) and to strengthen the sense of “who one is” (the means by which identity is stabilized). (See Figure 7. Identity.)
Melancholia. This term, as used here, touches on a feeling aspect of melancholia, rather than melancholia in any diagnostic sense. Muñoz distinguishes this understanding from that of Laplanche and Pontalis, who describe the work of mourning as an “intrapsychic process, occurring after the loss of a loved object, whereby the subject gradually manages to detach itself from this object.” In opposition, the works of mourning that he discusses ... offer no such escape from the lost object. Rather, the lost object returns with a vengeance. It is floated as an ideal, a call to collectivize, an identity-affirming example (1999, p. 52).

Further, neither is this particular “feeling structure” (as described by Muñoz) identical to that described by Wilson. This author/professor speaks of the “turbulence of heart that results in an active questioning of the status quo,” a longing to create new ways of being and seeing—this, in response to the feeling of perpetual anxiety, “a sense that the world is not quite right,” and in reaction to the apparently “hollow form” that constitutes “American
happiness" (2008, p. 8). While both understandings speak to “new ways of being and seeing,” they differ in their impetus.

Wilson, in his discussion of numerous artists, both visual and musical, describes an “ironic” connection between melancholy/death and beauty that is brought forth in the face of “physical and psychical pain” (2008, pp. 128, 96). While I am not taking issue with melancholia’s link to artistry or to pain, I am trying to highlight an aspect of melancholia that is altogether different, more European possibly, decidedly more communal, and even politic or queer. For the structure of feeling described by Muñoz is energized, not only out of intrapsychic necessity in response to a climate/environment that flattens and deadens, but in response to a climate/environment that derides and denies.

Through recognition only of the hypervisible, transgenders have been “swiped from the map of dominant culture and logic” (Gopinath, 2005). The result is a condition of (im)possibility; of loss, absence, and negation; and of relentless acts of contestation and struggle simply in the effort to survive (Garber, 1989; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 1999; Namaste, 2000; Treichler, 1999). This understanding of melancholia, then, and of the process related to surviving it, has more to do with an “impersonal self” realized through “counterpublics” that “disidentify” minoritarians, thereby allowing for their existence—in part, a recognition of self by way of disidentification with what the self is not (Muñoz, 1999, p. 178). Looking at everyday practices, it is this melancholia that

... is part of our process of dealing with all the catastrophes that occur in the lives of people of color, lesbians, and gay men. [This] different understanding of melancholia does not see itself as pathology or as a self-absorbed mood that
inhibits activism. Rather, it is a mechanism that helps . . . (re)construct identity and take our dead with us . . . (1999, p. 74).

Further, this (re)construction is not morbid but, on the contrary, a symbolic reminder of our own life force, operating through the memory of those who have preceded and hope for those who will follow us. (See Figure 8. Melancholia.)

Figure 9. Genealogy

*Genealogy.* Genealogy is used, not in reference to anything Foucauldian, but as related to the various activities that support and enhance families—whether biological, adoptive, hanai, or drag. Hanai, in this sense, is of particular interest, given its rootedness in Hawaiian traditional practice and in its recognition of ties beyond those of blood (Marsh, 2004). Genealogy pertains also to the perpetuation of culture and tradition, however practiced, through commonplace means (such as caring for children or the elderly), as well as diverse means (such as the cultivation and staging of “drags”). Finally, genealogy pertains to the efforts to spare “younger generations” the pain and hardship related to the catastrophes and losses experienced by the current or former generations. (See Figure 9. Genealogy.)
Explanation of kinship model. Returning to the questions posed earlier, we can identify, from the various narratives and images, several common forms of family—biological/nuclear/family of origin, hanai, adopted or adoptive, work related, and chosen, among others (these, in participants’ own words). These—depicted in the model as those conceptual markers off to the right of collectivity/kinship, our point of focus—appear alongside identity, understood to be shaped by and shaping of family.

We can identify, too, the many markers that have contributed to melancholia (depicted in blue), understood (consistent with Muñoz) as a “structure of feeling” tied to mourning and the force of the dead and dying in the culture and tradition around us (1999, p. 51). Finally, we can identify the many markers representing efforts to care for others—children, the elderly, those “drag sisters and brothers” struggling to transition, to make a living, to survive off (or on) the streets—as represented by genealogy (depicted in maroon, or blood red). All these themes enter into the stories and photographs of participants, as discussed here. (See Appendix F for a full listing of key markers or tree [hierarchically organized] nodes that appear in the kinship model.)
Collectivity and Kinship

Figure 10: Family of origin

*Family Practices*

*Composition.* Participants spoke of their blood families (biological), arranged families (adoptive or hanai), and those related to common goals or values (chosen), with no particular arrangement viewed as more meaningful or important.

*Biological/nuclear/family of origin.* Counter to the customary homonormative tale of family rejection and eventual exiling of the nonconformative family member (Gopinath, 2005), many participants shared stories of strong connection with their biological families. This is not to suggest that participants did not suffer periods of hardship with their families; only that there likely had been some sort of resolution, in order for these stories to be told. Of particular significance were stories of blood relations who stood by, even (or especially) in times of hardship or struggle. In reference to biological parents (of several different participants):
• But like my dad means the world to me because he chose to accept me as who I am; I mean an openly gay son initially and then one day I showed him a video of me performing.

• My father would always come down, when I was in prison, my father came to visit me every single weekend, when I was in prison; that was when my father actually saw me for the woman that I was, and now it was his daughter and my father actually stepped forward and even though it might have been shame-faced to come to the prison or shame for him to have somebody from the family be in prison, he stayed by me and made sure I was always taken care of.

• She came out looking for me when I was out on the road and she actually yanked me back home a couple of times but hard-headed as I was; she brought me food out there, she knew I was starving, she brought me clothes.

Several participants spoke also of the significance of their grandmothers. One explained how it was the acceptance and support of her grandmother that paved the way, if not forced, others in her family to follow suit.

• ... my grandmother being the matriarch of the entire family, being the person who um (pause) pulled the whole family together, she supported me; my god, she’s the one that supported me, that’s how the whole thing came together, the whole entire family had to accept me. She bought me clothes, she bought me my girl clothes, she bought me a lot of things; she bought me my gown, for my stepping down; she was so supportive that even the community, loud drag
queen scenes, she didn’t understand but she knew that’s what I wanted and
she supported everything that I wanted.

Participants also shared many stories and pictures portraying the importance and
special place of siblings, even when the acceptance for their (transitioning/transitioned)
brother or sister is/was less than complete.

• . . . but my brother you know no matter what, he introduced me as S., to this
day he still introduced me as S., this is my brother S. . . .; he accept me for
what I am but in his eyes, I’ll always be his brother.

• . . . for me being TG [transgender], I think at first I didn’t know with
everyone’s family but with mines [sic], my sister was the only one that
accepted at first, my sister and my sister-in-law, my brother’s wife ‘cause my
brother’s wife has a big family and they have a lot of mahus in their family so

• This photo is actually of my mom and my sister, my younger sister and um
(pause) me being TG affects my sister for sure ‘cause now she has a sister.
Before she had two brothers but now she has an older brother and she calls me
her sister.
Adopted/adoptive or hanai. Similarly, participants spoke of strong ties with their adopted or hanai family members (in the first narration, in an informal sense, and in the second, through a legal name change, connecting the participant to her hanai family).

- This is J., her [my mother's] church buddy, and I consider her family because she is like when I go to work she knows, she keeps contact with me with
appointments, she’s there to feed my mom when I cannot. She’s precious, so I adopted her family because she’s been with my mom for so long she’s just, um, just like a sister . . . That’s why she’s in this photo, ‘cause she I adopted her like my sister.

- So the pictures that I chose, my first picture is E., of my hanai sister . . . She’s my sister because when I first came out and my family kind of disowned me and I didn’t have a place to go, she was the one who kind of took me in, come with me . . . ; she opened up her house to me.

*Chosen, drag or work-related.* While drag families may be created in the quest to help cultivate the talents and assets of those brought into the family (in the tradition of old Harlem, mentioned previously), they also serve as a place of refuge. This is especially significant given the possibility, if not likelihood, of initial rejection by the family of origin and/or exclusionary practices on the part of the public.

- Because some of us, we can get isolated by our real families because we are, so we tend to make a whole new family with our friends, you know what I mean. And we take it to a whole new level, a whole new ballgame with this drag family, you know I mean. So it’s just for our peace of mind and our wellbeing; that’s why we create this whole other family to work. It’s just to make our self esteem a whole lot better, to face society and its cruelties and ridicules . . . ‘cause their ignorance we face everyday.

Similarly, drag families may also be generated in response to loss related to tragedy or death.
• I hear a lot about drag families and when I was first brought into a drag family it was by my first queen mother . . . and it was the perfect timing for me because of the fact that when I first met her my real mom had passed away and I needed that female figure in my life and she was it.

Many participants also serve as drag parents, whether as fathers or mothers (or sometimes both).

• T. didn’t know anybody else gay at the time so he pretty much looked up to me and I showed T. like the ropes, the stuff you need to know . . . But at the time that I first met T., at that point in my life I wanted to be a woman but now I know that that wasn’t for me, so T. is my son and my best friend.

• Because she doesn’t have a drag mother and, with all due respect, she’s a sister of mine . . . but um she looks at me at another light, which would be another parent. Instead of being a mother I’m like a father and she calls me Pops.
Blended families. Participants spoke of family composition in reference to blood relations as well as their drag families. Mainly, though, participants spoke of “blended families,” comprised of partners, housemates, children (blood and drag), elders, siblings, and others. As an example, one participant who had been ten years with her partner described the following:

- My household actually consists of eight people. I’ve got me/my partner, my partner and her four children, those then and one of the children has a child, and my sister also lives with me. So . . . in this picture I actually have like three generations of women right here.

while another spoke of a complicated connection between her drag family and biological, through relatedness by marriage:

- That is his [my drag son’s] wife next to him . . . and ironically M. is my real life cousin and I didn’t know that until last summer when we had our family
event . . . , so I didn’t realize we’re actually family and that’s . . . kinda cute; so she’s actually my daughter.

As a final example, there was also discussion of involvement in the families of participant’s sisters:

• . . . she was my own grandma, too; tell me a lot of culture things, when it came to Japanese culture and whatnot so I really embrace her and her family and like all whose pictures . . . my sisters love.

Figure 14: Obaasan (grandmother)
Genealogy and identity.

We are forever composing impressions of ourselves, projecting a definition of who we are, and making claims about ourselves and the world that we test out and negotiate with others (Reissman, 2008, p. 106).

Identity (or, more accurately, identity-making) is depicted in the model alongside forms of family, given its relatedness to self-defining activities and practices that serve to bring people together. These activities have been categorized by role—e.g., sister, drag relation (mother, father, daughter, son), or mentor/mentee. While caregiving is also a critical activity or practice, associated with identity, this is categorized as related to genealogy, pertaining here to those functions that serve to uphold family and family tradition, such as caring for children or the elderly.
Figure 16: Sisters

Figure 17: Untitled 1

*Sisterhood.* Along these lines, participants described the significance of their “sisters,” whose acceptance and support could mean the difference, in some cases and under certain circumstances, between life and death. While this support was or can be...
psychological or emotional, it was/is also often material (e.g., in the form of money, food, or shelter).

- This one right here is J. and everybody knows her. But why I chose her is because when I first started coming out and living out in Waikiki she was there one day and kinda like honestly she used to spoil me so I was just so close to her and I used to look up to her . . . and at the time meeting her we was into the scene of fast money and stuff so we didn’t really meet on positive terms but it was pretty fun (laughter), but she’s been there for me, too. For me right now, she’s like my sister; she’s my godmother, she’s my aunty.

- . . . if it wasn’t for them I think I would have been committed suicide, I think I don’t know, I woulda done the worst of things to me . . . but they were there to pick me up when I was at my lowest, and my family . . . when I moved from my family, trying to transition, understanding what mahuwahine [male to female transgender] was about; that was me, those were my sisters.

Drag sisters. The stage and “drags” are a big part of the lives of most of those who participated, even on the part of those who were/are not crossdressing. Helping a sister to perfect a performance or look (grooming), then, was an important feature.

- When I got disowned from my family, I really substituted; my family was my family that I met in the gay community, all the sisters I danced with, performed with, and associated with . . . so this was taken this past Sunday at the Venus pageant after we crowned M. and we, I think 11 Miss Venus’s now
. . . 'cause it's been about that long that I've been out in the community, so . . .

I gotta put this one in; these are my sisters, too.

Figure 18: Miss Venus pageant winners

Figure 19: At the club
Further, drag and drag sisters were similarly valued by the “butch queens” (the participants with male presentation).

- ... for these two, I consider my best friends and we have this very special bond and relationship because of what we went through growing up, you know, that I’m a gay man but they also know I’m a butch queen. I mean I was an entertainer and they stood up for me when I was in a [sic] abusive relationship, when my back was against the wall, when I questioned whether or not I wanted to be a transgender, and they’ve been there for me through a lot of these issues that I’ve been through, some things that I never even talked to my sisters about.

- We shared a lot of our deepest, darkest secrets; we have tended to each other in time of need; asked for advice and guidance, whether it’s to do with the
entertainment industry, show business or just our own personal lives, so when we did the Halloween show in Kona this weekend I thought it was a fitting picture to take because I really consider them as part of my foundation, to remind me of who I am, not only as a gay man, but as a housefather/housemother, a showsister, as well.

Figure 21: Halloween 2007

*Drag children.* Drag children are brought into the family by multiple means and for various reasons. For some, drag children are taken in for grooming (showgirl) purposes, though this is also related to caregiving:

- That's K., it took me a long time to, this one actually put me through a lot because you know I wanted her to be better yeah and it was like, I guess all her relationships she’s been in with . . . really I don’t know what brought her
down whatever so I tried my best, I don’t know. I put her on hormones, I wanted to help groom her, I wanted . . . to dolly up somebody; I wanted to put silicone in them and let them look really fishy [feminine] and stuff like that; I wanted to help her (joking).

In many ways, being a drag parent and having drag children is related also to inheritance, i.e., the passing down of character traits, or even of physical characteristics or style:

- . . . and the previous picture that you’ve seen . . . that’s her queen daughter and I think in her queen daughter, you can see a lot of traits in this mother right here.

**Drag parents.** Almost every participant had served as a role model or mentor to a younger person coming out or transitioning. While this relationship was often informal, it was sometimes made official or public by way of title and role—with many participants serving as a drag parent, while at the same time being drag parented, themselves. As stated, this sometimes includes the role of a father or mother, or both.

- So for a lot of my kids, they look at me as a mother and a father figure; to some, their mother, to some who already have mothers, I’m their father figure and it’s funny because I actually possess those qualities, you know—the mother, I’m very nurturing and loving, but as the father, I’m very strict and very, sometimes a disciplinarian.
Much of the narration and sharing, then, was done in the spirit of paying tribute, especially to drag parents whose support was recognized as critical—not only to "who" participants had become, but to their very survival (or presence).

- So what K. [my drag mother] stands for is she is actually the one who helped me to become, I guess, what I am today, part of what I am today. She's one of the reasons why I am who I am today.

- So actually who we're seeing here is my other queen mother, who is C., and from that side, I learned how to survive on the streets.
Identity

Acceptance. Critical to identity and belongingness is acceptance, especially for the process, or result, of transitioning. Though acceptance was more forthcoming in some families than others, all participants spoke of this factor as vital.

- It’s not the family we have, it’s the family that’s understanding you, you know what I mean. So you create this world where you’re gonna get the understanding, the acceptance; it doesn’t have to be basically about the disowning, it’s about the understanding and the acceptance.

- They are my family and actually the whole queen world is my family ‘cause they know how I am and that’s about it.

- They all accepting except for the name part; they address me by my last name which is M. and they will not call me by my legal first name because they feel that in their religion you cannot do that, but the sisters will call me oh sis and my brother-in-law and him, they don’t care; they’ll call me sis and by my girl name.

- When I went up there they totally wasn’t ready (laughter); they totally didn’t know, they knew through errors [sic] but they never seen and when I went up there, they were like oh wow, you know they didn’t move back, they kinda just hugged and embraced and um they got along you know. It was like, oh yes remember, now look and you know adjust to the change so therefore this was our trip in Vegas, a family reunion, this my ohana [family].
Further, even in cases when acceptance was difficult for families, participants attributed this to worry or concern, given the harm that might come to them; or to lack of understanding or knowledge (ignorance) about their lives.

- I think, I expect that she’s [my mother is] worried just because she doesn’t know about my lifestyle, so she’s uneducated, I know she’s worried ‘cause yeah . . . because everything she knows about my lifestyle is always negative, nothing positive so I know she worries a lot; sometimes she’ll ask questions like where you going, who you with ‘cause she knows most of my close friends but when I’m gone, like a long time, she’ll question who you with, where you going and stuff like that but we never talk about my gay lifestyle; just like where am I going and so she’s worried.

- So I kinda don’t want to say easy because my family, they didn’t want to see me go through the struggle and stress that my older aunty [also mahu] went through.

Cultural identity. For many participants, hailing from the same region (place) or even family line was also of particular significance.

- Both of them were like my closest bestest sisters, back home, from where I come from which is Wai‘anae, where I did my whole coming out, transitioning, giving me a place to stay you know and all of that. Girls out there always trying to manipulate me, you know and stuff and tell me wrong things and they were there to, you know, guide me.
• ... what we share is my family lineage that we went back to Ni‘ihau and she’d be the sister that’s just so out there, whether you like it or not she’s just out there (comments) but she’s another one that I lean to in terms of emotions; we share things, I can think a lot ... what she’s about to say, what she’s about to do ... so.

Identity as a woman. While drag families are understood to play a huge role in shaping identity, especially as a woman, so too does the biological family. My mom’s on the right, my grandmother’s in the middle, my sister’s on the left, and my niece ... that’s my ohana with my sister ... missing from my picture; and that’s four generations in my family and I chose this picture because everyone in the picture is like, they pretty much, I take every cue from every one of these ladies ... like I kinda look at them and I don’t say much but I just kinda watch what they do because outside of doing drags and being on stage and what I’ve learned from that um they taught me something completely different about what my idea of a lady is and how I want to present that idea of, you know, when I identify, that’s who I identify with as a lady.
Identity related to work. A number of participants spoke of the relevance of their work families. This is related not only to the time spent with co-workers, but to the values they share, especially among those working in the service professions. Work families are also recognized as providers of encouragement and support and, in some cases, career mentorship.

- ... they are very important to me because a lot of them have been in the field for longer than I have and they have taught me a lot of things. Some of the other girls have taught me with new fresher ideas, have come to the organization and have brought me a new direction in my personal career goals.

- [Names sisters] and I cherish my relationship with all of them because they all inspire me in many, many ways ... all my mahuwahine sisters that work in
the same field and of course my godmother, M. A., the bomb, all my sisters who all motivate me to work harder in this field, to be more professional in this field, um inspire me a lot as in show business um and as an individual, just as an individual in general and so these are my sisters.

• So these people are like my support that I would come home to. And even when I do outreach I might call them, like I might say, you know what, I just had an incident with a client, and blah, blah, blah, so they are really supportive for me.

Figure 24: Work family
Finally, participants expressed need for those who could support and encourage, while simultaneously helping to keep them in balance (or in check), on track, and functioning. In some cases, this came in the form of mentors or elders who could be counted on to “rein in” their behavior (or attitude), as needed. In other cases, this came in the form of others who reminded participants of “who they are.” For instance, in reference to her children

- ... and I call them my heart and soul and mind; they are who keep me balanced, my kids are what keep me balanced. I feel that’s why after I got my sex change ... that’s what keep me balanced is my kids.

**Genealogy**

**Caregiving.** More than any other responsibility, participants spoke about caregiving, both of elders and of children. While this may be a function of the age of participants, with
many taking responsibility for sick or elderly family members, this role also seemed expected
of participants, given their transgender status.

• . . . so that’s why a lot of mahus are the chosen ones, when it comes to their,
anything to do with grandmother um. Of course, we’re the thin line between
love and hate because sometimes our straight families are not a family, they
get so caught up in things where we are and it just takes just one word, or
whatever it is to put them right back into check ‘cause it’s not really about
them, it’s really about the children; you know, that’s where we’re always
connected to, the caregiving thing, that’s the life of a mahu; we’re chosen.

• I took this picture because it was to me, you know like (laughter) as
transgendered, it’s almost like our roles can be, we’re kinda harsh and we’re
very judgmental and we can be kinda forthright and all of that but um there’s
a side to us that’s very giving and very caring and normally you see that side
when you’re in that family element . . .

*Caring for elders.* Participants spoke of caring for their ill or aging parents and/or
grandparents.

• This woman is 87 yrs old. I love her with all my heart; her memory is fading
and it’s fading at a rate where she could get one minute [sic] and it’s hard for
me because I have to work and come home; I have to watch her, make sure
she takes her medication, she eats.
I took this picture of S. and her grandmother in her living room, because what S. was doing, she was putting on her drags and she would come out from down the hallway with music blasting and she would come spinning down the
living room and you know performing for her grandmother who, you know, has a hard time hearing, has a hard time seeing but she was laughing, she was cracking up every time she came out from around the corner; she was laughing and cracking up and S. was looking at her and posing for her and asking her how she looked, do you love it?

_Caring for children._ Several participants spoke also of raising children, sometimes from birth. In one case, these children had been born to a biological sister who had lost custody; in another, to a biological sister who was deceased; and in a third, to a long-term partner who was biologically female. Several who had raised, or helped to raise, children described the near irrelevance of their gender identity.

- Well, with my kids, they really don’t consider me as a TG. They might know I’m a TG, but the subject doesn’t really come up with my kids. I know one day I would have to talk to them about it, but as for now I can only say that my kids see me as their mama; I’m not even called a TG or a mahu aunty; I’m just their mama. Um so they have accepted me as a certain way and especially in my baby’s eye, I would have to say I’m like her rock, her pride and joy. I had them all as baby, yeah, from birth.

- We’re actually really close; sometimes it doesn’t seem that way in our household, in our day-to-day but I’m really close with all of the children and the children are really close with me and as far as like our relationship with family and everything and me being transgender, they’ve all come to know
me being mahu at a different stage and time in their lives; it’s always been in
front of them, it’s never been hidden.

Participants also spoke of sharing their “drags,” as a learning experience and as part of
caregiving.

• . . . so I’ve been with this family for like I said ten years so I’ve watched her
grow up from a tiny little girl, almost like since she was in the third grade I
think, and she’s like, she’s like my little princess; ‘cause of out the two girls,
she’s the one that likes the glitter and the glitz, and likes the big ball gowns,
and she loves being in drags and getting her hair [sic] and all of that.

• Last night I was just going to take my babies trick-or-treating but then my
middle boy decided that he wanted to go and spend, you know, mama, it’s not
for me, but then I said let’s go look through aunty J.’s makeup, I know she has
a lot of glitter, so that’s what we ended up with. And when I was painting him,
his brother was saying, I need to go pass out candy, so by the time I was done
with his brother, he was like, oh mama, could you make me a mask, too? . . . I
said okay so I ended up doing both of my sons.
Caring for those struggling to transition/make a living/survive. Many participants provide, or provided, for their biological families, as well as chosen. One participant, at the time, just out of high school, spoke of her efforts to help sustain her mother and sister.

- My mom them was living in a tent in my aunty’s backyard for a couple of months and I couldn’t see my mom and my sister living in that, living in my dad’s garage so, I bought them a bus and my mom turned it into a little Winnebago kinda thing and they lived in there for a couple years in my aunty’s backyard and after that my dad actually got things together and he bought my mom a house and things are good now.

In addition to the material, participants also provide or provided for their biological and chosen families emotionally, working to ensure their safety and wellbeing.
• J. was the one that took me in; I met her thru J. R. and she was always nice to me although everybody knows she can be raw. I always had a place to sleep; when I had nowhere to go, I could always go to her house. Her door was always open; she always has us in check, me and J. R., and she always made sure we had something to eat. You know, if we get hungry, like she cook us something, dress up so she could go buy us something to eat, so that’s J.

• He was going through some stuff, his family kicked him out because he was a gay boy and they didn’t want anything to do with him and so I took him in and I told him you know one day your family gonna take you back; you just take some time to let all of this process and then one day I actually made him call his parents just to see how things was and stuff like that and he actually called them and they actually cried and they asked to see him so I took him to go see his family and I, it’s all good now and I think that’s how I became close with his parents and they thanked me for making him call home ‘cause they were worried about him.

*Ensuring continuation of family line.* One primary function of family is to ensure the continuation of the family line. While this function is partly addressed through caregiving, it is also related to reproduction. Responsibility for this function was keenly expressed by a number of participants, despite (or possibly on account of) their own limited reproductive capacity or interest.

• ... she lost her other fallopian tube so now they have to artificially inseminate and the first one didn’t catch and that was a heartbreak so [this child] is the
second. I call him the golden child because um, he’s the golden child because my brother is pretty much the only one who will carry on you know the family name, that’s already set in stone, but um we have [this child] so now you know everyone takes care of him; he’s very spoiled, and I think at most she can have one more child but after that her womb or uterus, they’ll have to take it, so.

Carrying on the family line or name was/is also a factor for those who changed their names, whether legally or through adoption of a drag name, e.g., taking on the name of a drag parent or house.

• Because my dad doesn’t have a son now to pass on [our] name, [my sister] even though she got married and divorced she kept [our name]. When I was able to change my name when I asked my father what name would you have named me and I asked my mother what name would you have named me if I was born a girl, they said um they couldn’t think of a name the daughter now, this TG name; just keep your last name ‘cause that’s something that we need, we don’t have that many ... in our family so we did that and in the process I took my sister’s heritage and we have the same initials.
This function was also understood as related to the importance of tradition, as well as inheritance—whether of role, characteristics, or belongings.

- My grandmother, she’s just, she’s getting older, she’s got so much stories to tell with her getting older, so many things to share, she loves to reminisce; she
just really wants somebody to sit there and listen to her and the other picture that I will share, it’s kinda interesting, ‘cause I almost feel like that’s gonna be my place; like I’m gonna be the one to take all of this in. It’s already started already, like I get so much jewelry already from my grandmother, she passes so many things down to me that she wouldn’t give to anybody else in my family, you know; she, for some reason she compels always to give it to me.

Finally, as in any family, there is effort on the part of the elders or parents to instill and foster values, especially those that could serve the community.

• I’ll be presenting my pictures for the first week . . . This is my drag family; these are my kids, ‘kay? . . . Each of my child represents a part of me ‘kay, because I instill and I provide guidance in their life.
I could say the new generation of, is it f(emale) to m(ale)?; f to m, yeah, and I chose this because obviously I’m their nana and um each one of them has a different story, unique as trannies themselves. And I don’t know, every time I see them, it’s always in my head . . . or I’m hoping, and I did talk to them about this, that they can help others in their predicament like how all we here are doing for our community so that they have something there and I hope they be the ones to . . . because you know they call me nana and I just hope it would do something for their community.

Melancholia

Figure 32: Sister

Feinberg has written of masculine women and feminine men as targets for punishment, harassment, and even arrest due simply to gender expression. Given heteronormative expectations, transgenders are left to “battle for the right to be hired, walk
down the street, be served in a restaurant, buy a carton of milk in a store, play softball or
bowl” (1996, p. 8). While participants did not make these types of stories their focus, they
did speak of troubles with family of origin, sometimes leading to running away or even
disownment; subsequent school and work troubles, healthcare issues (sometimes complicated
by drugs and/or prostitution), and multiple losses related to estrangement from loved ones,
loved ones who have moved away (left the islands), and loved ones who have died.

*Family Troubles*

Participants spoke of trouble with family, especially around the issues of coming out
or transitioning. Given the young age of participants when these troubles were occurring,
their schooling, and therefore employment and housing, often were affected.

- Growing up with them, I think, I know I have good parents but growing up, it
  was kinda hard, my father had a substance abuse problem, and he was abusing
  me and my sister and all, um my sister would get abused. I was always up and
  up with my dad and [he was] like 4 inches taller than me . . .

- ... when I left home, I didn’t have a place to go and I wanted to live my life
  as a transgender and C. on the left [in photo] opened her home to me and my
  sister on the right and my sister J., we would always gather; I would finish
  work at . . . 11:00/midnight, we’d just gather at the house and just eat and talk
  story and there was big support for me, you know, trying move on in my life
  as a transgender when my family wasn’t there supportive.

- And me coming out, being a TG, me coming out to her, my family, was kinda
  hard ‘cause I was the first one, out of six kids, and it was kinda a big shocker
to my family seeing me coming out in drags because you know I was a boy, had girlfriends, who played sports and when I said that I wanted to be mahu, she was the first one that I actually go confided and she was in shock and my family was in shock and my relationship with my family because I was TG was a kinda strained because they never understand the lifestyle; they never understand why I chose to be rebellious, why I chose to you know run towards the streets, why I chose not be the good kid that she wanted me to be.

Finally, a participant who had been adopted felt that the neglect of her family had lingered, now in the form of guilt.

- ... they were very close to my stepmother, so I mean I used to be left on the porch waiting away, waiting to see if my brothers would pick me up on the weekends, go be with my real family like that; and I think to this day they still have this guilt, yeah, a little guilt of not going and they think because of them not going to pick me up and stuff like that that I really ended up turning mahu, you know; so I let them have that.

**Drugs**

Participants also spoke of substance abuse, sometimes, as a form of self-medication or coping, however "maladaptive." This for some lead to selling or distributing drugs, perceived (along with commercial sex work) as one of the few available means of obtaining a viable income.
• I was trying to get out of the drug business 'cause so much of my sisters' family was going down, so much of my sisters was going down and I was actually getting scared because I had my kids and I just could not find a job and so I just thought all I could do was just deal drugs; so when she called me one day and said come down here, they’re hiring and I said okay, I’ll go check it out and I went there and they hired me.

• I was getting into drugs and I was dealing drugs, and prostituting, so she was kind of like encouraging me to stop doing what you’re doing, but then I wouldn’t listen.

Prison

Given their involvement with drugs and/or prostitution, several of the participants had also been arrested or done prison time.

• I have my little brother and me and my mom was on welfare and my, I wanted to become a woman, she was okay with that, it’s not like she wanted, you know, to say no, you cannot dress up until you’re like 18. But it just that she didn’t have money, she was on welfare and I wouldn’t have allowance and I wanted money, I wanted to buy me things. I wanted to buy makeup and stuff like that so I ended up leaving my mom and then I got arrested.

Interpersonal connections made in prison, like those made on the “outside,” were seen as vital to participants, and sometimes maintained even after release.

• This is Daddyola. This is V., um, he was at one point in my life when I was, ‘kay (pause), I did seven and a half years in jail, and being locked up in jail, in
another state, in Oklahoma, he was there and he was my family at that time and moment; he was my only family ‘cause I never talked to my family for so long and when I do talk to them, it’s very, only like a brief moment. So ... well anyways, he was there at the time of my life when my family wasn’t, they was far away from and it was expensive to talk to them and I couldn’t see them ... and he was there for guide me and to influence me, to give me some kind of motivation in life.

• I met her in jail and so we was like the only two mahus on the block and I was scared; I was so scared of going to jail and um I just watched too much T.V. out here and thinking jail was like really all, all the mahus ... but when I went there I went straight to her quad and I ended up ... she’s so much older than I am so she’s like my, I would say she’s sort of like my mother but really she’s just an aunty but she’s been like a mother in there.

• And I got close to A., I got real close to her; we were like so inseparable and when I was having hard time in jail, you know I was very emotional and when I would have problems I would go to her for advice and she has been there for me, in and out, and today, I call her everyday on a daily basis so we’re like so close.

Further, among participants, being arrested and doing time were perceived as commonplace and often unavoidable, even for their friends or sisters.
• ...‘cause C. is my best friend, god bless her soul she’s been lock up again; you know she’s in church, trials and tribulations (that’s how it is), because, you know, that’s how it is, that’s part of life.

_Estrangement_

Participants spoke of being estranged from siblings or a parent while growing up. This resulted, in some cases, in deeper connections once family members were reunified; and in other cases, in differences that could not be bridged (especially if the separation was extended).

• Throughout our childhood like we’re like actually separated for a little while, like she moved here when I was living in Washington and when I would move here, back to Hawai‘i, she would move back to the mainland.

• You know it’s not really a tight bond that we have. I moved out when I was 16 and we’re ten years apart so you know she was only six and by the time we reconnected I was already an adult, and by the time we really connected I’d already transitioned and I had been a girl for many years already so, you know, our relationship is very different from any other relationship that I have with anyone else.

In addition, participants spoke of being estranged from family members due to their needing to leave home, sometimes because of drug use:

• Because I had been using drugs at an early age, I ran away from home at 13, so I left my mom and I did not call her for like five years.
This is my younger brother, so he’s like four years younger than me. Um, this is another one where I haven’t really, I mean we was so close when we was young; today we’re close but since my using time and all that I really lost a lot of spending time with them, with my mom and him.

on account of confinement in prison or jail:

- I did another five, no actually four and a half years, in jail and that’s another stretch that I . . . of lost time that I have with her [in reference to mother].

or due to disownment, related to their transitioning.

- . . . you know no father wants his son to be mahu but like I told them like I think I haven’t seen them for almost like seven or eight years, I kinda just left the family, my father already told me he disowned me, um when my grandfather died who we’re both named after. He’s pure Hawaiian, he passed away from cancer and um he my family, my dad said you’re not a part of this family, you’d be ashamed, if you’re active in the life you’d be embarrassed, you’re not welcome around the family, and dah dah dah dah, and I had to do a lot of soul-searching to find myself.

Workplace Discrimination

Though no participant used the term “workplace discrimination,” a few did acknowledge hardship at the workplace, especially while transitioning.

- . . . it was actually, I was there for eight years and six out of those eight years was my transition; towards the last two years I would say was when I had to take a lot of pressure and discrimination and I think it was just because my
physical appearance. I don’t think it was (pause), because they knew me as a person, they knew me for like six years, you know, as that same person. It’s just that when my appearance started to change, when my breasts started to grow and my skin started to change and I started to lose weight and I started to have nails and started wearing makeup and eyebrows and I would get harassed for having make-up; I would get written up for having eyebrows. I would get written up for a lot of things and I think it was just for my physical appearance.

Figure 33: Christmas 2007

*Healthcare Issues*

Participants spoke of healthcare as particularly troublesome, in part related to the lack of health insurance coverage for those for were unemployed or working less than full time.
For participants who were insured, there still was strong reluctance to seek care, due to the lack of knowledge, and therefore sensitivity, on the part of service providers.

- I don’t get the same kind of healthcare that my sister gets, I don’t get the same kinda healthcare that my mother does, I definitely don’t get the same kind of healthcare that my father gets; um like I think for me for a long time, I never used to like to go to the doctor’s, I never used to like to go to the dentist; I didn’t want to go anywhere that, you know, where you have to fill out the form that asks for your gender, you know, and then having to go through maybe explaining to them when you’re there that you know, um this is what I’m experiencing ‘cause, you know . . .

As a result, participants spoke of postponing medical visits or stopping treatment, or of avoiding visits for preventative care altogether.

- I actually didn’t even finish the treatment that I was supposed to go through. I didn’t finish the whole process because it was kinda like a, it was an issue for me because, you know, how do you explain . . . all that stuff was a challenge.

Loss Related to Moving Away

Many participants spoke of hardship around missing family members who had left the island(s), sometimes permanently.

- So I kinda hold her close to my heart, near to me, although she lives, she’s moving back and forth here, then to the mainland [continental US] and whatnot.
Loss Related to Death

Finally, participants spoke of having to deal with the loss(es) of people who had been especially close to them, and of helping their sisters, or biological family members, in dealing with the same. Particularly when the death(s) was/were premature or related to a tragedy, this loss was extreme, leaving a permanent imprint.

- She has lost her parents and as you can see she is standing or kneeling on her mom’s grave, her mom and dad’s grave. And to me that picture um is very sentimental because she don’t have you know; she only have herself, her blood sister, and that’s it. Both her parents is no longer with us.

- [in reference to family members lost in a car accident] I should have went to the grave and took pictures of all the ones that are missing.

- My grandmother recently passed away, not even recently but . . . of hepatitis-related illnesses um, she had liver cancer, and I was there with her until the end. I had issues with the entire family making decisions that I felt . . . that my [grandmother] wanted. I ended up with her, I stayed with her when I came home from prison. I actually made a lot of decisions to stay home and stay right there with my grandmother because my grandmother, regardless of if [my sister] raised me or my mom loves me and my dad supported me and everything, I think my grandmother really was my background. She was constantly there no matter what I did.

- I think when we came out it was like, for me it was easy for me to come out but for him it was a little bit harsh, I guess ‘cause he never told his dad about
him coming out, yeah, and he always said if his dad ever saw him he’d actually commit suicide. . . . You know he was in a relationship with someone that you know I really didn’t care for and because of that he actually kinda pushed me away so whenever we got together, yeah, it’s like everything that, in a way he um he wouldn’t bring up his name, yeah, so it was fine for me and it was fine for him. It was just a mother and son kinda bonding and when they broke up I was so happy, I was so happy that I didn’t know that his actions . . . messed with his mind because a few days later he actually committed suicide so. I don’t want to go into details because I still miss him, yeah. And so he will always be in my heart.

Figure 34: Supporting a sister at her mother’s grave
Public Misperceptions

Participants felt that the public had little understanding of the realities of their lives, based on their negative misperceptions:

- [TG] has something to do with bad, you know, something with sex.
- The straight people would come by us and they grab their husband and they say take a look. And the husband would give that smirk to us, you know what I mean. They get one whole different perspective on our lifestyle and the way we are.
- . . . and they think . . . they have to do with something nasty that you know, like we’re . . . in the gutter, you know what I mean, our lifestyle is just pure gutter.
- If they could understand, and if they understood the things that we went through on day-to-day basis, maybe then they would be um not so much; you know, if they could see what we went through on a day-to-day basis, they would see how much of a rough life most transgenders have to live just because of the stigma that they put on [us].

*Why this Information is Important*

Given the general consensus around the problem of public misperception, participants were asked how, and why, people should become more knowledgeable about them and their families. Towards this end, there was strong support for education—for both service providers and the general public. Additionally, there was almost unanimous voicing of the desire to be recognized as people, as human.
• Why is this information important, is because we’re human beings, we bleed just like anybody else, we cry when we go through hard time; we face these issues.

• Well I think that with transsexuals, you know, we’re people too and you know a lot of people, you know, see transsexuals as sex objects ‘cause they see something that’s kinda like uncertain for a lot of people; a lot of people really don’t even know what to do when approached with the situation. So education definitely is a big part, you know, I guess you, when you teach homosexual, transsexual maybe could be a part of that . . .

• I think . . . if anybody knew anything about me, I think they’d realize that I’m a normal person, you know. I mean girl, we’re the same, we all have the same issues, whether we’re transgender or not, that’s what I think. And I think they would treat me differently; I think they would treat me like how they would treat any heterosexual person, really, if they knew.

• . . . and I do a lot of M[aster] of C[eremony]’ing and I’m trying to always educate them about things that are always tripping me up so I just go with the flow after that. But I think they should just educate themselves more, continuously.
Related to this, participants voiced hope for the future, as a result of efforts (to educate) today.

- Maybe something for the younger generation now, more for their, this is very supportive here, like a family; yeah, more, exactly, like something like maybe offsite counselors to go out and speak with families about the whole, you know, some of the stereotypes, for their if their child is mahu they would disown, instead then unconditional love is there. You know if you disown your child you know your means of your chances of them falling along the side, being unloved and picking up the bad habits is what will happen. I did it because at times I felt unloved and I had no one to turn to and I turned to the bad things, therefore if you feel love at a younger age like when you’re
nurtured and supported with family structure then when you grow up you
achieve more in life.

- I think if we had courses to open up the doors, #1, and #2 to teach those in our
community what it’s actually like to be us, you know, to actually learn more
about who we are and our lifestyle, I think it would actually open up our
minds, hopefully reduce the number of (hate crimes!) hate crimes out there.

**Constancy of Family**

In response to these types of hardships, participants—who had been stigmatized,
harassed, ostracized, or otherwise shunned—spoke of the importance of family, however
conceived, as a critical place of support and refuge. Family, in fact, was understood as one of
the few constants, in the face of relentless drawbacks and challenges.

- We have families just as any normal people does and um everyone has their
own different mindset on TG’s and I believe that in the end, families are going
to be there for who you are and what you are and I believe we’re no different
from anybody else.

- And I believe that what a family is, our family would be a bunch of people
who are supportive in your life, who have been there for you, and when you
have troubles they’re always there.

- I know deep down in my heart as well as everybody else that’s included in
this family that there’s nothing that any one of us can do to one another that
will cause us to break up our . . . home (pause), no matter what, we’ve been
through so much and gone through so much together, individually with one
another that you know anything that could happen; there will be trauma that can occur but that healing process will definitely come right after it and we will back to normal, so . . .

Figure 36. The next generation: looking ahead

New Ways of Doing Family

Returning to the question of how family has shaped transgenders, and how transgenders have shaped the family, participants spoke of their families' new insights and understandings.

- . . . so that's what it taught my family, to be very accepting and very open, to open your mind and really that's what it would take especially for a lot of local families, because once you are born male into the family you have all of
these stereotypes for what you need to be as a male and sometimes you need to open up your mind and allow different concepts to form.

- I think that your family would be a positive thing, again proving their expectations and stereotypes to be wrong and actually proving to be a positive influence.

• ... after my initial concerns for my parents that my life would end because I would fall into drugs, I would fall into, you know, not supporting my education, not wanting to work and I totally proved the stereotypes wrong.

Further, there seemed to be an understanding or belief that exposing children to different ways of being and educating them would result in the kind of world that would allow for a wide(r) range of gender presentations, all of which would meet with familial and societal acceptance.

• ... but um I., he’s the youngest one, he was four or five, he was just entering kindergarten, and he didn’t know what being mahu was, or being a drag queen, or being a showgirl or any of that; he never identified with my, my gender you know. He just knew that I was aunty and I did shows, and I had all the girls and we all did shows together; and he knows that aunty L. is aunty L. from next door and aunty L.’s always been around so the gender thing never really affects them at all. You know me being transgender or being mahu, or my friends being mahu, it doesn’t affect them; it’s just part of the family.
• When it comes to them, when I won Universal, he had my crown, so I have a picture of him with you know me holding the crown on top of him. So I took a picture of M. holding, with the crown on top of her. Um, because drags is kind of what I share with them; I mean, it’s a part of... they come into aunty’s closet and they see all this shiny, shiny stuff hanging in her closet and it’s obviously not what mom has in her closet or grandma so like I kind of share my drags with them to, you know, bring them into my world a little bit, educate, understand.

In light of these understandings, participants also suggested some possible policy-related changes, particularly around the matter of domestic partnership.

• In regard to domestic partnership laws, oftentimes when domestic partnership comes into play, they often think about two men, two women, and really it’s how your choose to define relationships when it comes to people; you know, domestic partnerships could be a single mother you know with her boyfriend with her kids or it could be a TG living with her husband or her girlfriend that chooses to adopt a child.

• I think if lawmakers, the public in general, had a better understanding of our community, like who we are and realize that just because we may not be blood related and this is how we choose to define our families, that um it really is a good thing.

• I think in general, when the public and policymakers hear the word *domestic partnership*, they think of things that are negative; they think of stereotypes,
they think of determining what your transition is, and I think that’s part of it but a lot of it in my opinion is who you choose to define as your family... I know that a lot of our people in our lives and their friends, aunties, uncles, and godmothers, I think we’ve all chosen to define a very close kinship with people in our families, and I think that if lawmakers had a chance to understand how these people affected our lives and who we are, I think they’ll open a lot more doors.

Conclusion

Morrison, in an essay on slave writings, has stated

... Whatever the style and circumstances of these narratives, they were written to say principally two things. One: “This is my historical life—my singular, special example that is personal, but that also represents the race.” Two: “I write this text to persuade other people—you, the reader, who is probably not black—that we are human beings worthy of God’s grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery.” With these two missions in mind, the narratives were clearly pointed (2001, p. 153, cited in White, 2001).

Through stories and images of the wide variety of linkages between people, we begin to see the inadequacy of normative constructions of identity, whether in reference to physical presentation (especially around gender), “psychical identifications with sexed body images and/or gendered subject positions,” or the “performance of specifically gendered social, sexual, or kinship functions” (Somerville, 2000, p. 170). More important, these stories/images also begin to reveal the effects of these departures from normative and
mainstream expectations, both materially (e.g., status loss, disenfranchisement, poverty) and psychically (e.g., melancholia).

While it appears, at first glance, that the two main categories of markers are disparate and theoretically apart—with the notions of collectivity stemming from the postcolonial literature, and the particular understanding of melancholia stemming from queer literature, specifically gay—both here are understood to be interlocked, at least as experienced by people in their daily lives.

To elaborate, Halberstam (2005) has suggested that the absence of a middle class logic of reproductive temporality, in the context of a social reality (space) that renders some bodies “expendable” (whether to drugs, illness, impoverishment, withholding of care, etc.), results in/ allows for alternative methods of alliance—e.g., by forcing a rethinking of the conventional emphasis on longevity and futurity, and/or by making community in relation to risk, disease, infection, and death (Bersani, 1996; Edelman, 1998). This rethinking (taking place, as it does, in reaction to losses) includes notions of communal mourning—for oneself, one’s community, one’s very history.

Set side by side, we can see that melancholia is not separate from collectivity or family (and those acts that serve to uphold and maintain family), but essential to the processes of reconstructing identity and fostering belonging. What binds these together is their informing of each other, “the melancholia that occupies the” [hearts and] “minds of communities under siege,” the “militancy and the mourning,” (Crimp, 1989), the force of the dead and dying in the culture and tradition in our lives and those around us (Munoz, 1999, pp. 73-74).
Somerville has pointed out that particular meanings of socially constructed identities "gain currency through repetition, resistance, and appropriation." The meaning of family cannot be established, once and for all, but rather "emerges from ongoing processes of contestation and accumulation" (2000, p. 14). Though the visual and narrative texts, here, are selective (i.e., limited in range) and clearly not representative of the population or of the region, they do suggest a challenging of cultural fictions of—especially sexual, but also racial—opposites. This challenging disrupts conventional discourse, in favor of a position that holds both present and past (i.e., melancholia), the "necessary fiction that grounds us" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 74). This is the space of productive hybridization—between what is lost and cannot be recovered, and the "refusal to follow the identificatory protocols of the dominant culture." It is this hybrid space—never far from mourning and the "transhistorical" space of (im)possible conditions, that allows for the emergence of friendships, solidarities, and collective identities, i.e., family (1999, pp. 72-74).
Social workers, as well as public health workers and other professionals, are arguably well positioned to offer opportunities for active participation towards community and social change (Checkoway & Gutierrez, 2006). This method (photovoice) and approach (empowerment/strength based) held such opportunity, while at the same time appearing especially suitable for the population of study. This held true on account of the method's participatory nature, which acknowledges the tendency of research to marginalize, pathologize, and otherwise malign transgenders and others who depart from normative expectations—at times, in the name of science. It held true additionally on account of the population’s comfort with, if not fondness for, the camera.
While I found both this method and approach viable and productive in terms of resultant data, they were, nonetheless, “messy” in their implementation and implications. I would like to address, then, some of the important themes that emerged from the study, above and beyond those emerging from the individual images and narratives. Towards this end, I will preface my general suggestions for social work practice and policy with a brief discussion of topics touched upon previously:

1) the reflexive turn and its implications for practice and policy,
2) reflexivity’s call for flexibility,
3) flexibility’s link to the role of emotion,
4) the problem of exclusion and its link to homonormativity, and
5) disidentification and its link to worldmaking.

This is followed by discussion of future plans and reflections on the project. These topics coalesce, then, in a brief section on everyday cultural practice and its connection to kinship, identity, genealogy, and melancholia.

The Reflexive Turn

All interviews are interventions. Unlike the therapy session, however, where the task is to effect change in the participant, the task of the research session is for the participant to effect change in the researcher, specifically in his or her understanding. Still, the perceived power differential generally favors the researcher, who is often believed by participants to be “expert in something.” Thus, the encounter itself has an impact on the interviewee, in the sense that
the participant may likely "assume a template" against which [his or her] own
narrative is constructed (Josselson, 2007, p. 546).

What happens when the researcher, rather than the "subject," is the intervened upon,
and how does this change in the researcher (whether perceived or "real") affect the research
process and content? As issues related to social work practice and policy, it may be helpful to
discuss some of the implications of what has been termed the reflexive turn (van Berkel &
Møller, 2002).

The development, evaluation, and implementation of policy measures has been
largely guided by the "orthodox consensus" (Giddens, 1984), at the heart of which is the
empirical-analytical research model emphasizing theory testing, large-scale research,
quantifiable data, and theories of causality. Within the social sciences, however, these
methodological principles have been fundamentally criticized, in favor of a "reflexive social
science." In this model, knowledge is developed in everyday practice, in the context of
everyday interaction. General statements can only be expressed in modest terms, with
knowledge linked to contextuality, reciprocity, and uncertainty (Valkenburg & Lind, 2002, p.
189). The implications of this are far-reaching, not only on the level of methodology, but also
with regard to theory development and practice.

Justified by the orthodox consensus, the researcher who wants to study complex
process can resort to dissection of the complexity. Reflexive social science, however,
requires a "reckoning with social patterns" as reproduced by daily patterns, and with the
ways that both are reified in institutionalized forms. Reflexive social science also requires
attention to subjectivity, including norms, values, meanings, and understanding of power relations, themselves complex (Valkenburg & Lind, 2002, p. 187).

As a first move, we must take as a starting point, at least in the initial stages of research, that the people under investigation have more knowledge about their actions than researchers do. This is related not only to the facts of their lives, but to the complexities of their social contexts. Getting at these facts and complexities, however, requires trust. This necessitates that the researched have knowledge of or information about the research, control of the information provided, and influence on the research process (Valkenburg & Lind, 2002, p. 190). Even more, this requires language—a language that people, whether the researched or the researcher, may struggle for or even fail to possess, in part, as a result of the unconscious and routine nature of day-to-day behavior.

With consideration of these requirements, the reflexive researcher must work to capture “the ways in which people make sense of themselves and their predicaments, and their resultant adaptations” (Demerath, 2006). These, however, are not “prefigurable,” so researchers who attempt to understand these processes must allow for the potential of “surprise” (Willis, 2004, cited in Demerath, 2006). Further, this surprise aspect, i.e., the absence of prefigurability inherent in qualitative research, reaches into and complicates every stage of the conventional research process—from human subjects protections, to dissemination of the research products, to evaluation of the research products, once completed (Craig & Huber, 2007; Demerath, 2006). It is to be expected, then, that these also complicate the application of the research, in connection with both policy and practice.
With regard to social policy, the orthodox consensus requires a gathering of general data, from which policymakers define the problems, determine causes, and establish appropriate solutions—with no expectation of contributing to the emancipation, equality, identity constitution, or solidarity of the researched. This top-down and paternalistic “structuration” (Giddens, 1984) of social policy interventions is deeply ingrained at all levels of policymaking, from the decision-making process to the routine or “habitus” in the practices of social workers (Valkenburg & Lind, 2002, p. 217). It follows, then, that transforming these practices into more tailor-made or client-centered approaches is, or would be, a radical process, affecting not only policy delivery, but management process and policymaking, itself.

With regard to practice, this reflexive turn has been equally disruptive, translating into an understanding of the interdependence of method, theory, and values (Mishler, 1984, cited in Lather, 1991, p. 14). This requires theory that is both relevant to the world and nurtured by actions in it. Further, as critical practices derive their forms and meanings in relation to changing historical conditions, a position (any position) “can never be established once and for all, but must be perpetually refashioned and renewed to address adequately those shifting conditions and circumstances that are its ground” (Solomon-Godeau, 1988, cited in Lather, 1991, p. 3).

In sum, this is an altogether different approach to empirical inquiry, falling somewhere between relativist and absolutist. Given this positioning, it holds the capacity for helping us to tell a better story, “however hesitant and partial” (Grossberg, 1988, cited in Lather, 1991, p. 114). At the same time, this approach complicates the entirety of the
research process, as well as its applications—whether in reference to practice interventions or the development of policy.

The Reflexive Turn and Flexibility

Alvarez and Gutiérrez (2001, p. 14) have spoken of the need for flexibility, and the potential loss of control over program design, implementation, and even outcome, if the effort is truly "participatory," and thereby "collaborative." This insight was instructive, in my reflections upon the current project. From selection of participants to scheduling, to management and facilitation of the sessions, I rarely felt myself to be "in charge." In fact, there were many times when I experienced myself as being carried by the project, rather than the other way around.

As an example, the first working session was scheduled earlier than expected (before I had secured the cameras), prompted by a local event (a drag pageant on Maui) and the participants' desire to take pictures there. Wanting to ride this wave of enthusiasm, I hurried to secure the necessary materials and conduct the session. As it turned out, however, I was hampered by both the lack of an assistant and of a projector, requiring that all photos be printed out for sharing/discussion. These made for an inefficient first session that took its toll on participants, already spent from their workdays. During subsequent sessions, then, I made sure I had both an assistant and a projector, facilitating viewing and thereby discussion.

As another example, the project was expected to last for six to eight weeks, with the two groups running concurrently. As it turned out, sessions were spread out over a period of 12 weeks, due to scheduling issues on the part of participants, researcher, and assistants (related to illness, travel, work, etc.—the very issues that complicate the day-to-day). This
not only extended the amount of time needed for data gathering, it resulted in sessions that were more staggered than concurrent. Also, again due to scheduling issues, there were occasions when a participant from one cohort would attend the session of the other, potentially affecting the group dynamic and process—though this may not have been problematic, as the narratives were used in combination rather than compared. (Also, as a result of this creative strategy on the part of the community leader, the project suffered no attrition.)

As a final example, and this is personally the most troublesome, not all participants took kindly to my appeal for co-authorship, with one participant becoming angry at my uncertain stance which she attributed to lack of confidence. It is possible that, in my attempts not to appropriate, I was too passive in my role or vague in my delivery or explanations. At the same time, this criticism could be related to the participant’s sense of having been exploited or used for purposes unrelated to community gain, given my unwillingness (and inability) to proclaim a necessary “next step” in order to facilitate “real” or material change.

Flexibility and the Role of Emotion

Related to flexibility is the role of emotionality. Though rarely discussed in the literature, it is difficult not to be affected by a participant’s telling of struggles with, for example, discord or loss. As a result, the research process becomes an affective, emotional experience, inevitably shaping the research itself (Blakely, 2007).

As an example, it was difficult to “manage” the time that participants spent sharing their photos and stories, in part due to my desire to hear everything they had to say, but also due to my reluctance to “cut people off,” given the personal and emotional nature of the
content, particularly when the emotion was one of grief. This resulted in a situation where I
would attempt different strategies, e.g., insistence on time-limited sharing or limiting the
number of photographs to be discussed, though admittedly never finding a good balance.
Further, this issue of emotionality came into play not only during the sessions, but also
during the process of transcription. This resulted in my becoming mired in a given story and
the feelings surrounding it, to the detriment of my own progress, sometimes having to “stop
the tape” or otherwise remove myself.

While emotionally engaged research can be thought of as a process or method
incorporating both emotions and intellect working together (Reinharz, 1992), the result, on
the ground, may be an erosion of illusions of “stability, certainty, security, and safety”
(Blakely, 2007). Even more, these kinds of unsettling circumstances can add to our
apprehension around “mislabeling, misinterpreting, and misunderstanding that which and
whom we hear, record, and analyze/interpret” (Devault, 1999). Thus the potential for
misrepresentation has a fixed presence in emotionally engaged work (Blakely, 2007).

While emotionally engaged research has been addressed by other researchers, this has
been mostly in relation to the emotionally charged topics of rape, sexual harassment,
domestic violence, femicide, and abortion (Hippensteele, 1997; Campbell, 2001) and not, to
my knowledge, around the topic of family-making or other (supposedly) “non-feminist”
topics. Finally, I mention emotionality not as a factor to be circumvented or strategically
diminished, but as a factor in the research process, bearing on both the researcher and
researched and, thereby, the resultant understandings.
Exclusion and Homonormativity

There is concern that as mainstream gay and lesbian rights organizations "strategically embrace agendas that view for acceptance within contemporary economic and political systems" (e.g., normative and family-oriented formations associated with domestic partnership, adoption, military service, and gender-normative social roles), they abandon their political commitments and radical potential for social change. Further, much of this political activity is based on consumer rather than citizen rights, thereby privileging particular groups over others (Murphy, Ruiz, & Serlin, 2008, pp. 4-5).

With regard to the population of study, we can see the relevance of themes of exclusion and marginalization (the traumas of state-sanctioned repression of queer communities) and their relationship to homonormativity. Through the promise and lure of recognition and legitimation, "highly individualized narratives of bourgeois belonging and ascension" have been picked up in a "privatized, corporatized, and sanitized 'gay agenda' that places . . . gay marriage and penalty-enhancing hate crimes laws at the top of its priorities." It must be noted, however, that these are for "good queer subjects"—white and upwardly mobile, "monogamous, consumptive, privatized." (Non)subjects—to include other queers, transgenders, the poor or working class, people of color, indigenous people, dissidents, inmates, prostitutes, and the disabled—may very well be "other Others," whose lives, and deaths, do not even merit mention or attention (Agathangelou, Bassichis, & Spira, 2008, pp. 122-123).

Consistent with this logic is the linking of the treatment of transsexuals/transgenders with understandings of their productive capacity as related to labor and dutiful citizenship.
This understanding of transpeople privileges those within transsexual communities who have the potential to integrate into heteronormative capitalist society, at the same time excluding those

... of color, those who do not pass as men or women, those with illnesses or disabilities, those who are impoverished, those who are unable or unwilling to be employed within the legal wage labor economy and thus work in the sex trade, as well as those incarcerated in prison or mental institutions. Their narratives largely remain untold (Agathangelou & Bassichis, et al., 2008, p. 51).

While emphasis of the normative potential of transsexuals/transgenders may be a successful strategy to counter the marginalizing effects of pathologization, it does little to challenge heteronormativity. Of particular concern is the flattening of spirit and imagination as a byproduct of movement toward what Rubin (1984) has coined the “charmed circle” of sex—those practices and identities that receive social sanction. Further, “claims to self-sufficiency, morality, and a positive work ethic undermine the potential for a politics of resistance” and divide communities on the basis of class, race, citizenship status, and ability, among other differences (Irving, 2008, p. 55).

Disidentification and Worldmaking

Muñoz has spoken of disidentificatory performance as willfully disavowing that which majoritarian culture has decreed as the “real” (1999, p. 196). In similar fashion, Halberstam has spoken of the possibility of “futures” that can be imagined according to
logics beyond those of the “conventional, forward-moving narratives of birth, marriage, reproduction, and death” (2005, p. 4).

While this project has touched upon alternative forms of kinship, it has not done so in relation to notions of progress. According to Irving, “much emphasis is placed on integrating transpeople as nonnormatively sexed/gendered into heteronormative capitalist society.” Such a focus, however, serves to reproduce problematic approaches to transsexuality/transgenderism.

“Contemporary scholarship is haunted by the specter of pathologization due to the continuous reproduction of the heteronormative sex/gender binary system.” Further, this specter emerges as especially troubling “in our current neoliberal moment wherein claims to rights and equality have been easily subsumed within a discourse of economic productivity” (Irving, 2008, p. 51). Although poverty can result from marginalization from the legal or legitimate work force, the assimilation currently required of transgenders to achieve this type of integration may not be worth the price. Moreover, while it may be helpful to render trans identities “visible” and to challenge state and institutional dominance over their lives, individualist strategies that reinscribe and reinforce dominant class relations will not be sufficient (2008, p. 40).

If, in fact, “disidentificatory performances and readings require an active kernel of utopian possibility” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 25), it may be our sole task to allow for this possibility. This is the potential future to which Halberstam refers (2005), beyond dominant culture and outside of ideology (Muñoz, 1999).
Next Steps

From the beginning of the project, before the first photos were taken, participants understood the importance of showing their images and stories to a wider audience, beyond readers of the dissertation. As a next step, there has been planning for an installation at a university gallery and/or community coffeehouse. The first of these is slated for early Fall 2008, at the Women's Studies art space at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa.

In preparation for this installation, the gallery space has been measured; costs projected—for mountings, announcements, light refreshments, and possibly a digital production of the photograph stills; and support sought to cover expenses. There has also been discussion of an opening event, to be attended by participants, the general community, and local media and legislators.

With participants' approval, and with their voluntary participation, this event and the installation, itself, can provide a forum for participants to convey their perspective to community leaders and the general public. This can create the opportunity for community leaders to assist participants "by first learning from them" (Wang, 2003, p. 193).

Reflections

... inquiry is necessarily engaged in understanding the human world from within a specific situation ... it is always and at once historical, moral, and political. It provides not just the starting point of inquiry but the point and purpose for the task of understanding itself. But if this is so, interpretation is not simply a dimension of science. Rather, it means that science, like all human endeavors, is rooted in a context of meaning which is itself a social
reality, a particular organization of human action defining a moral and practical world (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987, p. 14).

It was hoped at the onset that this project would result in raised awareness and ultimately, political change. As stated in my initial proposal, this project (study) can serve to strengthen the identity of transgenders and their families as community members, expand their skills, and inform “outsiders” about their unique experiences and insights. Further, the project can support transgenders in framing their expertise so that is intelligible and integrated into overall community change, though realistically this process may be a complex and long one (Suleiman, Soleimanpour, & London, 2006, p. 128).

As it turns out, this community change, as I have understood it, has not been proposed in the form of educating or informing legislators, policy-makers, service providers, or even the general public (though all these were mentioned), so much as was a request for non-assimilation (Ruiz, 2008) and all messiness that this entails. To clarify, this was not a request on the part of participants (and their families) to be left alone, so much as it was a request for non-transgenders to honor their (participants’) lives as they have chosen to live them, bodily and relationally. Further, this request was for change at the micro or interpersonal level, as well as the macro or institutional (e.g., improved provider sensitivity, equal access to services, etc.).
Returning to the model on kinship, it appears that we, as social workers and other health and mental health professionals, have focused our attention on those factors that have contributed to melancholia—histories of trauma, prostitution, drug abuse, arrests, and confinement in prison; trouble in the workplace; poor family relations; homelessness, and the like. While attention to these is clearly warranted (particularly, it could be argued, from social workers), this often has taken place at the expense of attention to other factors, such as those related to genealogy or identity. When participants spoke of their families, I believe
they were interested in attention and concern, not only to their struggles around family, but to the wellbeing of those they care about. When they spoke of sisterhood, drags, and transitioning, I believe they were interested in acceptance—not only for who they once were and the embodiment they once possessed, but for who they are and are becoming.

While social work, or any other discipline, cannot mandate attention, concern, or acceptance, it can exemplify it. This can begin with steps to address our own attitudes towards "diversity," in order to provide maximum support. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW), for instance, has recommended that social workers become, at minimum

... educated about issues affecting transgender youth, spouses of transsexuals, the differences between gender and sexual identity, the humane treatment of intersexed infants, and utilizing the Standards of Care for ethical treatment of transgender people developed by the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association, to name just a few issues (Lev & Moore, 2000).

Beyond this, it may be helpful to actively work towards minimizing, if not eradicating, discrimination in access to goods and services. As a beginning step, this can be addressed through the provision of education and information about transgender issues to a wide range of audiences—including employers, workers, communities, government agencies, and health professionals. Also, to improve recognition of gender status, it may be helpful to provide more options when collecting sex data (i.e., not just male or female). Finally, it is important to recognize and support the leadership and advocacy of transgenders, as they
work to obtain the same rights to dignity, security, and freedom of expression as other citizens (Human Rights Commission, 2007).

Further, it may be productive to focus on interventions that are consistent with the values of the culture, such as those supporting family strengths and mutual caregiving, as well as promotion of individual functioning within the context of the family system (Kaʻopua & Mueller, 2004). These interventions might also incorporate traditional collectivist values or culture-specific processes aimed at resolution of family conflict and promotion of family wellness, such as hoʻoponopono or the practice of “talk story,” as used in photovoice. To clarify, this would not be for the purpose of cloaking the “therapy in the garments of the client’s cultural milieu,” as proposed by Shook (1985, cited in Hurdle, 2002), but to recognize and tap into the rich history, culture, traditions, customs, values, and beliefs that have sustained these individuals and families, to date.

Suggestions for Policy

The suspicion of the intellectual who both objectifies and speaks for others inveighs us to develop a kind of self-reflexivity that will enable us to look closely at our own practice in terms of how we contribute to dominate in spite of our liberatory intentions (Lather, 1991, p. 15).

While it has not been the mission of this project to recommend policy or ways that policy might be better directed, the narratives of participants do provide us with some direction. Reconsidering what family does in our society may be one way to begin to respond to questions about policy. A central function, as indicated by the narratives, is that of providing care for dependents, whether elderly or young.
As caregivers, themselves, must be ministered to and cared for, in order to perform their roles more effectively, family—however conceived—already plays a role. Beyond this, caregivers would surely benefit from emotional support, consideration, and resources, including fair pay and flexible schedules on the part of their employers.

Equally important is the issue of healthcare. When participants spoke of unequal healthcare services, they were not speaking of services as simply different, but as substandard and inferior, in part due to the discomfort or discrimination they experienced. Efforts to educate and thereby improve the sensitivity of service providers would prove helpful, especially in tandem with a healthcare system that was responsive to the issues common to transgenders, such as those related to transitioning. Additionally, participants would benefit from laws to protect against discrimination on the basis of sex or gender identity, as well as provisions for enforcement of those laws—whether in regard to employment, housing, or accommodations.

Everyday Cultural Practice

Though reference has been made, throughout, to the significance of culture, it has not been addressed specifically. In part, this is because local transgender culture is complicated by aspects of space (place) and time, entangled with aspects of identity—not only with regard to sexual orientation and gender identification, but also with regard to race and ethnicity. Additionally, these aspects are further complicated by the fluid, and often changing, sexual orientation and gender identifications characteristic of the population, as well as differences in identities related to mixed race status (i.e., even as the overwhelming majority identify as Asian and/or Pacific Islander, primarily Native Hawaiian or Samoan, this
is not a homogeneous group). Culture in Hawai‘i is also complicated by the presence of a local culture—a coming together of Hawaiians and immigrant laborers, originally in resistance to the exploitations of the plantation system (Najita, 2006, p. 132). At the same time, however, it may be these very complexities that allow for some commonality, at least in reference to a particular kind of hybridity.

Drawing comparisons among Hawai‘i, Samoa, and New Zealand/Aotearoa, Najita (2006), for example, speaks of common legacies of land dispossession, contact, and annexation; settlement and imported labor; and contemporary attempts at reconciliation. In the cases of indigenous peoples, such as Native Hawaiians and the Maori of Aotearoa, there is also a history of outlawing and delegitimation of native languages, resulting in further cultural alienation and weakening of ties from one generation to the next (Najita, 2006; Merry, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999/2006).

These and related violences are now being met with a re-emergence or “renaissance” of indigenous and islander culture that coincides with movements for decolonization, examples of “the Oceanic imaginary already occurring at the level of cultural and everyday practice” (Najita, 2006, p. 18). There is, then, a collective sense related to the power of place, shared melancholia around multiple losses, and parallel attempts to “right historical wrongs” (2006, p. 10). Further, these attempts to reestablish cultural and genealogical connections extend also to the family, where the “heteronormative and familial imperative of colonialism has suppressed tribal and extended family structures, alternative sexual practices, and non-biological modes of belonging” (2006, p. 16).
To elaborate, in contrast to western notions, which privilege linear descent and pedigree, this indigenous Pacific understanding of genealogy connects one not only to land and place, but to ancestors as well as non-biological relations (Najita, 2006; Kameʻeleihiwa, 1999). Indigenous genealogies, then, are "the vehicle for the resurgence of the past," at the same time functioning "as a guiding post, anchoring one to place and lighting a path for the future" (Najita, 2006, p. 23).

The significance of this understanding may be better understood in light of Hawaiian and Maori notions of time. For both, the past occurs in front and the future behind, such that "one goes backwards into the future." Not only does such a notion suggest the "coexistence of the past with the embodied present," it also represents a "layered, interwoven collective sense of genealogy," intimately connected with all the events and relations that came before (Najita, 2006, p. 100).

Examined historically, we can see that the mahu of Hawai‘i and of New Zealand, fa‘afafine of Samoa, fakaleti of Tonga, and others of the Pacific’s "third-sex" (Najita, 2006, p. 108) held significant social status, prior to colonial imposition (Kameʻeleihiwa, 1999). Through residual practices exercised contemporarily—e.g., non-traditional self-identification, dress, language, social and familial relations—transgenders, and other dispossessed, "refuse and imagine beyond the nation." This is not necessarily an attempt to return to pre-contact practices, however, but more often to chart that "precarious line" between competing native traditions and societal interests, in order to occupy the ever-changing space between traditional and modernizing forces (Najita, 2006, pp. 16-19).
As social workers, particularly those practicing in multicultural settings, we are advised to attend to these and other marginalized ways of knowing that, in their persistence, “critique the disciplinary discourses that have contributed to the subjection of [a] region and its peoples” (Najita, 2006, p. 24). As the legacies of imposition are only partially past, we must remain sensitive to the power of violences and trauma that “extend into the present in an unbroken chain” (2006, p. 26). This warning equally applies to research, as even the most well intended emancipatory and empowering models retain some degree of intellectual arrogance or paternalism (Tuhiwai Smith, 2006, p. 177).

In recognition of these warnings, we have little choice but to reassess our tendency to search for individual solutions to community problems—especially given the likelihood of our being implicated in those problems. Finally, we must learn to distance ourselves from spectatorship (Namaste, 2000) and other “touristic conventions” (Najita, 2006) in order to become sensitive to, and appreciative of, the ways everyday aesthetic practices can work against oppressive conditions.

Conclusion

Perhaps there are certain ages which do not need truth as much as they need a deepening of the sense of reality, a widening of the imagination (Weil, 1963, cited in Sontag, 1966, p. 50).

Something is good not because it is achieved, but because another kind of truth about the human situation, another experience of what it is to be
human—in short, another valid sensibility—is being revealed (Sontag, 1966, p. 287).

The social work literature has long been plagued by a conceptual disconnect between theories of individual action and interaction, and theories of society and social change (Giddens, 1984; Kondrat, 2002). This separation is also evident in practice, with practitioners being routinely faulted for what has been viewed as their lack of attention to macro aspects (Specht & Courtney, 1994, cited in Kondrat, 2002). The understanding that the relationship between microaction and macrostructure is much closer than usually conceptualized adds a critical activist ingredient to social work’s concept of person-in-environment. More important, this framework allows for the conceptual possibility of self-transformation and of social transformation, as well as inclusion of notions of power (Kondrat, 2002).

Like other societal institutions, the business of working with families has been structured in ways that serve to support the dominant value system while keeping invisible certain organizing principles of our lives, such as culture, class, race, and sexual orientation/identity. While many have worked to incorporate these hidden dimensions and to transform our definitions of “home” and of “family,” the complexities of culture and of identity make this a slow and difficult evolution (McGoldrick, 1998, pp. 1-3). It has made sense, then, to explore the relatively invisible population of transgenders in relation to family, as defined and portrayed by transgenders.

While it can be argued that people of all persuasions “work” to make and maintain kinship, these processes are arguably more difficult for those living outside heteronormative expectations. Always in the background are procreative interpretations of kinship; in the
foreground are opponents, well meaning or otherwise, who treat non-traditional families as "pretend relations that never quite measure up" (Weston, 1991, p. 212). It becomes necessary, then, to begin to move away from normative standards that serve to bolster some at the expense of many.

Social exclusion, whether on a personal level or institutional, limits the ability of transgenders to participate fully in society and to care for themselves and their families. It limits their choices, compromises their health, and shortens their life span. As long as there is a preferred and privileged family form (Lehr, 1999, p. 128), transgenders and their families will suffer.

While social work can work towards inclusion, e.g., through facilitation of access to goods and services, it would be important to recognize and support the leadership of transgenders. From the fashioning of self to the fashioning of family, transgenders have shown themselves to be highly creative. It may be, then, that social work needs only to allow for a different, supplementary set of standards—ideally, one that "relishes, rather than judges," (Sontag, 1966, p. 291) and that permits the particularity and messiness of actual lives, however lived.

Finally, I think this project has touched upon an important concept that has great relevance for the field of social work—the notion of survival. By this, I mean a form of progress that deviates from that of normative understandings—one that is not ambitious or otherwise connected to mobility or consumerism, but rather related to the preservation of culture, and to maintenance of ties to those who lived before us and those who will come after. Through attention to the local and the everyday, we gain insight into new communities
and ways of belonging, and appreciation for the reinvigoration and revival of cultural forms
and expressions—an allowing for individual and communal health.
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate
Re-visionsing Family: A Photovoice Project
with Transgenders and their Families in Hawai‘i
Researcher: Linda Ikeda-Vogel; UH, School of Social Work

Purpose of study. The purpose of this study is to learn more about transgenders and their families in order to help service providers and policy-makers become more responsive and develop better programs/services and laws.

Expectations. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:
• attend a series of four (4) meetings/group sessions over a two (2) month period,
• take photographs of your family, and
• participate in group discussions about the photographs and your family.
   It is also hoped (though not required) that you will be willing to:
• be audiotaped during the group discussions, and
• share and release some of your photos, in order to further the aims of the project.
   (Note: If you do not give permission to be audiotaped, recorder can be turned off. Also, you have the option of providing photos for discussion, without turning them over to researcher.)

Confidentiality. Your participation in this study and information about you will be kept confidential, to the extent allowed by law. Also, you will have a say in the photographs and stories selected for the project, and in how these are understood and used. The four (4) meetings/group sessions will be audiotaped and later transcribed. At no time, however, will these tapes/transcriptions be used for any purpose beyond that of the immediate project/study. Information that identifies you will not be released without your permission.

Risks. The risks to you and your family are minimal, though you and your family may be identifiable in photographs. There is also a chance that you may find some of the discussion upsetting. Support will be made available to you if this should occur.

Benefits. Although you may not receive direct benefit through participating in this study, you may have the opportunity to:
• serve as a representative and spokesperson for local transgenders,
• bring attention to issues important to you and your family, and
• raise awareness and potentially influence program planning and social policy.

Compensation. There is no arrangement for compensation for your time or effort, though expenses will be covered. You will, however, be given a camera (and xD picture card) for the purpose of gathering photographs, which will be yours to keep (during and after the project, even if you are unable to complete all the sessions.)

Contact. If you have any questions about this study, you may write or call: Linda Ikeda-Vogel, School of Social Work, University of Hawai‘i, phone 808/375-7369, email ikedavog@hawaii.edu If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the UH Committee on Human Studies at 956-5007, or write to 2540 Maile Way, #253, Honolulu, HI 96822 (email: uhirb@hawaii.edu).

If you agree to these terms, please sign on back of this page. You will receive a copy.
Consent to Participate

Re-visioning Family: A Photovoice Project with Transgenders and their Families in Hawai‘i
Researcher: Linda Ikeda-Vogel
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, School of Social Work

I have read the preceding page and understand the nature of this study.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may participate without being photographed, audiotaped, and/or releasing photographs to researcher.

I agree to (please initial):

______ participate in project
______ be audiotaped
______ release photographs selected by me for purpose of the study.

I understand that I have the right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time, with no negative consequences.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date _________
Consent to be Photographed
Re-visioning Family: A Photovoice Project with Transgenders and their Families in Hawai‘i
Researcher: Linda Ikeda-Vogel
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa, School of Social Work

I give permission for me (or my child/ren) to be photographed for purposes of project study.

I understand that these photographs may be used for focus group discussions.

I understand that my identity (and those of my child/ren) will be kept confidential, to the extent allowed by law, and that photographs will not be released without my written consent.

I have read and understand the above and consent to be photographed for project purposes.

Signature of person photographed (parent or guardian, if minor)

Printed Name/Date

Contact Phone Number
I agree to release my photographic or other image taken of me or in which I may be included, for purposes of project study.

I am fully aware that my likeness may appear in materials available to students, faculty or staff, and individuals outside of the university community. I hereby waive any right to inspect or approve the finished image(s) or printed matter that may be used in conjunction therewith, or to the eventual use that the image(s) may be applied.

I understand that any publicity or promotional materials accompanying my likeness will be fully compliant with the University of Hawai‘i, Manoa (UHM) and UH School of Social Work (UH SSW) policies, statements, and values. I release UHM and UH SSW, and those acting under their authority, from any liability related to the alteration—intentional or otherwise—that may occur or be produced in connection with any processing, editing, transmission, display, or publication of images for project study purposes.

I realize and understand that UHM SSW uses are, by nature, not for profit. Further, I recognize that all images in which I am included, and which I agree to release, will become the exclusive property of researcher.

This agreement constitutes the sole, complete, and exclusive agreement between UHM SSW and me regarding the images, and I am not relying on other representation, whether oral or written.

______________________________
Signature of person photographed (parent or guardian, if minor)

______________________________
Printed Name/Date

______________________________
Contact Phone Number
APPENDIX D
Participant Survey/Revisioning Family: A Photovoice Project

Country of Birth: __________________________________________

Race (check all) Assigned sex at birth

☐ Asian/specify, list out ______

☐ Pacific Islander/specify, list out ______

☐ American Indian

☐ Black/African American

☐ White

☐ Hispanic

☐ Other/specify, list out ______

Age: ______

Current Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Intersex

Current Gender

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Transgender (M to F)

☐ Transgender (F to M)

☐ Other (non-conforming)

Education/Vocation/Employment

Highest level of education completed: ____________________________

Current Income: $________________________/month

Income Source

☐ Full time employment

☐ Part time employment

☐ Government Benefit: (type): __________

☐ Other: __________________________

Work related Discrimination currently?

☐ Yes

☐ No

History of Work related Discrimination?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Type of employment: __________________________________________

Housing/Social Support

With whom do you live?

☐ Alone

☐ Partner/Significant Other (list): ________________________________

☐ Family (list): _____________________________________________

☐ Friends (list): ____________________________________________

☐ Facility (list): ____________________________________________

☐ Other(s) (list): __________________________________________

From whom do you receive support?

☐ Family (list): _____________________________________________

☐ Friends (list): ____________________________________________

☐ Organizations(s) (list): ___________________________________
☐ Other(s) (list):

What kind of support is provided? (can write on back on page, as needed)
Session 1. Discussion of overall purpose; discussion of possible themes for picture taking.

Participants will be informed of overall purpose of project. Information will likely include the following:

You are here as part of a project involving 16 transgender participants. Each of you will be given a camera and asked to take pictures of and talk about your families. The point of this is to identify and represent your families in ways that make it possible for non-transgender people, especially program planners and law makers, to begin to understand what is special about and important to you.

We will meet four times, including today, each time for about two hours (not including the time allotted for a food break). After this session, you will have about two weeks to take your photos, with the entire project taking about six to eight weeks, depending on our schedules. Every session will be recorded, both through note taking and, with your permission, audio-recording. Nothing that comes out of this project will identify you without your permission, and all of us will agree to keep everything we talk about in our group sessions confidential.

While the photos—and at the end of the project, the camera—will belong to you, it is hoped that you will sign to release some of your photos to the project. This will help to furnish evidence to your stories and to create better understanding and more healthful, and helpful, public policy.

Today we’ll talk about photovoice (concept and method), how to use the cameras and go about picture taking, and a little about who your families are and what makes them family. For example:

Photovoice concept and method:
• What “experts” (doctors, social workers, public health professionals, law makers) think is important may not match what you think is important. This project, then, represents an opportunity to identify, represent, and enhance (your segment of) the local transgender community.
• Viewing the photos together and talking about what is important and how to show or explain what is important is a big part of this. Every time we come together,
meaning is added and there is a greater chance of others understanding what you think and feel.

How to use the cameras and go about picture taking:
- Maintaining high ethical standards will be critical in this process. The people you photograph, including children, may be vulnerable to harm. It is important that you photograph only willing participants, and that you obtain signed consent when they (or, in the case of children, their parents/guardians/caretakers) agree to being photographed.
- If anyone’s safety or security cannot be reasonably assured (and we can talk about how to assess this), do not proceed.

Discussion questions around picture taking.
- What is an acceptable way to approach someone to take his or her picture?
- Should someone take pictures of other people without their knowledge?
- What kind of responsibility does carrying a camera confer?
- What would you not want to be photographed doing?
- To whom might you want to give photographs, and what might be the implications? (Wang & Burris, 1997)

Discussion questions around family.
- Who is in your family? (Families may include partners, children, biological relatives, adoptive relatives, hanai relatives, drag relations, close friends, and others, depending on responses of participants.)
- If family, what makes them family? (Participants will be allowed to define this for themselves.)
- If not family, how do you distinguish them from family?

Session 2. Selection of photographs, beginning discussion of topics and emergent themes. This is a three-step process that includes:
1) selection of those photographs that most accurately reflect the community’s concerns/assets,
2) contextualizing or telling stories about what the photographs mean, and
3) codifying or identifying the issues, themes, or theories that emerge (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Wang and Yi (1998; Shaeffer, 1983), in reference to contextualizing or explaining the meaning of the photos, have suggested encouraging participants to take a critical stance by framing their narratives (stories) in terms of the acronym SHOWeD.
- What do you See?
- What is really Happening?
- How does this relate to Our lives?
• Why does this (problem or strength) exist?
• What can we Do about this?

In keeping with the open-endedness of this type of questioning, the following are likely to be posed to participants/photographers (as topics/themes for discussion around photographs already taken):

  • Who is this person/persons who appear/s in your photo?
  • What is this person’s/these persons’ relationship to you?
  • Describe your relationship to this person/these persons.
  • Describe your responsibilities to/for this person/these persons.
  • Describe this person’s/these persons’ responsibilities to you.

  • Who is missing from photographs? Why?

  • Where was this photo taken?
  • What is the significance of this place?

  • What is the significance of this particular photo? Why is it important/not important? Why should it be included/excluded?

These questions may be posed to the group at large (e.g., written on white board or easel) and to individual participants, when more in-depth responses are needed. An agenda or outline, including these questions, will be provided.

Session 3. Narration/stories about photographs and meanings of the images; discussion of emergent theme or issues.

Discussion, at this point, will need to follow/be shaped by issues defined by the group. Focus, however, will remain on family—as family affects participants and as participants shape family (including broader understandings/conceptualizations). A necessary next step is connecting this information to the realm of the practical, through recommendations for service providers/program developers and policy-makers/legislators.

  • How does being transgender affect your relationship with family?
  • How does being transgender affect your family’s relationship with you?

  • What should non-transgenders, including service providers and policy-makers, know about you and your family?
  • Why is this issue/information (response to preceding question) important?

  • If service providers/policy-makers understood this, what might they do differently?
Session 4. Discussion of use or display of photographs in order to inform awareness, policy, or planning; discussion of impact of project; closure.

- What is important and needs to be remembered? What needs to be changed?
- How would you like to convey this information to the community/service providers/policy-makers? (Photos and narratives, for example, can be exhibited by way of easels or panels, web pages, written materials or publications, etc.)

- How has this project affected you?
- Should this work continue? In what ways/how?

It is hoped that this process will not only make this particular segment of the transgender population “visible,” but will provide support and (a new or different) sense of community through collective action.
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