A Thesis

entitled

Speaking like Her, Him, and Hir: The Search for a Transwoman’s Speech Community

by

Ryan D. Wright

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in English

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May 2012
An Abstract of

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This thesis examines past linguistic and anthropological research associated with transwomen and speech community theory in order to provide new theoretical framework to the notion of an English-speaking transwoman speech community. In addition to reviewing research completed by well-known linguists and anthropologists, such as Don Kulick, William Leap, and Rusty Barrett, leading transwomen writers’ work was also considered as to provide a well-balanced outlook on such a topic that is as equally significant for academia as societies unassociated with academia. After reviewing research written on the topic of both transwomen and language and gender, the only linguistic theory that could possibly unite transwomen on the basis of their speech behavior is queer linguistics. However, the notion of “queer” has become a conflicted term among transwomen and sometimes creates divisions on the basis of its acceptance as an appropriate identifier of their population. Since the only current linguistic theory is not well-supported, the search for a transwoman’s speech community is unproductive. Rather, more ethnographic research of transwomen is necessary in order to determine the linguistic varieties found within the English-speaking population. This theoretical study is meant to provide scholars a practical framework for future studies.
For my partner, friends, and colleagues who have provided me love and support through the process of writing the most significant piece of work in my career to date and have encouraged and aided my intellectual growth. For those who have believed in me and my work when I did not. For those who believe in an international transgender movement.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible if it were not for the endless support that I received from my thesis committee consisting of: Professors Melinda Reichelt, Sharon Barnes, and Joel Lipman. I am forever grateful for Professor Reichelt believing in this theoretical study and its usefulness to the transwoman community as well as to the fields of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology. Each of them provided me guidance and encouragement when I most needed it and their commitment never wavered. Their critical comments pushed me to be a better theorist and helped me to develop this thesis into a piece of work that would have been impossible otherwise. Working with all three has been a rewarding and honorable experience that has provided me a great deal of intellectual growth on the subject of the thesis and on academic writing. Their dedication and intelligence have inspired me and permitted me to discover my love of research. I perpetually thank each of them.

I also am most fortunate for my partner. He always believed in my ability to achieve greatness with this thesis, and his positivity helped me to realize its worthiness. Love and support is his greatest gift to me, and I dearly thank him for everything.
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B.C.E.........................Before Common Era
F2M............................Female to Male
M2F............................Male to Female
Chapter One

A Trans History

The Trans Beginnings and Significance

Trans persons have been widely discussed and written about in many world societies since the ancient civilizations of the world. In fact, we know from written records and art that if a male desired to embody some, or all, of the stereotypical characteristics of the female gender, he was most often accepted by his community. Ancient texts reveal that some men dressed in what was commonly referred to as female, feminine, clothing. They, too, wore make-up and wigs and adorned themselves in jewelry. All of this gender (expression) transformation was usually for the purposes of theatre, religious ceremonies, and rituals. Men rarely lived undergoing this transformation on a daily basis. However, there are cases where transwomen and men permanently assumed the gender role opposite to their biological sex, although their decision to do so was occasionally met with resistance.

For example, in the eleventh to eighth centuries B.C.E. the Hebrews wrote the Book of Deuteronomy (the fifth book in the Jewish Torah) which was revered by the people and their culture as a sacred doctrine and set of laws. Interestingly, within this large prose contains a set of laws directly pertaining to men and women who desire to rebel against those norms established for their assigned biological sex. In Deuteronomy, there is a clear rejection and dismissal for cross-dressing of any kind: “The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman’s garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God (22:5)”. In addition, the culture forbade any man to become a post-operative M2F transsexual: “He that is
wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter the congregation of the LORD (23:1). From these simple excerpts we can determine that: 1) Semitic men and women living in ancient civilizations had wanted to live as a gender opposite to their biological sex; 2) There were various sectors of the trans community that included persons who wanted to cross-dress as well as those who desired gender reassignment surgeries to permanently alter their gender; and 3) Trans persons had a strong enough visible presence within their ancient Hebrew communities that mentioning it in Torah was necessary.

Also, the ancient Greek civilization is another significant culture and timeframe that reveals more about trans persons’ history. This particular civilization was consumed with festivals, customs, rituals, and traditions, and many of them often involved males dressed in female’s clothing and vice versa (Zeitlin, 1995). Greek mythology furthermore had numerous references to common trans actions, such as cross-dressing. Some of the gods and hero warriors who cross-dressed, according to mythology, were: Achilles, Heracles, Dionysus, and Athena. According to Irving (1990), “Literal and metaphoric sex change seems to have been a subject of considerable imaginative interest in the ancient world and had some importance in ancient religion” (p.149). Even from some of our most prominent, well-known philosophers and literary theorists throughout history, such as Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, have commented on the role, or lack thereof, of females in the public theatre or any creative, performing art. Since they were denied the access to enter this field of work, males were required to serve as both actor and actress. This tradition continued throughout ancient history into other European and Asian civilizations. In China, the renowned jing opera featured this temporary and performative
male gender transformation. Even though the tradition of males performing as both males and females still arises in a public forum as it did in the ancient civilizations previously discussed, the difference currently consists of Western males publicly performing as females and being referred to as drag queens (and members of a much larger group of women—the transwoman population).

Some cultures however did not disapprove of cross-dressing or any trans person. This sentiment was especially a reality for many tribal groups throughout the world, especially those groups that had shamans. In China, the shih-niang, a name for the religious leader within tribes, often appeared wearing female, male, and religious attire. This is also true for numerous African tribes where many of the religious leaders mixed gender expression or exercised the opposite—a gender expression which is not traditional to their biological sex. In regards specifically to the West, examples of transmen and transwomen existing in South American and Native American (in the U.S.) tribes can be found in the writings of colonizers. Conquistadors or colonizers from Europe readily documented when they were compelled or confused by unconventional gender identities or gender expressions that were not stereotypically conforming to one’s biological sex. In 1576, after arriving in Brazil, Pedro de Magalhaes wrote about the Tupinamba females who “lived as men and were accepted by other men, and who hunted and went to war” (Feinberg, 1996, p. 22). As well, a white colonizer wrote about the Crow people of North America in 1850: “Strange country this where males assume the dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn men and mate with their own sex!” (Roscoe, 2000, p. 3). Based on these quotations concerning two tribal cultures in two distinct
geographical locations, we can ascertain that trans identity was common among the locals and not rejected except by European foreigners.

We have learned about the popular trans figure in many Native American tribes of the U.S. known as Two-Spirit. Two-Spirit refers to a man who dresses and takes on the physical gender identity, without any reassignment, of a female but embodies both gender expressions. Therefore, Two-Spirit is the icon for androgyny. Ze\(^1\) is neither male nor female, but we know that Two-Spirit is commonly a biologically assigned male who purposely makes himself androgynous by expressing some physical characteristics common among females. In the U.S. Two-Spirit specifically had a great influence on the trans community and inspired alternative gender expressions. More recently in U.S. history, persons, such as Rollerarena, RuPaul and Dr. Mary Edwards Walker have received a great deal of attention for their trans identity.

During the modern and postmodern eras, more research has been dedicated to understanding the trans community and their comprehensive history. Many scholars in the fields of anthropology, history, women’s studies, and medicine have made us more aware of their diverse status across the world and possible reasons for the existence of trans cultures as a subculture to gender. In reviewing this rather intriguing history of trans persons and their culture, we are left only knowing that their existence was as controversial in ancient Semitic cultures as it is today in postmodern U.S. An area that is entirely forgotten from trans history is the style and characteristics of their speech. We are uncertain as to how M2F trans Brazilians in the 16\(^{th}\) century were communicating

\(^1\) Gender-neutral third person singular pronoun popularized by Leslie Feinberg. It is formed by uniting the Standard English pronouns: he and she.
with one another. Was there a language or distinct style that they only used in speaking with one another and perhaps with others as well? Was there an alternative method for communicating that would not have been mutually intelligible by non-M2F trans Brazilians? The same questions can be asked for all ancient civilizations where we believe a trans culture was present. Nonetheless, in the 21st century linguists and linguistic anthropologists have yet to theorize intensely on the idea surrounding the trans community and their linguistic features or style.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to address the following research question:

Is there a speech community(ies) which exist among the trans community? Is there a speech community that exists for a specific sector of the trans community? In the trans world, there are multiple subcategories which are positioned under the term “trans”. As for this study, I will refer to the subcategories of the trans world as pre-operative transsexuals, post-operative transsexuals, drag queens, and transvestites. There are considerable differences between the subcategories mentioned. The term transsexual denotes any person who dresses and lives their everyday life as the opposite gender that ze was biologically-assigned at birth. Pre-operative refers to those persons who have not yet undergone any gender reassignment surgery but desire to undergo gender reassignment surgery in the future. Contrastively, post-operative refers to those who have. In contrast to transsexuals, drag queens are biologically-assigned males who perform as females. Any person assuming a drag role always performs for audience in a bar or nightclub because the performative space is a mandatory element in the

2 For this theoretical study, I will only be referring to the English-speaking trans community and its numerous subcategories.
transformation process for a drag queen and king. Although many researchers confuse transvestites and cross-dressers by using these terms interchangeably, they are significantly different in the trans worlds. Cross-dressers are those who find it appealing to dress as in the opposite gender’s clothing and adopt mannerisms and characteristics often associated with the gender opposite of their own; however, they never intend or desire to fully live as the opposite gender in the manner that all transsexuals do. Transvestite is the term used to refer to persons who dress in the opposite gender’s clothing for specifically sexual and fetish purposes which is also referred to as *transvestic fetishism* which is a medical term that is commonly used in by sexologists, psychologists, and gender/sexuality theorists and scholars. By reviewing these four subcategories of the community, this theoretical study will offer the trans community and scholars of trans studies a starting place for conceptualizing trans persons and their possible linguistic distinctiveness.

**Methodology**

This study is especially interested in reviewing the past research focusing on trans persons. The literature that will be reviewed most heavily is that from linguistic anthropologists and historians (since they are the two fields of study that have published most extensively on trans persons, in general). In addition, there are some books written by trans persons who detail and comment on their experience as a trans person and the way in which they see their community in juxtaposition to other gender-identified communities. Moreover, in discussing the study’s theoretical significance it will be vital to include philosophical assumptions made about gender and self-identity. Doing so will help to determine whether the trans community, or its subcategories, have a unified
speech community on the basis of any particular speech characteristic. In addition, it is significant—and what makes this study unique from others—to juxtapose the multiple subcategories of the trans community and distinguish similarities and differences that exist between them. Including this information will assist linguists, anthropologists, gender theorists, and others in better understanding how persons who identify with the trans community are linguistically similar and dissimilar.

**Historical Perspective on Gender and Sexuality**

In *The history of sexuality: An introduction*, Foucault (1980, but originally published in 1976), writes that the Victorian era has been instrumental in creating the conventionalities of gender and sexuality in the Western world. Of those conventionalities, the gender binary system has been the greatest detriment to trans communities. From this system, we have been urged to view gender existing as either male or female as well as sexuality being composed in either a classic form of masculine or feminine behavior. Victorians also believed that gender and sexuality are interlinked in that males are masculine and females are feminine. The conventionalization of the binary system is arguably prevalent in regards to sexual orientation—heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals. The gender binary system is contrived on the basis, as indicated by Beauvoir in *The second sex* (1989, but first published in 1949), that the female gender is a result of the abnormality of what is considered *male*. She argues that the binary gender system is a product of society considering non-males—what has become our conception of the female—*the other sex*.

While Foucault supports the argument that sex is biological and gender is constructed, Butler (1990), author of *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of*
identity, argues against this philosophy and demands that society begins to look at these two identity markers through another lens. Butler claims that Western society, and most societies in the world, regard biological sex as classifiable (male and female) and gender only functions in conjunction with it. According to the current methodology for determining one’s sex and gender, gender is an execution of sex. Therefore, sex and gender are biological—not constructed. In stating this, Butler arrives at her central argument which is that this understanding of sex and gender is not reflective of reality, and gender in particular is performative and functions are determined by the individual. She agrees that sex is biological, but gender is playful and we are always fluctuating between the male and female binaries. Furthermore, she is suggesting that gender is not a standardized establishment but that the construction of gender identity is capable of being performed in an unlimited number of fashions. The theory for what constitutes a male and female is not universal. Rather, it is culturally-bound.

The dichotomy between male and female is also a topic of great relevance to activists and trans authors in America. In Feinberg’s Trans liberation: Beyond pink or blue, ze emphasizes the necessity for society to accept all who are not heteronormative. The title of hir book, Tran liberation, is a phrase that has developed to refer to all persons who blur the heteronormativity of American society regarding their sex and/or gender expression. Feinberg reminds the reader that every human or huwomman is assigned a gender at birth, and according to the biologically-assigned gender, his or her

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3 A term used by Judith Butler in Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.
4 A gender-neutral third person, singular possessive pronoun also popularized by Leslie Feinberg. It is developed by combining the Standard English pronouns: him and her.
expression of that gender initially is expected to carry the society’s heteronormative expectation. Ze explains that those who are assigned the male gender are expected to be masculine and those who are assigned the female gender are expected to be feminine. And, Feinberg refers to persons who deviate from the “male vs. female” and “masculine vs. feminine” dichotomy as the epitome of hir concept of trans liberation. Furthermore, in hir first novel titled Stone Butch Blues (1993), ze situates the character plots in a manner that provides the reader with evidence of trans liberation occurring in a society, albeit a fictional one. The novel was written with the purpose of depicting a “real world” and the events, situations, and conflicts that are consistent in most trans or lesbian and gay communities, especially those which were prevalent before the Stonewall Riots of 1969. For example, Feinberg thoroughly details the central character’s decision to initially begin the process of changing hir gender but eventually ceases hir male-to-female (M2F) alteration to live as a butch lesbian.

Similar to Feinberg, Bornstein, gender and sexuality activist and author, asserts that persons who deviate from what is considered gender normal and heterosexual—who Feinberg would credit as representative of trans liberation—are the third gender. In fact, ze insists that the gender binary is a false belief in society, in that the biological construction of humans and huwomans is strictly formed on the basis of male and female chromosomes not amalgamating. Ze claims that there are precisely fifteen chromosomal markers for gender. In The gender outlaw: On men, women, and the rest of us, Bornstein

Prior to the Stonewall Riots of 1969 (or colloquially referred to as Stonewall), police often raided the gay, lesbian, and drag bars. These raids usually consisted of the police punishing those present and were jailed for a limited time period. In order to privately communicate, Feinberg mentions how the characters of hir novel create a code as a means to communicate without the police tracking their conversation.
argues that those who identify not as male nor as female, but as trans, are exercising society’s third gender. Therefore, Bornstein’s argument for the third gender would be applicable to a much larger population, according to the multitude of chromosomal markers, than what is currently recognized. Bornstein, a M2F post-operative transsexual, establishes a distinction between sex and gender. For hir, sex is suggestive of one’s orientation and/or preference. Whereas ze argues that the concept of gender demands all persons to recognize it as more than simply biological gender assignment but also as gender role, gender identity, and gender attribution.

**Gender and the Speech Community**

Since our gender and sexuality are not clearly defined, every human and huwoman communicates daily with others, or the self, in some formal or informal capacity. Verbal communication\(^6\) (otherwise known as speech) is one manner in which we define ourselves and others around us. It is one characteristic of our identity. The linguistic concept of speech community has been highly debated since its initial emergence in the 1960s by Gumperz. He developed a new method for examining communication in a sociolinguistic context. He named his theory called interactional sociolinguistics. The premise of this newly founded sub-discipline in linguistics was to investigate the ways in which persons create meaning from the interactions that they experience with others. Expanding on his interactional theory, he further asserted that persons from all regions of the world are capable of communicating. “This universe is the speech community: any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent

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\(^6\) Anytime communication or the verb ‘to communicate’ is referred to throughout this work, it is referring specifically to verbal communication.
interaction by means of a shared body of verbal signs and set off from similar aggregates by significant differences in language usage” (Eerdmans, Prevignano, & Thibault, 2003, p. 155). From this quote, we can assume that if all persons from all regions of the universe were in frequent interaction with one another, then Gumperz would consider there to be the existence of a universal speech community. In 1964, he writes in “Linguistic and social interaction in two communities” that despite the linguistic differences that may exist between the two groups (a speech community), the particular speech characteristics exercised by them create a system based on their mutual array of social norms.

Shortly following Gumperz publicized his theory of speech community, Chomsky (1965) argued in disapproval of it and stated that linguistics is concerned “primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions… (p. 3)”. The most significant difference between Gumperz and Chomsky on the issue related to defining speech communities is Gumperz acceptance the heterogeneous persons are capable of establishing such a community based on their shared features of language, even if it is based on social norms. However, Chomsky negates this as a possibility and emphasizes that speech communities must be homogeneous because linguistic proficiency must first be set otherwise there is no language acquisition. In other words, Chomsky disregards social norms as a reliable factor in leading persons in creating a speech community; rather, the linguistic structures must be shared by all members of a speech community in order for verbal communication to be realized.
In 1963, Labov conducted a study at Martha’s Vineyard that aimed to record the prevalence of language variation and dialects prevalent in the area. What he found was that there was a great deal of language variation which accounted for multiple dialects spoken throughout Martha’s Vineyard. Despite these differences, Labov determined that all of the residents used shared linguistic features which united them. And, it was this situation of language variation but mutual intelligibility and shared linguistic properties that interested Labov. This notion of persons being organized on the basis of their geographic location and communication style was a clear representation of what he would later regard as evidence for a speech community. For Labov, “the speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms: these norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage (Labov, 1972, 120-21)”. Although Labov agrees with Gumperz that social norms greatly influence the construction of speech communities, he, too, agrees with Chomsky that the language which is shared must be homogeneous and cannot rely entirely on social norms. Labov’s theory of speech community therefore functions as a compound of the two. He would later refer to this theory of speech community in his studies investigating the varieties of English spoken in New York City and the linguistic characteristics unique to African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

Labov’s initial study of Martha’s Vineyard provided him data to suggest that persons throughout the world are not only members of a community depending on where they may reside, but they are also members of a community that has its foundation in the
speech characteristics of the members. Therefore, this example provides evidence of a speech community. And, it was this theory that inspired (and continues to inspire) other linguists, specifically sociolinguists, and linguistic anthropologists to conduct research in other regions around the world to test whether the speech community theory would prove to be true. In the late 1970s, Milroy performed a study in Belfast, Northern Ireland that was aimed at collecting data on the thriving social networks and linguistic variation among the population. The results of her study demonstrated a relationship similar to that of Labov’s Martha’s Vineyard study. While linguistic variation is recognizably significant among the persons in the Belfast region, there is an overarching speech community which connects them. Among studies such as Labov’s and Milroy’s, researchers became eager to determine all the ways in which a speech community could be structured and organized.

Lakoff’s (1975) book focuses on ways in which women and language influence one another. This ultimately led to a change in the field of sociolinguistics and its relationship to gender. In her book, *Language and woman’s place*, she writes that there are characteristics in language that are unique and special to only women. This assertion led her to argue that there is a special women’s language in English that is uniquely different than that of men’s language. She articulated this by elaborating on ten underlying characteristics that ranged from hedging to hypercorrection of grammar and pronunciation. Even though she does not explicitly connect her theory to the speech community theory, one may argue that her claim regarding the existence of a distinctive women’s language aligns with Chomsky’s theory. The women’s language that she
outlines is closer to the Chomsky model than Gumperz or Labov because she does not consider others who may share social norms with women.

Lakoff’s distinction between women’s and men’s language inspired a great host of scholars in linguistics and anthropology to examine more ways that men and women may differ in their speech and manners of communication. For example, in the 1990s, Tannen began to write on the subject of gender and language. Her scholarship on the topic can be viewed as an expansion of Lakoff’s seminal work in the area. Tannen (1990) wrote *You just don’t understand: Women and men in conversation*, and it is here that she further elaborates on the claim that women and men have fundamental differences with respect to the way in which they converse with those of the same (biologically-assigned) gender and those opposite to them. Similar to Lakoff, Tannen’s analysis of the differences between men and women’s communication supports Chomsky’s theory of speech community. Tannen too does not acknowledge any social norms existing between the two genders that could lead to a communicative style where the two could “understand” one another. Also, the author does not address minority gender identities, such as genderqueers or transwomen, particularly those who do not self-identify as belonging to the female gender category.

Pratt’s theory of linguistic contact furthermore raises a concern regarding Lakoff’s and Tannen’s work. Pratt argues that there are linguistic contact zones where there is a merging of two or more cultures. If we view women and men as representative of two distinct subcultures who are in linguistic contact—as they naturally are in nearly every culture—then there should be linguistic contact zones which are not be accounted for in either of the scholars’ work.
The concept of men and women innately having their own method and manner of speaking and communicating also has been explored in regards to differences among persons with differing sexual preferences. Sonenschein (1969) argued, using linguistic evidence that a homosexual (or gay) language existed and it was utilized by gay men for the purposes of verbally communicating with each other and signaling relatedness in identity. Sonenschein believed that the language’s characterizations consisted of effeminization, utilization, redirection, and invention. In order to test this study, he spent one and one-half years in an unnamed southwestern city in the U.S. asking informants to define and elaborate on their definitions of various “role terms” or “sex terms”. His results revealed that 64% of the role terms were only understood by the gay community, and of those terms, 45% were unknown to non-identifying gay subjects. Although Sonenschein does not express that this is evidence for a speech community that is organized on the basis of a population’s sexuality, it certainly does suggest this. Not only do the results of his work suggest that a speech community is present, but the speech community is created on basis of the Labov model. Not only do these gay males have shared language features, but they also have social commonalities. Moreover, his comparison and contrast of the gay and straight populations’ awareness of such terms attests to his belief that gay persons have a language that is incomprehensible to anyone who is not gay.

Published one year after Sonenschein, Stanley (1970) also tested whether there was a vocabulary that was unintelligible to all non-homosexuals (or non-gays). In order to test this, he distributed 100 questionnaires to 100 persons. His hypotheses were the following: 1) the gay community has a distinct vocabulary for communicating; 2) the gay
community’s usage of such a vocabulary is relatively homogeneous and would cut across all boundaries; and 3) the heterosexual (or straight) community is becoming more familiar with a potential gay lexicon. And, Stanley’s results suggested that the straight community does have some awareness of the lexicon or slang terms that were previously regarded as only intelligible by gay persons. From this conclusion, he determined that lexicon has the potential to be acquired by anyone and one’s sexuality and gender do not influence their capability in doing so.

A number of scholars beginning in the mid-1990s began to review Lakoff’s scholarship on women’s language and ask ‘If women are different than men in terms of their language and communicative styles, then is it plausible for persons of differing sexualities to have non-mutually intelligible language characteristics?’ In 1996, Leap wrote *Word’s out: Gay Men’s English* where he asserted more strongly than he had ever before that there was language which was formed on the basis of sexuality and which is coined as Gay Men’s English. Similarly to when Lakoff asserted that women had a special language, Leap also defended the idea that gay men also have a special language. He argues that they have a unique language that is strictly intelligible only to other gay men. That is to say that one may suggest that there is a speech community whose members are only of the male gender and gay in terms of their sexuality which would be in great support of Gumperz’s theory of speech community. Gumperz’s theory seems to align most appropriately with Leap’s argument for gay men’s English because this style of English is adopted by those who are gay. Leap also determined that this speech community was unique in that it maintained solidarity on the basis of its lexicon.
Similarly to Leap’s gay language discovery, Queen (1997) writes in *Queerly phrased* of the existence of a *lesbian language*. Also expanding on Lakoff’s study of women’s language, Queen asserts that the lesbian language is one that has features which clearly differentiate itself from the language that Lakoff wrote about. The lesbian language is described by Queen as having a blend of the features from Lakoff’s women’s language; non-standard forms that are most prevalent among working-class urban males; lexical features from Gay Men’s English; and stereotypical lesbian women’s verbal characteristics, such as pitch and words of expression (as described by Queen). Queen argued that these four linguistic features were central to identifying lesbian language, and it was her understanding that only lesbians communicated in their speech community using all four features which marked, as one might suggest, the speech community and the lesbians, in general, as linguistically different from any others. If the lesbian language is a blend and mimics features from other communities, then one could argue that Queen’s theory of lesbian language is a speech community on basis of a Labov model.

In contrast to this scholarship, Kulick and Cameron (2003) in *Language and sexuality* argue against the claims postulated by Leap and Queen. These two scholars argue that the existence of a gay and lesbian language is highly unlikely—if not impossible—since language can be acquired by anyone. Essentially, they set out reminding others that language is acquirable in a native, second, or foreign context. According to them, it therefore does not make sense to call any unique set of features as belonging to, for example, gay and lesbian persons. In regards to gay and lesbian persons, they also attest that they do not form cohesive societal communities because not all gay and lesbian persons are alike. Rather, they argue in support of research that focuses
strictly on the manner in which language and desire influence each other. It is their understanding that depending on the speech community that one desires to relate to at any given point in time, then she or he is capable of adapting to the language that is relative to the situation and people involved.

In retrospect, their central argument for language and desire aligns with Butler’s philosophical argument on performative gender. If language is acquired on the basis of desire, then language cannot be a human attribute that derives from any innate qualities; rather, when one uses her or his language, then she or he is performing the language features of a particular community. If we distinguish the relationship between language and desire in the said manner then we are unable to recognize—to avoid creating a paradox—language as being a property of a particular gender but as a property to any person of any gender identity.

Thus far in linguistics, anthropology, and other related fields, there has been no scholarship which has been entirely devoted to examining the existence of a trans speech community. This may be a result of the unavoidable complexity that is innate in a community focusing only on trans persons. To begin, there is no single definition of who is trans. In fact, it is likely that we are not aware of all of the plausible genders (and sexualities) that do exist in our world. This being the case, it is hard to define who is trans and explain why they fit the definition but someone else does not. It is important to recall that trans is a gender identity; therefore, the gender which has been biologically-assigned to a person may not be the gender identity that she, he, or ze feels best represents herself, himself, or zeself. Since some trans persons identify as a she, he, or somewhere in between these two binary genders, discussing and theorizing about features of speech that
are unique to and shared by all trans persons could be an overwhelming task. After all, the community consists of males who identify as females; females who identify as males; and males and females who identify as neither male nor female. In regards to their sexual preference, the trans community consists of males who are heterosexual, gay, bisexual, intersex and pansexual, and females who are heterosexual, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and pansexual.7

In the research, there have been scholars who have contributed or mentioned M2F trans speech characteristics and explained the method that trans women have used (and possibly still use) to identify other trans women. Bagemihl (1997) wrote a chapter, in Livia and Hall’s *Queerly phrased*, titled “Surrogate phonology and transsexual faggotry” where he brings attention to the disparity that has arisen within the M2F trans community. This disparity that he writes of is a result of straight post-operative trans women’s disapproval of lesbian post-operative trans women in that the former do not consider the latter to be valid and true to the M2F post-operative trans community because of their sexual preference. As a result, the former reject the latter using phonological features that are commonly used among them and demand for the latter to create their own unique features. From Bagemihl’s 1997 study, one is able to realize that some transwomen do recognize themselves as members of a speech community that exists based on their non-biologically assigned genders and sexual preferences. Yet, one has to critically question whether Bagemihl’s study of trans women is a study where they created a distinctive speech community, or is it a case where the community is formed

7 And, there certainly are other sexual preferences which have failed to be recognized that equally legitimate and may consider when reading this thesis.

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based on one’s biological sex? This becomes especially important when considering
other M2F trans persons share common speech characteristics with a community that is
already organized but are encouraged not to identify with it.

**What More Do We Need To Do?**

Kulick (1999) wrote in “Transgender and language: A review of the literature and
suggestions for the future” about the scholars have produced a vast amount of research
dedicated to linguistics and biologically-assigned sex and gender identity. However, the
cross-study of linguistics and gender identity has failed to receive the attention that it
deserves. This is especially true when one considers the rise in visibility of the trans
population in the U.S. My study aims to provide scholars and general readers with a
theoretical understanding of the work that has been published; to give attention to the
common questions that are arising from various contemporary theories; to contribute an
argument to the discussion of whether all or any of the M2F trans population share
linguistic features that would result in a single (or multiple) speech community; and to
produce useful conclusions that will contribute to our theoretical conception of language
and gender identity.

For the humanities and social sciences, this theoretical study is significant.
Historically, the research that centered on language and its impact on gender and
sexuality has derived from sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists. When focusing
on the M2F trans population however and the premise for organizing speech
communities, we can realize that there is a direct implication of how this population
understands themselves in a societal context and in communication with persons of the
same gender identity. It is obvious that academic fields, such as history, sociology,
psychology, law, English, theatre, and modern languages could benefit from a more comprehensive analysis of the M2F trans population. In particular, it is especially important that even a field of study like English as a Second Language (ESL) begins to investigate the extent to which non-native speakers of English who are M2F or F2M trans articulate their speech and form speech communities based on their second language (English) and gender identity and/or sexuality. While this topic is quite revolutionary in the current field of ESL research, it does serve a clear purpose in understanding the diverse array of students and educators who enroll in U.S. universities and colleges. All academics fields nevertheless can benefit from research on the topic in that becoming informed of how people communicate is vital to ensure that they are respected and understood.

The Importance of Trans Persons and Speech Communities

As mentioned earlier, the significance or worth of studying the existence of speech communities is remarkably debatable in both linguistics and anthropology. This is particularly true following the initial speech community studies in the 1960s and 1970s. While some scholars have continued discussion pertaining to its validity and offering new ways in which speech communities can be understood and interpreted for a larger meaning, post-modernism and queer theory (and other movements throughout the disciplines) have been the source of doubtfulness in regards to the legitimacy of conceptualizing speech communities as distinct and individually unique groups of people who are communalized on the basis of their speech acts or features. These late 20th century theorists disregard the existence of such communities because of their ideology concerning the human ability to perform. They understand structures to be more fluid and
believe less in these structures maintaining exclusivity, so when examining the unknown existence of speech communities formed on the basis of gender identity and/or sexuality, theorists in post-modernism and queer theory, like Butler, will attest to their argument on performative gender and sexuality.

Nevertheless, an expansive and critical theoretical study is needed so scholars are better informed of the ways in which M2F trans persons may or may not consciously or subconsciously create speech communities with others of a similar gender identity or sexuality or share similar speech features. For those who find it accurate to juxtapose the “real world” to academia (however, for the purpose of this paper, it is not believed that these exist in two different universal planes and therefore do not coincide), the study of speech communities and their relation to gender and sexuality is a very important one. Speech is only one way that humans who can effectively communicate through verbal interaction understand their position in a local, national, and international society. This is to say that studying the existence of speech communities can be effective for marginalized persons (like M2F trans) to have another outlet in understanding who may too align with them in regards to their social status and recognition of identity or kinship.
Chapter Two

Searching for a M2F Transwoman Community

This chapter will review the speech behaviors and characteristics that are reflective of the diversity within the M2F transwoman community. After a series of descriptions are discussed, a comparative analysis will be done to gain a further understanding of how these sectors align and differ from one another in regards to the features of their speech. Then, the concept of ‘speech community’ and its variety of definitions will be explored as well as examine whether or not the term “speech community” can be used to describe M2F transwomen’s speech.

The M2F Transwomen of the Study

The M2F transwomen who will be discussed throughout the study do not represent the trans population in its entirety. It is beyond the scope of this study to include and discuss every sector of the said population. Nevertheless, the sectors that will be foci of the study are drag queens, transvestites, pre- and post-operative transsexuals, genderqueers, and cross-dressers. The central purpose in narrowing this scope is to concentrate on those M2F transwomen and their speech behavior, which has been a relatively underexplored area in academia, including those sectors of the population who are currently being discussed by academics, especially linguists. For those who identify with cross-dressers, it becomes significant to fully understand how they integrate into this diverse world of M2F transwomen.

Drag Queens

Drag queens are one of the most well-known sectors of the trans population. Their popularity is recognized in a large number of countries around the world, such as
Thailand, Philippines, U.S., and Brazil. In the United States drag queens have embraced their cultural representation as “campy” entertainers. Since their purpose in altering their perceived gender identity from M2F is purely entertainment-related, they typically spend a limited amount of time as their opposite biologically-assigned gender. As entertainers, it is not common for drag queens to desire a gender reassignment surgery to permanently alter their gender; rather, they typically embrace their biologically-assigned gender as well as the female gender. For example, they pride themselves on the idea and their ability to transform their perceived gender and live as not one but both genders.

The language of drag queens has been studied most notably by linguist Rusty Barrett. From his study of African American drag queens in a Texas bar, Barrett (1998) concluded that they altered their speech depending on the perceived race of their audience. For example, when the audience consisted of predominately white males, then the drag queens modified their speech to resemble an upper-class white female’s speech characteristics. This study reveals that drag queens are as capable of fluctuating between their gender identities (male and female or some representation of female) as they are adapting the characteristics of their speech in order to take on and, in this case, appeal to various audiences. Thinking of this study as our primary source of drag queens’ speech, one could conclude that their speech is not fixed to any linguistic feature.

**Fetishistic Transvestites**

Fetishistic transvestites enact the behaviors of the (so called) opposite gender for sexual purposes. M2F transvestites have been a central topic on research in the humanities, medicine, and social and biological sciences. Specifically, in the field of sexology, Hirschfield (1910), Ellis (1915) and others have desired to provide a conclusive
answer as to what may permit or influence males into having a psychological and sexual desire connected to gender identity. For transvestites, it is readily understood that males do not have any desire to undergo gender reassignment surgery, perform in public as another gender, or live temporarily or permanently as the gender opposite to the one they were assigned at birth. Their desire is one which is quite special and unique from all of the other sectors discussed in this study. Transvestites only alter their gender during or prior to sexual intercourse. Therefore, the desire to transform from M2F is similar to that of any other human’s sexual fetish. It is strictly for sexual purposes.

The characteristics of the transvestite’s speech are less known. This is largely due to transvestitism being a gender identity change for predominately sexual interests; therefore, collecting data becomes more difficult. The little that we do know is reported by Don Kulick in his seminal text, *Tranvesti* (1998). The book contains an in-depth look at Kulick’s study of Brazilian transvestites (referred to as “transvestis” which is Portuguese for transvestites), and how they articulate their identity. Although the transvestites in his study are prostitutes, the transvestites’ purpose in altering their identity is similar to fetishistic transvestites. Since their motivation for becoming a woman results from sexual desire, it is fair to assume that their speech is manipulated as to adopt their own interpretation of the female speech characteristics. There is nothing biological about speech characteristics, but rather, the desire to imitate female speech is psychological and would allow their transformation as a M2F transvestite to be successful.
**Pre- and Post-Operative Transsexuals**

While transvestites manipulate their perceived gender for purposes strictly related to sexual desire, M2F pre-operative transsexuals alter their gender identity for an entirely different reason. In understanding this sector, one needs to be aware that these persons alter their biologically-assigned sex and permanently live as the sex opposite to which they were assigned. In the *Encyclopedia of sexual knowledge*, Haire (1934) writes that transsexuality became well-known in the 19th century in Germany. Some of the earliest medical writing on transsexuality derived from German doctors who publicized this phenomenon of males desiring to become females. The desire to live permanently as a female (assuming one was biologically-assigned as male) derives from internal feeling that ze was assigned and/or born as the “wrong” gender. In other words, the feelings do not align with the physicality. In regards to their identity category, the ‘pre-operative’ marker denotes that the M2F transsexual lives as a female but has not undergone any gender reassignment surgery. Some M2F pre-operative transsexuals never go through with the reassignment surgery for multiple reasons, such as lack of funding or lack of interest. Also, some live for many years as pre-operative and eventually do have the surgery. However, if they do have reassignment surgery, then they become referred to as a M2F post-operative transsexual. The reassignment surgery accounts for the only difference between the experiences of those who are pre- and post-operative transsexuals.

Since both pre- and post-operative transsexuals live full-time as females, they also likely (if not always) utilize female hormones. These hormones are taken to aid in

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8 “Ze” is a gender-neutral pronoun popularized by author Leslie Feinberg. It is neutral, since it combines the gender-specific pronouns: “he” and “she”.
altering their physicality to appear more like the desired gender. For example, the hormones contribute to hair, body structure, and breast (among other physical attributes) conversion. Furthermore, there are also female hormones that are commonly taken by M2F transsexuals to alter their vocal characteristics. This means that after taking such hormones for an unknown period of time (it depends on the individual), the M2F transsexuals begin to speak in a slightly higher pitch and their voice slightly alters to become a little “lighter” than it had been previously as males without female hormones. This is not to say that their speech characteristics differ. Vocal and speech (or language) characteristics are not to be understood or thought of as one in the same. However, it is significant to note this vocal alteration because it would certainly factor into the manner in which they feel comfortable adopting certain speech characteristics or using them in specific environments.

A study by Bagemihl (1997) titled “Surrogate phonology and transsexual faggotry: A linguistic analogy for uncoupling sexual orientation from gender identity” investigated the phonological differences between transsexuals who are straight and gay. Bagemihl brings to our attention the mistreatment of gay transsexuals in regards to excluding them from communities, such as the straight transsexual speech community. In fact, he reports that straight transsexuals purposely disengage with the gay transsexual community in order to maintain solidarity (including linguistic solidarity) with the other straight transsexuals. In order to achieve this, they use phonological characteristics that are not intelligible to other communities. Even though Bagemihl’s study addresses linguistic differences between a sector of the trans community based solely on sexuality, it is a difference that will be crucial when evaluating the M2F trans speech community as
a whole. Since one sector of the trans community is purposely isolating another sector from using phonological characteristics that are commonly used, the concept of a universal trans community becomes less plausible.

**Transwomen’s Speech: Similarities and Differences**

Both linguistic similarities and difference exist between each of the trans groups under discussion. As previously stated, only pre- and post-operative transsexuals experience a unique speech modification. Of course, this modification is only possible if one chooses to take female hormones. It also is important to address that all post-operative transsexuals consume female hormones before, during and after their gender replacement surgery. However, pre-operative transsexuals do not always follow this path. Some never undergo the hormonal changes. This means that only post-operative transsexuals can be confidently assumed to undergo some biological voice modification. But, pre-operative transsexuals could experience the same change in the future with hormonal treatment. If pre-operative transsexuals choose not to experience female hormones, then their speech behavior may be more similar to that of drag queens and/or transvestites.

Pre-operative transsexuals, drag queens and transvestites are all conscious of assuming a female gender identity and creating the best representation of that identity, although it is likely correct in understanding that the social construction of gender permits “female” to be defined in a multitude of ways. However, pre-operative transsexuals are most often transwomen who choose to live full-time as the opposite of their biologically-assigned sex, so their desire to pass is typically far more crucial to their identity than the drag queen or transvestite. In stating this, we can assume that the pre-
operative transsexual is likely to modify her speech so that her identity is not doubted. Of course, we know this not to be the case for every pre-operative transsexual. Some will not attempt to manipulate their speech in any manner, but it is likely to be true for those who are persistent in passing in the outside community. Although drag queens and transvestites have different motivations for altering their speech, their underlying goal in doing so is perhaps quite similar. These sectors may be eager to adopt more feminine speech characteristics in order to attract others – either as entertainment or for fulfilling sexual interests.

**Speech Community Theory and M2F Transwomen**

A purpose in defining a particular speech community is sometimes to consider which speech characteristics are shared among a group of people or community. It is a method for defining solidarity with others and creating a boundary that signifies how one community’s speech is different from another. As well, by critically examining one’s speech, conclusions can be drawn as to which community (or communities) one most appropriately belongs. As speech communities become more mobile and dispersed in various locations, it is common to recognize characteristics or behaviors that are shared among many speech communities. Therefore, it is most appropriate to consider whether every aspect of a community’s speech behaviors must be alike in order for one community to be conjoined with another, or perhaps it is plausible for us to consider two or more communities being one community if any of their speech characteristics are similar. Similar to how race, class, gender, political affiliation, geographic location, nationality, and so on are pertinent to persons identifying the communities to which they belong, speech also is another major factor in our ability to recognize yet another
community that we can identify ourselves with which we can identify. Even though research on speech communities have been understudied in the past decade or more, investigating speech communities as they apply to the trans population offers new insights on the idea of “speech community,” how they work, and how they do or do not apply to the trans experience.

Speech community theory is most significant for a group of persons who identify as M2F transwomen, although it is likely that sociolinguists are responsible for educating and informing transwomen outside of academia of the plausible importance of the said theory. As a community based on their gender identity, there still remain many limitations in identifying themselves with other trans and non-trans communities. Therefore, the relevancy in studying whether a M2F transwomen speech community does or does not exist is vital. It is critical that they are capable of recognizing the communities to which they are members. As it has been presented above, there are similarities as well as obvious differences between these transwomen communities; however, it is necessary to look further and postulate ways in which we might see these aforementioned sectors belonging to one speech community or we may be able to propose ways for these sectors (and others) to adopt a particular speech characteristic or behavior in order to bridge their differences and create solidarity among themselves.

A Speech Community Is…

While many scholars write and lecture about the significance of the speech community in society as well as the theory and its importance to sociolinguistics, not all scholars agree about what defines such a community. Scholars, primarily linguists and linguistic and cultural anthropologists, who publish most often on this topic derive
differing conceptions of how we might look at the speech community based on the study that they conducted. For example, Leap (1996) is most acclaimed for his original work in the study of gay and lesbian language (also referred to as lavender linguistics) which is represented in his book titled *Word’s out: Gay men’s English*. From the conclusions that he draws within his scholarly work on gay and lesbian language, we know that his idea of a speech community – at least one involving gay and/or lesbian persons – is one that is defined by persons who have shared speech characteristics that are mutually unintelligible to persons who are not gay and/or lesbian. Perhaps, if there is gay and lesbian language, then one is born into particular communities based on a variety of cultural and social factors, such as race, gender, and sexuality.

In contrast, Cameron and Kulick (2003), in their book titled *Language and sexuality*, counter Leap’s notion of the existence of a gay or lesbian speech community. Their argument is that anyone who desires to be recognized as a speaker of a particular language or embody some linguistic characteristic of a community is able to do so at his or her will. They believe that all language is acquired and can be acquired by all persons. If we are to examine how they define a speech community, Cameron and Kulick would assert that there are no boundaries to a speech community. They perhaps would say that speech communities are all interlinked in some manner. There are no limitations to who could be or become members of any speech community. Likewise, Baker (2008) argues that speech communities are entirely performative. He takes the approach from Butler’s philosophical argument for queer theory and applies it to the sociolinguistic theory of speech community. If speech is entirely performative, according Kulick and Cameron,
then speech communities are not useful in thinking of ways that people may have solidarity with one another.

Barrett has also written at least two articles – “The ‘homo-genius’ speech community” (1997) and “Is queer theory important for sociolinguistic theory?” (2002) – that discuss the existence of speech communities that are significant for all persons who are non-heterosexuals and/or do not abide by the gender binary complex. For those of us who do identify as non-heterosexual or have altered our biologically-assigned gender, Barrett suggests that we may want to consider ourselves members of an exclusive speech community that is referred to as a “homo-genius speech community.” In addition to members of this particular community, we would identify our speech with “queer linguistics”. If our concept of a speech community derives from Barrett’s construction of a speech community, then we can conclude that Barrett does believe that speech communities are possible and are possibly exclusive from outsiders. While his approach in thinking about the existence of a speech community is a mix of Baker’s and Leap’s arguments, Barrett perceives that queer persons are capable of performing a speech commonality that would result in a speech community consisting of queer persons.

A Definition of a Transwoman Speech Community

These opposing arguments concerning how we should view the existence of speech communities in our societies are most helpful in understanding whether or not it is plausible for M2F transwomen to define their own speech community. Based on the four viewpoints of speech community theory that were previously mentioned, Barrett’s conception of a ‘queer linguistics’ will only suffice for the M2F transwoman community. The sectors of the trans community that were considered in this study would only be able
to demonstrate solidarity by recognizing that one another speak “queerly.” That is to say, they would have to accept themselves as queer, at least, in regards to their speech. Of course, they also would be aligned with other self-identified queers, so their speech community would be more comprehensive.

**The Practicality of Speech Community Theory in this Context**

The specific transwoman communities addressed here lack a shared speech characteristic that would otherwise unite them. Each sector does something different with their speech in order to retain their M2F gender identity transformation or desire to be ambiguous. Therefore, there is only one practical method for considering M2F transwomen as sharing common speech characteristics. That method is queer linguistics. Yet, before such an endeavor is assumed, the question that needs to be addressed is: ‘Is it practical to classify any non-heteronormative speech characteristics or behavior as representational of a linguistics that is queer?’ In order for any scholar to properly answer this question, he or she should reconsider the varying viewpoints concerning the rational for why or why not speech communities exist. Assuming that the M2F transwomen create a verbal code or some unique tonal variation signaling one was the same gender identity, then they would have a speech community that would unite them as a cohesive group of persons who share a common speech feature which could not be replicated by a non-M2F transwoman. However, the likelihood of the chosen speech feature not being replicated by an outsider is almost impossible according to the theories of Baker and Kulick and Cameron. Linguistic characteristics and behaviors of a group of persons can be adopted by another person or group if the length of contact is significant enough. Language is performative, and we have the conscious ability to change our speech or perform the
characteristics or behaviors of another’s speech when we desire to align ourselves with various groups of people.

It is now purposeful and useful to discuss further Barrett’s theory of queer linguistics, since it may be the only conceptualization of a speech community that potentially allows for all M2F transwomen to be situated among a variety of M2F transwomen within the M2F trans population. Next, the trajectory for studying this population and their involvement with the speech community theory within the framework of the discipline of sociolinguistics must be given consideration. Lastly, we will move from the academy to include a discussion of the implications involving this study with M2F transwomen communities and organizations outside of academia. Such a theoretical study as this one has great potential to be useful for our awareness of gender identity and language, but it also addresses the trans population’s visibility, or lack thereof, and oral nature as exposed in the public domain.
Chapter Three

A Transwoman’s Linguistic Future

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the aforementioned sectors of the transwoman population lack a common feature in their linguistic performance. Therefore, one is unable to argue, based on previous studies and theoretical analyses conducted by scholars in a range of academic fields, that these sectors can be conjoined into a single, unique speech community. The great racial, gender, sexual, ethnic, national, religious, and class diversity among the transwoman population which marks it as especially unique is unlike any other gendered population. However, there is a non-linguistic commonality among them: they are *Pan-Transcists*\(^9\) who recognize one another as belonging to the same population based on their gender preference and/or performance. In regards to linguistics and the speech community that they perhaps may best identify with, it would be beneficial for the transwoman population to occupy their place in queer linguistics.

For the remainder of this study, it is pertinent to offer a detailed explanation as to why this analysis is significant to future research focusing on the topic of transwomen and their language expression(s); articulate how and why this analysis (and others like it) are critical to the field of sociolinguistics; comment on the significance that this analysis has in a world outside of academe; and suggest where we (linguists interested in the field of ‘language and gender and/or sexuality’) might consider going from here in terms of future projects and research endeavors.

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\(^9\) Pan-Transcists are trans individuals who represent the belief that all trans persons have a common bond and celebrate the notion of connecting trans communities.
Trajectories for Future Research on Transwomen and Language

Even though one may not be able to define clearly a speech community exclusively for transwomen, this is not to imply that transwomen do not have the capabilities of unifying themselves within a constructed and defined speech community. Queer linguistics offers this to transwomen for now, and linguists’ influence will undoubtedly aid them in identifying a community that they can comfortably become members of based on their gender preference and/or performance. If they do self-identify as members who align their speech behavior with that of queer linguistics, then the subfield of ‘language and gender’ will be challenged with learning newer ways in which societies conceptualize the norms of male and female speech. With transwoman’s speech entering the said discourse quite recently in the history of linguistics, it adds new development and demands for all linguists, scholars and professionals to reconsider who is capable of assuming the genders of male and female and who speaks “like a male and/or a female”. When more scholars organize research focusing on this important 21st century study involving genders outside of the binary, they will have a momentous impact on the future of the field of sociolinguistics.

Speech communities were a once popularized area of study within sociolinguistics, but it was practically dropped and dismissed in early years of the 1990s. Although she does not refer to speech community theory in her work, her argument concerning males and females not sufficiently communicating with one another, but are entirely capable of doing so, suggests that males and females belong to some single arbitrary speech community. Nevertheless, one can argue that this abandonment of investigating speech community theory was a result from scholars feeling that it had been
“overworked” and perhaps a general consensus was being made which neglected anything new to be claimed. But, as gender performance gained popularity and attention, and trans authors like Bornstein and Feinberg wrote extensively on the trans person’s deserved place within the modern day binary gender system, scholars have slowly began to reconsider the manner in which language and gender was thought of in the past. That is to say, the ‘gender’ aspect of this subfield had been typically reduced to the binary gender complex that Butler (1990) writes about in *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*, and the public display of minority gender identities and expressions are demanding scholars in all fields, including linguistics, to expand on past research.

**Sociolinguistics: Transwomen and Language**

In terms of the field of linguistics, sociolinguistics in particular has the most relevance in discussing transwomen and language. Multiple sociolinguistics textbooks and anthologies used in academe note breakthrough studies conducted by linguists and linguistic and cultural anthropologists who have reported on a new discovery with one or more sectors of the transwoman population. One study often cited in these works (and is also cited in Chapter Two of this thesis) is Barrett’s late-1990s study which examined African American drag queens in a Texas bar and their use of code-switching tactics. Even though this study is intriguing and of citation because of its originality and intriguing findings, more works needs to be completed. For sociolinguistics, the transwoman population (and transman population) is a group unique in its diversity, so generalizations and assumptions are incredibly difficult to proffer to readers and other scholars. Therefore, a great deal of work needs to be done in accordance with the various sectors of the transwoman population who differ in age, class, race, and birthplace. The
transwomans’ linguistic actions are a result of a multiple of factors – not simply their biological sex and gender identity.

Sociolinguistics is a subfield that has potential to offer something really great to the transwoman population. Although the study of speech communities has been abandoned by the frequently published sociolinguists and remains in the periphery, it can be argued that speech communities are relevant in our study of the multitude of alternative gender identities that are gaining recognition in the early quarter of the 21st century. These alternative gender identities, for example, are the vast range of sectors within just the transwoman population and that is not considering those that identify with the transman population or the trans population in general. In keeping with the discussion offered in this analysis, transwomen continue to organize themselves within the diversity of the human population, and their performed linguistic actions have been, and continue to be, a mechanism for verbally identifying and aligning themselves with the chosen population. In fact, sociolinguistics has the capability of publishing productive research that not only appeals to scholars in academe but also assists transwomen in their search for societal identification and community. In addition, sociolinguists could help transpersons acquire the features of their chosen sexual and/or gender identity. Unlike a great deal of research in all academic fields, such as feminist and women studies and social work, further study in language and gender will only become particularly applicable as transwomen become more integrated into mainstream society and laws are passed protecting their rights in the workplaces. Language is one of the ways in which transwomen will articulate themselves and create community among their colleagues and other transwomen. Therefore, research in the subfield of ‘language and gender’ has
potential to expand and continue to help others see gender non-conformity. This work, in the areas of alternative gender expressions, identities, and lifestyles, is practical for all populations, including persons outside of academe and in “real world” environments.

**Significance to the Non-Academe World**

In the world outside of academe, the discussion of who aligns themselves among and within the transwoman population is particularly significant for trans and non-trans people. As previously stated, one method used by people to identify a (or the) community that they might comfortably exist within is by recognition of shared linguistic behaviors or actions. This allows for two or more people to communicate in a mutually intelligible way. In the U.S. where transwomen are still subjected to hate crimes and discrimination within a variety of workplaces, the need and desire to create a speech community between only transwomen or others who may be allies becomes all the more urgent. During the 1960s in Great Britain, Polari was the name of a slang that was created and widely utilized by members who self-identified with the gay culture. This language was understood to be only intelligible to self-identified gay persons, and this was due to their effort in keeping it as a mechanism for slyly identifying others who also were gay but felt intense pressure not to “out” themselves. Polari is a very ideal example of how persons in the academe and non-academe world were able to build a speech community for the purpose of safely communicating with others who shared the same sexual identity. In regards to transwomen, queer linguistics (although suggested to be used by all queer persons) offers a similar kind of privacy and safe place for them to verbally articulate themselves among other transwomen and queer persons.
Where Do We Go From Here?

Transwomen represent a sector of the trans population, and their visibility in a variety of environments including pop culture will lead scholars and experts to conduct more comprehensive, empirical studies than have ever been completed. And, the subfield of sociolinguistics will be no different. For that matter, speech community theory should be revisited. If one considers the minute but diverse list sectors of the trans population that were discussed throughout this study, then it should be clear as to why speech community theory is beneficial to helping us better understand how and why people who identify under an umbrella term like “trans” perform their speech behavior in a multitude of ways. This is especially true if one analyzes the speech actions of drag queens and compares them with post-operative transwomen. In the U.S., transwomen, such as Bornstein, are currently writing, speaking, and advocating about the need for American culture to adopt the argument of queer theory, apply it in all areas of society, and demand for all institutions and agencies to stop requiring humans to be assigned a gender. If such a movement becomes well-recognized, then scholars of ‘language and gender’ will need to deconstruct the conventional notion of gender and reassess the extent to which speech community theory applies to anyone. As the conventions change or become irrelevant, a field such as ‘language and gender’ will demand scholars to recognize such alterations in society’s mentalities to point out how the present differs from the past.

Sectors of the transwoman population who were not discussed in this study should be the primary focus of future studies, such as cross-dressers. Some populations of people do not abide by the West’s binary gender system or do not classify themselves as conforming to the binary. Rather, they identify more with the middle of the gender binary
spectrum or consider themselves to be an outlier to this spectrum, therefore, they consider to be in no way gendered. Those populations refer to themselves as the following: genderqueer, genderfuck, pangender, and intersex. As these populations become more recognizable in popular culture and media, the field of sociolinguistics will find it appropriate to discover their speech behaviors and characteristics as to theorize whether speech community theory applies to their population (if we can consider it a single population). In addition, Kulick (2000) writes in “Transgender and language” that linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists need to devote more time researching the verbal and non-verbal communicative actions of the F2M (female-to-male) population. Those who are included are transsexuals, transvestites, cross-dressers, and drag kings. There are nevertheless sectors of the F2M population that are undiscovered or less written on who should be included among the aforementioned sectors. They, too, are a population who rebels against gender conformities and is an active population within the trans community. Bringing the androgynous, such as genderqueers and pangenders, and F2M populations into the conversation concerning language and gender will provide scholars a more comprehensive reality for the subfield of ‘language and gender’. Scholars who are interested in the trans community in a sociolinguistic or anthropologic context need to find it a responsibility to include androgynous and F2M gender identities in their research, so they can fairly draw conclusions that will be more inclusive and reflective of the trans community as a whole.

As transwomen become more readily integrated into a variety of professional workplaces and environments throughout the U.S., scholars will likely find that their speech behavior and characteristics are factors that they may perform in hopes of
distinguishing themselves as transwomen or of the female gender (in its most conventional or unconventional understanding). The manner in which they choose to verbally articulate themselves greatly relates to their performed identity. For example, the U.S. military may perhaps permit transwomen to serve, and this permission would undoubtedly create for an interesting study noting whether or not they performed particular speech actions along with a desired identity. For now, there is such a vast array of professions where transwomen are gaining recognition for admitting their trans status. As a result, it will be worthwhile for scholars to investigate how they build solidarity with their coworkers by code-switching from their “normal” speech actions to another. If this does in fact occur, then scholars will find it useful to conduct ethnographic studies on individual transwomen and document whether or not their speech communities contain a unique array of actions or characteristics which would be distinct from others’ usages to persons who are unfamiliar with their speech communities. In doing this kind of research, transwomen and others are capable of tracing societal changes in how humanity adapts or manipulates their speech in order to build solidarity and intelligibility with others. Transwomen signify a new development in the general society’s awareness of non-binary gender identities and (queer) performative speech in relation to creating sub-communities that share linguistic commonalities. The future of studies concerning transwomen and their correlation to speech community theory will be a fascinating endeavor which will likely provide us a conception of the intricacies that surround the subfield of ‘language and gender’.
References


