

Crossing Cultural Boundaries

Crossing Cultural Boundaries:
Taboo, Bodies and Identities

Edited by

Lili Hernández and Sabine Krajewski

CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

Crossing Cultural Boundaries: Taboo, Bodies and Identities,
Edited by Lili Hernández and Sabine Krajewski

This book first published 2009

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2009 by Lili Hernández and Sabine Krajewski and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-4438-1234-X, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-1234-4

“Identity would seem to be the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self, in which case, it is best that the garment be loose, a little like the robes of the desert, through which one’s nakedness can always be felt, and, sometimes, discerned. This trust in one’s nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one’s robes.”

—James A. Baldwin, Introduction to *The Price of the Ticket: collected Non-Fiction 1948-1985*, New York: St. Martin’s /Marek, 1985. p. Xiv.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Chapter One: The Construction Of Identity.....	1
Crossing Plastic Boundaries: Masculinity and the Surgically Altered Flesh	4
Michael Atkinson	
Fat in the Philippines: The “Freakish” Body and its Inscription in Philippine Humour	26
Maria Rhodora G. Ancheta	
Understanding The Veil.....	39
Saadia Abid	
Queering the “Asian” in Cyberspace.....	53
Elaine Laforteza	
Chapter Two: Taboo and the Body.....	67
Taboos around the Body.....	69
Hartmut Schröder	
Spitting—The Emergence of a Taboo	81
Sabine Krajewski	
Bloody Animals!: Reinterpreting Acts of Violence Against Animals as Part of Contemporary Chinese Artistic Practice.....	92
Paul Gladston	

Chapter Three: Human Skin and the Notion of Otherness 105

Alterity: Piercing and Tattoos as Text 107
 Rao Nadeem Alam

“My Sole Reality, My Only Refuge, My Unique Prison”:
 The Body of the Black African Albino in Williams Sassine’s
 Mémoire D’une Peau..... 117
 Charlotte Baker

Chapter Four: Geographic Transitions..... 131

Transnationalism and the Body 134
 Beauty Practices of South Korean Women in the United Kingdom
 Young Jeong Kim

Crossing Cultural and Bodily Boundaries of Migration
 and Menopause..... 148
 Denise L. Spitzer

Eating Bitterness: Re-Enacting the “Primitive” Rural..... 159
 Michael B. Griffiths

Chapter Five: Physical and Spiritual Boundaries 175

Crossing Boundaries Between Body and Mind: Transforming
 Everyday Life through the Practice of Meditation 177
 Lili Hernández

Images Of Death, Images Of Society 190
 Emilie Jaworski

Contributors..... 203

Index 207

PREFACE

In 2006, at a meeting of the newly established Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo, China, the idea to organise an international conference on our campus took shape. Looking at our own research interests, the nature of our research institute and our geographical position in the world we decided on the theme Crossing Cultural Boundaries and instantly had two scholars in mind to invite as keynotes. As international staff, we had all just been through geographic and cultural transition and were aware of the effects on body, mind and spirit.

It was very exciting to plan an international conference on our new campus, and we knew we could rely on the help of other colleagues who would contribute their experience, their knowledge of the Chinese language and their commitment to the project. At the same time we could foresee challenges that were rooted in simple things such as how our delegates would get around in Ningbo without speaking Mandarin, how conference fees could be paid without the university having credit card facilities and how to keep communication going while the computer swallowed some of our outgoing or incoming emails. We could not foresee at that point that we would also have to deal with the fact that some nationals would not be issued with Chinese visas (e.g. delegates from Nigeria).

We placed a call for papers on an international website (www.conferencealerts.com) and soon had a collection of fascinating topics around cultural boundaries, the body, identity and taboo. Our keynote speakers, Hartmut Schröder and Michael Atkinson, needed some gentle persuasion but soon agreed to cross all boundaries and visit us in China. Our speakers are natives of Britain, France, Germany, Canada, Mexico, Australia, the Philippines, South Korea and Pakistan, and they travelled to China from Europe, Canada, Australia and the Philippines. May 2007 saw all efforts materialise in a conference which attracted more Nottingham staff and students each day, so that what had started as a cosy exchange of research results became an academic discussion in front of a larger audience that culminated in a final Friday lunch where everyone was filled with new impressions, exciting ideas and a basis for international collaboration.

This book is a collection of refereed papers which enriched the discussions during the conference. It turns out to be a truly interdisciplinary project where topics such as taboo, the body, identity and everyday life are approached from different cultural perspectives and investigated within various academic frameworks. The contributors of the articles belong to academic disciplines such as anthropology, comparative literature, sociology, critical and cultural studies, international communications, gender, migration and health studies, applied linguistics, Chinese studies, European languages and cultures, sport and exercise studies. Although particular in address and content, the papers in this book all explore boundaries and their transgression; they focus on Crossing as an academic theme. Crossings may be voluntary or involuntary, at times accidental. In any case there will be a renegotiation of identity.

The first chapter of this volume sets out to analyse border crossings of the body in negotiation with identities. Later, in the third chapter, the interpretation of the body as the site of identity negotiation is continued, but this time the focus is on skin. The transgression of boundaries may include the construction of new boundaries; the borders of identity are fluid and constantly negotiated. As in the case of taboo, boundaries are often internalised and may function as protectors and regulators for a society. Their existence becomes evident at the moment they are violated.

The papers of the second chapter revolve around these connections between taboo, boundaries and transgression. Voluntary crossings of boundaries can be empowering, liberating and redefining; accidental crossings may be disorientating but also redefining.

Chapter four re-evaluates physical border crossing while the last chapter focuses on spiritual crossings. Physical border crossing is examined as a restructuring of power and the process of questioning hierarchies and hegemonies. It looks at geographical journeys and identities that fluctuate through time and space. The last chapter includes the identification and re-definition of the self through the crossing of physical and spiritual boundaries.

This volume about Crossing Cultural Boundaries exemplifies the fluidity of identity, boundary and communication and provides an insight into the theoretical groundwork and practical connections across disciplines. The articles cover common ground in viewing boundaries not as static, containing obstacles, but as sites for experimental transgression, for the redefinition of self, as starting points of new spaces.

Ningbo and Sydney, May 2009.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

At each step both organising the conference and putting together this volume we have benefited from the help of people without whom neither of these projects would have materialised. This is the time when we can finally thank everyone involved.

We thank our colleagues for their support and hard work: Andy Xia from our finance department in Ningbo helped us with all financial issues. Sherwin Sung from the international office explored venues and catering possibilities for our opening dinner and got us a fantastic arrangement in a hotel in downtown Ningbo. Freya Song from the international office booked flights and hotels for delegates and acted as the emergency contact should a delegate need help in Chinese—day and night!

Sascha Zemke who lives in Germany created our conference logo and our conference website which he kept feeding with information for months; Ada Qian organised posters, name cards, transportation, various bookings, flower arrangements, lunch menus and all the details that make an event successful. A big thank you goes to Yanping Lin and Jean Wu who organised an impressive student performance for our opening night. Delegates were swept away by performances ranging from Chinese opera via Tibetan dance to classical Chinese instruments. Thanks to Paul Gladston from the Institute of Comparative Cultural Studies for his support - and for the flowers!

We thank the team at Cambridge Scholars for their support in putting this volume together. This book owes a lot to our patient proofreaders and copy editors, Reg Harris and John Twiname. We thank Reg for reading and re-reading each and every article and for making them even more beautiful and John for taking good care of all formatting issues. Last but not least we thank all the contributors, of course. This book would not exist without your research and commitment. Thank you for your collaboration in crossing cultural boundaries.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

The construction of identities implies a process of identification which operates across difference and by which symbolic boundaries are demarcated between insiders and outsiders within the flow of particular discourses (Hall, 1996). Boundaries between the self and the “other” become in such a way necessary points for self-identification. This chapter addresses how boundaries in identity creation are often sites of contending discourses and practices that bring those identities into question. Embedded within struggle and resistance, such boundaries are hence reconceptualised within specific social, economic, political and institutional frameworks. While identity creation means demarcating and delineating boundaries, it also means challenging that which bounds, such as traditional conceptions and representations of masculinity, the veil and the fat body. It further implies deconstructing what is customarily conceived of as boundless space, that is, cyberspace.

The papers in this chapter challenge normalised boundaries in the process of identity creation, refusing to see identity as stable social construction. In the first paper, Michael Atkinson immerses into largely unexplored territory where traditional boundaries of masculinity are transgressed and negotiated, and where social and cultural expressions of maleness are deconstructed through embodied work. What is known as the crisis of masculinity is used as the background that challenges traditional views of masculinity as unproblematic. Such an identity crisis calls into question the role and status of the male body and allows the men in this study to elaborate on the difficulty of clearly demarcating the boundaries of a masculine identity. The men in Atkinson’s study use plastic surgery to express their own notions of masculinity. The discussion is inscribed within a consumer society that whilst saturated by images of the perfect body promotes at the same time a variety of lifestyles which conspire against such depictions. Atkinson’s paper not only offers an articulation of anxieties, doubts and frustrations attached to masculinity as a dominant cultural identity, it also attempts to shed light on how social and cultural expressions of maleness are reframed in

innovative ways through cosmetic surgery. Myths around a masculine body that has to endure social rejection, ridicule and marginalisation are deconstructed by men's power of altering their bodies. Through cosmetic surgery the men in Atkinson's study take responsibility not only for their physical appearances but also for a sense of self-acceptance and authority.

The body becomes a site of contested discourses too in Rhodora Ancheta's paper where boundaries between what is deemed "normal" and what is seen and laughed at as "freaky" are deconstructed. Ancheta confronts stereotypical sources of humour where laughing at fatness becomes normalised. Through an analysis of cultural representations of the fat body in popular media forms in the Philippines, Ancheta's discussion exposes prevalent meanings whereby the fat body is inscribed in contradictory discourses. On the one hand are those which glorify Western representations of the fit and ideal type of body. On the other hand are those meanings by which the fat body is associated with wealth, status and well-being. In such ways, class and power issues are revealed. Ancheta's critique casts light on how the fat body can be read as a body of resistance and subversion rather than as an object of excess and disability.

Further crossing of boundaries is evident in Saadia Abid's paper. Abid takes us on a journey from ancient to modern times, addressing a topic hitherto highly misunderstood, that is to say, the veil as part of Muslim women's clothing. She provides the historical, religious and cultural background for the understanding of a symbol of material culture which involves gender and power issues that cannot be disengaged from the diverse cultural settings that provide the background for the interpretation of such a symbolic piece of clothing. The veil is explored as a marker of identity in a global world where cultural meanings all too often are lost within the diversity of cultures and ethnicities. As the gap between that which is intended to convey and that which is actually perceived becomes increasingly large, the veil for the Western observer remains a symbol of patriarchal domination and women's subjugation. Nevertheless, Abid contends that what are focal issues for Eastern women such as "freedom" and "feminism" highly differ from those of Western women. From this arises an aspect that Saadia clearly addresses in this paper, the difficulty to decipher the emblematic meaning of the "hijab" from a Western perspective.

The construction of boundaries across geopolitical, geographical and socio-cultural frameworks goes beyond visible markers of identity, such as masculinity, Muslim women's clothing and the fat body. Instead, it reaches out to that which we catch sight of in the mirror of new technologies, particularly the Internet. Elaine Laforteza offers a critique of cyberspace as a site that while enabling possibilities for queering identities

to connect, it also constricts. Through preconceived ideas and reductive stereotypes such as “whiteness”, “the west”, “the east” and “the Asian”, cyberspace becomes that which normalises and asphyxiates queerness. In this paper, Laforteza challenges dominant uses of cyberspace that reject diversity and difference and which embody normalised white, western values. This paper enables a critique of established norms across the bounds of the Internet. It foregrounds the politics of inclusion and exclusion in cyberspace through issues such as language, social class and economic and technological power, questioning cyberspace as infinite space.

CROSSING PLASTIC BOUNDARIES: MASCULINITY AND THE SURGICALLY ALTERED FLESH

MICHAEL ATKINSON

Masculinities, boundaries and cosmetic surgery

Men's cosmetic surgery practices in Canada have mushroomed in the recent past. Estimates suggest that over 10,000 Canadian men have received aesthetic surgery in the past seven years alone, with participation rates rising sharply between 2003-2006 in particular—a 20% increase (Medicard, 2004). The collective willingness of men to experiment with radical forms of surgical intervention in the pursuit of more youthful, vibrant, attractive and healthy-looking bodies signifies that collective sensibilities about the masculine body may be shifting; it may symbolize how men are presently negotiating traditional parameters of established (Elias and Scotson, 1965) masculine identity performance to include cosmetic bodywork.

Surprisingly, there is a relative dearth of published research on men's experiences with the aesthetics of body modification and display—save, perhaps, for the literature on men and masculinity in the sociology of sport (see Young, 2003), or within the burgeoning literature on gay/metro/queered masculinities (see Atkinson, 2003). The lack of research symbolizes, as Connell (2005) suggests, a general tendency to view masculinity as a relatively unproblematic gender identity (see also Grogan and Richards, 2002). Dominant constructions of masculinity are typically interpreted as rigidly hegemonic/traditional (Garlick, 2004), or drastically alternative and deeply marginalized (Hise, 2004). Neither of these polar positions accurately captures how men often wrestle with, negotiate and reinvent established constructions of masculinity in novel ways.

Horrocks (1994) and Whitehead (2002) contend that with the fracturing of family, economic, political, educational, sport-leisure, technological-scientific and media “boundaries”, masculinity codes have

been challenged and reconfigured. As such, men no longer possess an unfettered ownership over institutional sources of hegemony. Importantly, Hise (2004) and Tiger (2000) suggest that with an increased presence of “femininities” across social institutions, a resulting anxiety about the social construction of masculinity follows. Masculine anxiety is also heightened by a range of other cultural boundary violations and challenges, such as the proliferation of gender equity movements, political correctness (and chauvinistic incorrectness) movements, and the spread of “misandry” in popular media (Nathanson and Young 2000). In the midst of the perceived “crisis of masculinity”, certain men refuse to acknowledge or embrace new masculinities—despite popular discourses regarding metrosexuality or ubersexuality—and retrench themselves into traditional, essentialized and hegemonic performance. Yet others, however, discover innovative ways to reframe their bodies/selves as socially powerful in newly masculine manners; such as through the practice of cosmetically altering the flesh. A central premise in this research is that the fracturing, or at least contestation of, male dominated power bases and institutional boundaries by “Others” explains, to a significant degree, men’s surging interest in cosmetic surgery. As argued here, the surgical reshaping of the male form is a definite power play in, and reactive response to, a perceived cultural battle of (gender based) power and control.

Men and surgical control

In *What is Sociology?* (1978), Elias outlined three basic social controls that are interwoven into social power dynamics. For Elias (1978, 2002), members of social groups enact power and control:

1. *Over the nature through technological advancements*
2. *Over groups of individuals through institutional processes*
3. *Over drives and desires through learned mechanisms of self-restraint*

Elias argues in *The Civilizing Process* (2002) that the collective history of Western nations reveals a common tendency for complex groups of densely bound agents (what he referred to as *figurations*) to rely upon the third source of social control over the long-term. That is, while court-centred monarchies and then nation-states relied upon the threat of force as a main tool of control over citizenries, the course of civilising processes paved the way (although unintentionally) for the development of self-

restraint as the dominant social control mechanism. Of course, as a full range of gender theorists point out, the social groups responsible for dominating others first by force and later via codes of mannered conduct have been, over time, controlled by men (Connell, 2005).

Figurational sociologists argue that a central task in civilising processes has been to institutionally “tame” masculinity, while simultaneously ensuring its social dominance (Dunning, 1999). Indeed, the history of social discipline and punishment illustrates how aggressiveness and psychological/affective orientations (typically described as “masculine” or attributed as essential characteristics of men) were transformed as complex social institutions and other cultural boundaries took form. Elias illustrates in *The Germans* (1996) that as physical violence becomes less pervasive in social life and as inner-restraint reveals one’s achieved distinction (*qua* power) to others, the institutional control of productive forces and knowledge dissemination becomes more central. These mechanisms of control have been historically dominated by men in Western figurations, and replete with ideal-type images of the masculine male.

The emerging literature on contemporary masculine politics in Western nations like Canada suggests that the institutional sources of men’s social control have been dislodged by ongoing structural and cultural change (or what Elias (2002) calls “sociogenesis”) toward gender equality (Mosse, 1996). Horrocks (1994), for example, evidences how movements toward gender equality in families, educational sites, workplaces, religious institutions, and a full host of other institutional sites calls into question the very basis of masculine power and boundary maintenance. As an extension of what Elias (2002) refers to as the “parliamentarization of conflict”, gender stratification and related power imbalances have been systematically disputed through highly institutionalized, formal and rationalized rule systems. The splintering and re-distribution of masculine control across institutional landscapes has encouraged, we may argue, a perceived crisis of masculinity; in that men are no longer certain about what constitutes men’s roles and statuses, or how to enact properly gendered masculine identities (Whitehead, 2002).

In the remainder of this paper, the crisis of masculinity is not considered to be a cultural truth per se, but a conceptual backdrop for interpreting why men may be selecting and inscribing aesthetic bodywork as an innovative technique of bio-power. Cosmetic surgery is configured by men interviewed in this study as a tool for re-establishing a sense of anchored masculine identity in cultural settings perceived to be saturated by doubt, anxiety and contest. In figurational sociological terms, surgically

altering the flesh is a return to a very basic technique of social control in a context of cultural uncertainty. Men seize control over their bodies in order to “reframe” (White, Young and McTeer, 1994) their masculinity as revitalised and empowered. The men draw on widely disseminated and established images of the vibrant, healthy, youthful, aesthetically polished and affluent male through cosmetic surgery processes and present themselves as powerful (i.e., in control) in social settings wherein their masculine hegemony has been contested. Furthermore, with diffuse ideological and material pressures to consume, commodify the body, and perform scripted identity work through highly rationalized physical displays (see Featherstone, 2000; Crewe, 2003), it is understandable why, at this historical juncture, Canadian men are finding “collective solutions to common status problems” (Cohen, 1955) in cosmetic surgery.

Cultural fragmentation and the destabilization of boundaries

To further contextualize how the crisis of masculinity and turn to cosmetic surgery is spurred by a vast array of feminine boundary crossings, we need to understand that boundary crossing itself is a hallmark of post-industrial cultures. Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that with the ongoing transition from modern industrialism to post-industrialism—or, what they dub as the “informatization of production”—all cultural forms and formations in the West are reconfigured. With the production of knowledge, the consumption of commodities (and more often, commodity images), and the decentralising of material production as markers of contemporary post-industrialism, Western cultures have changed dramatically. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) and Marcuse (1964) predicted that a shift to a commodity-fetished and fragmented culture/economy would indeed rewrite cultural practice. Lefebvre (1991), and Deleuze and Parnet (1987) concur, each arguing that the “molecular” features of everyday cultural life were turned somewhat upside down through the 20th century progression into a different “molar” society (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987).

Post-industrial/modern arguments about the fragmentation of culture are almost universally encapsulated by, in either subtle or overt ways, Jameson’s (1991) and Lyotard’s (1979) analysis of the death of Western institutional meta-narratives (i.e., as discourses which create and help reinforce social boundaries), and Anderson’s (1991) notion of contemporary “imagined communities”. From Jameson (1991), Lyotard (1979), and Borgmann (1993), post-structuralists have drawn attention to how the fragmentation of work and the economy, education, religion, health and

medicine, the arts, the media and other institutional spheres produces a zeitgeist of distrust for any culturally overarching truth claim; such as those pertaining to gender and its essential embodiment. Cultural meta-narratives like the belief in government, science, God, patriarchy or other totalising frames erode in conditions of post-modernity (Lyotard, 1979). In information societies predominantly organised by service sectors wherein people produce systems of knowing and communicating as their vocations, nearly anyone's ontological standpoint is as valid as the next person's. The power to know and to produce reality is far more public than private and institutional. The splintering of cultural knowledge production, representation and dissemination into a billion pieces leads to what Lull (2000) refers to as the contemporary "looseness of [cultural] meaning".

From Anderson (1991), cultural studies theorists address how concepts like the nation-state, society or even small group collectivities are more fictional constructions of cultural and structural alignment than empirical realities. Anderson's (1991) historiography of the emergence of imagined communities succinctly captures the ways in which symbolic representations of spatially re-contextualized "We" cultural boundaries are tactically formed by actors in highly fragmented post-industrial nations to (at least attempt to) create ontological order and meaning. Wilson and Atkinson's (2005) examination of Rave and Straightedge on-line communities in North America, for example, illustrates how groups of politically disenfranchised and alienated middle-class youth may actually never come into embodied, face-to-face interaction with one another. Yet participants understand members' biographies, lived experiences and practiced lifestyles as communally bound. Virtual boundary lines provide meaning in the practitioners' everyday lives by creating common bonds and systems of representation with "others like me, out there".

Exacerbating the internal cultural change of any spatially and socially arranged imagined community such as a nation-state, city, or local neighbourhood, is of course the ongoing process of globalisation. Frankfurt School theorists predicted that the mass globalisation (*read* Americanisation) of culture would create new social centres and colonies of economic and ideological production (see Wallerstein, 1978). The "homogenisation thesis" reads a one-way cultural flow between global actors; economic and political power centres like the United States and the United Kingdom export cultural products and ideas that undermine local cultures in the second and third worlds. In Kenya, Coca-Cola® becomes a cultural drink of choice, in Vietnam, Nike® becomes a brand symbol of local identity, and in Morocco, Diesel® jeans are more coveted than

traditional gandoras or jellabas. Local actors become part of the globally imagined (Western) community by consuming images of nations (and their imagined identities) through commodity acquisition; highlighting the fetishization of commodity exchange-value over use-value. This leads to what Maguire (1999) describes as the increasing variety of, but decreasing contrasts between, world cultures and their boundaries. Boundaries, at all levels of consumption, prove to be more permeable, fluid and expansive in the post-modern, global era (Appadurai, 1997).

Chaney (1994) argues that the global reformation of culture as increasingly post-industrial or postmodern veritably opens up cultural representation and practice for widespread bricolage. Chaney (1994) contends that stark divisions between hierarchically organised taste groups within and between societies are not nearly as pronounced as those found in the modern era. Access to a full sweep of visual, material and ideological sources of cultural production is not owned by the empowered cultural elite, but by the consuming masses. More directly in the study of cosmetic surgery, as meta-narratives decline, global scapes open, and bricolage proliferates heretofore gender-bound practices like cosmetic surgery may be poached and given new cultural meanings.

Logics of multiculturalism, (mass) market consumption and reflexive representation extolled in such Western nations, respectively destabilise notions of dominant or authentic cultural identity in any space (Andrews, 2006; Hannerz, 1996). As groups are mix and match cultural objects, images, and practices as part of “doing” unfettered reflexive identity, established-outsider cultural practices bound in (definitive) space and time are replaced by the practice of situated representation and the “aesthetics of everyday life” (Featherstone, 1991). Spivak (1993) argues that the de-centring of dominant cultural identities (like hegemonic masculine identities) and exploration of polymorphous or subaltern cultures, allows for a vast array of representational practices to be deployed within institutional landscapes.

From the above perspectives, and others not included, cultural life may be nothing short of the commodity-fetishised spectacle Debord (1967) describes, or the simulacra Baudrillard (1995) outlines. Muggleton (2000) describes the contemporary cultural milieu in Western nations as a supermarket of commodity and ideological style; where identities are not anchored in stable cultural images and systems of practice, but attached to transitory, fleeting and polysemic texts, languages and images. Straw (1991) describes the cultural movement toward reflexive identity construction and boundary disruption as a sociogenesis into “taste culture” lifestyles. In a world perhaps over-saturated by global commodities and

cultural flows, one must thus question whether stable, intersubjective understandings of culture—as a system of problem solving, meaning making, and collective representation—are possible (Lash, 1999). In this cultural milieu it is understandable, then, why some men experience a “crisis” of masculinity, and doubt the existence of an anchored, permanent masculine self.

The men

Although there exists a rather full literature on women’s experiences with cosmetic surgery in North America and elsewhere (see Sarwer and Crerand, 2004), incredibly few body theorists have *empirically* addressed men’s embodied interpretations of the cosmetic surgery process (Davis, 2002). My own involvement with cosmetically altered men commenced when I first encountered a surgery patient named Les in southern Ontario. Les exercised in a local health club I attended, and learned about my previous research on tattooing (Atkinson, 2003). During the middle of a workout one day, Les approached me and inquired as to whether I had studied cosmetic surgery. Following a brief conversation, he disclosed his experiences with three cosmetic procedures: Botox injections, liposuction and an eye lift procedure. Over the course of time I pondered Les’s confessional narrative to me, and considered the viability of a study of men and cosmetic surgery. By the autumn of 2004, I sought out additional patients in the southern Ontario area (e.g., Toronto, Hamilton, Mississauga, London and Burlington) for interviews.

Through Les’s sponsorship, I encountered and subsequently interviewed forty four cosmetic surgery patients in southern Ontario. I asked Les to provide the names of several other patients he knew personally. At the time of his interview, Les offered five names of fellow patients in the city of Hamilton alone. Rather surprisingly, all of the patients agreed to be interviewed for the study. Subsequently, each patient provided the names of, on average, 2-4 other male patients, and the sample expanded progressively.

With a population in excess of 4,000,000 and a booming cosmetic surgery industry, the number of cosmetic surgery patients in the southern Ontario region is increasing exponentially. Patients range in age from 19 to 65, a slight majority are single, are largely middle-class, with a mean income of approximately CDN\$120,000, and predominantly of Anglo-Saxon heritage (Medicard, 2004). Experience with cosmetic surgery varies considerably, as evidenced by the men with whom I have interacted and interviewed. Most of the men have undergone one or two treatments,

while a slight minority of others has received extensive bodywork. The most common procedures Canadian men request includes rhinoplasty, Botox, microdermabrasion and liposuction (lipectomy). However, other men experience hair replacements, breast reductions or reshaping (gynecomastia or mastopexy), eye lifts (blepharoplasty), skin or reductions and “tummy tucks” (abdominoplasty), face lifts (rhytidectomy) and in rare cases, muscular implantations in the chest, biceps or calves.

Interviews with the men were conducted in a variety of settings such as my office at the university, a coffee shop, a local park or a restaurant. In all but a few instances, I used a tape recorder during the interviews and field notes were taken both during and after the interviews. Notes were then (within several hours, or at maximum, one day) transcribed onto computer files and filled in considerably as I conceptually analyzed the texts. Interviewees were given an explanation of informed consent prior to and after each interview. Interviews ranged in length from forty five minutes to four hours. All of the participants were interviewed once and (with the exception of five) were shown transcripts of the interview sessions at a later date so that they might review their own narratives. In all cases, pseudonyms have been employed to protect the participants’ identities.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed a schedule of approximately twenty five questions I wished to explore with participants about cosmetic surgery and masculinity. Most of the discussions started with a basic request: “So, tell me about your cosmetic surgery.” I wanted the men to craft narratives from the interpretive standpoints they wished, and from starting points they found to be sensible. Over the course of time, I tactically discussed my own personal doubts, interpretations, and scepticisms about cosmetic surgery, as a means of encouraging participants to share the more intimate details of their personal narratives. As a “bad cop” technique of narrative elicitation (see Hathaway and Atkinson, 2003), I challenged the basis of cosmetic surgery as appropriate masculine bodywork. Here, I wanted to inspect how practitioners justify and tell stories about cosmetic surgery to outsiders. By engaging such interactive techniques with respondents I wanted our conversations to probe motivations for cosmetic surgery, emotional accounts of its performance, and elements of patients’ social biographies.

Men, cosmetics and social control

I looked at my neck droop for so long before I mustered up enough courage to have it fixed ... I look like I’m twenty again; well, at least around my neck!! At least no one calls me “turkey neck” anymore ... you

have no idea how many times I wore a turtleneck sweater to avoid derision. I can't buy enough low collared shirts to show off my work. (Tom, face lift)

Tom is a 46 year-old advertisement executive living in Toronto. Although one may never glance at him and suspect his "work," he is proud of his body for the first time in his life and exudes comfort in his "new skin." Tom's cosmetic surgery narrative is a typical one; he tells a story about cosmetic surgery as a pathway toward body enhancement, as a vehicle for fitting in, and as a technique for building self-esteem. As part of his narrative, Tom expresses a clear understanding of his own interest in body enhancement; he simply wanted to be present, recognised, and very commonly male.

Among the select few men choosing to tell stories about cosmetic surgery, a common narrative theme similar to Tom's underpins their accounts. For these men, transforming the body into something socially "common" (*read*, traditionally masculine) motivates their aesthetic projects. Stated differently, the act of cosmetic surgery becomes a process of gaining power over others' negative stares and comments. Cosmetic surgery is not sought out egomaniacally, nor intended to draw social gaze to the surgically enhanced flesh. To the contrary, the intervention is intended to achieve the opposite, to allow the individual to fade into a crowd as a stereotypically, and rather culturally nostalgic, regular guy. A liposuction patient named Patrick (37) described:

There's a comfort every day in walking out of your house and knowing that people won't be looking at your gut when you pass by... when people ignore you, it's because you are the average person, the non-descript regular guy. I was a fat kid, and then a fat man, and I all ever wanted was to look regular. Yeah, when people ignore you, wow, what a great feeling.

Patrick's cosmetic surgery stories are replete with the idea of feeling "average", of looking "regular", and not being marginalized. The ability to do so, these patients articulate, is an act of social power for them; a power to determine a portion of their public image through embodied work. As discussed below, however, the sense of being average deeply resonates with very traditional images and ideologies of masculinity in Canada, and is borne from a perceived crisis of masculine identity. In what follows, the links between looking average, fitting in, and becoming a "re-established" masculine figure are unpacked.

Physicality, violence and masculine bodies

Men's social control has been challenged along a number of lines, especially men's ability to wield overt dominance as cultural practice. In adopting a figurational perspective, she argues that men's agency for expressing aggressive effect has been curtailed over the course of long-term civilizing processes. Indeed, as Maguire (1999) comments, while men have in no way been uniformly restricted as aggressive agents, the internal compulsion toward and external control of physical/emotional/psychological aggression has both qualitatively and quantitatively morphed for men through civilizing processes.

Yet some men, contends Godenzi (1999), interpret the attack on aggression as a challenge to the very foundation of established masculinity. Labre (2002) examines how groups of men perceive the (external) restraint of the men or male bodies as a critical condemnation of and control effort on the very basis of the male psyche. In perceiving that masculinity is now threatened diffusely through anti-authoritarian (read *anti-male*) social doctrines and politically correct "sensitivity policies," some Canadian men are encouraged to reflectively engage in forms of bodywork to shore up their masculine images in socially non-threatening manners. This tactic is, ironically enough, a decisively self-restrained response to a perceived status problem among men. The cosmetic surgery patient Allan (41) explains:

I'd never looked like a handsome guy until I underwent the hair transplantation, you know ... I'm like every other man who's lived with teasing about being bald so young. Women find the look totally unsexy and not very strong looking, but all the same attack me as a chauvinist just because I am male. I hear that all the time at work. Like if I got angry about being teased for my baldness, I would be called hothead or the Alpha male trying to assert his anger. What a joke. I could never win then, and [in our culture] now the only way people leave you alone and accept you now (as a man), is if you look good without "acting out" as a guy.

As Allan and like-minded peers explain, men may locate substantial social power by reclaiming their threatened bodies and repackaging them as aesthetically desirable. By drawing on neo-liberal preferences for the fit, toned, groomed, reflexive, healthy and non-aggressive body, the men, at least from their interpretive standpoints, contest the contemporary crisis of masculinity.

For other men in the sample, exploring one or another form of surgery displays a peculiar sense of docility and willingness to submit the body to

others. Viewed from such a perspective, the masculine man “gives” his objectified, commodified, and de-stabilized body to a professional to be re-worked and thus acknowledges a deficiency with his own masculinity. It is both an admission of weakness (i.e., the failure to physically live up to a set of cultural expectations) and a moral gesture of the desire for reflexive and hyper-individualistic self-improvement. The confessional move finds grounding in a middle-class aesthetic (see White, Young and Gillett, 1995) that positions bodies as sites of ongoing monitoring, disciplining and identity management. Byron (28) comments:

I haven't spoken to a lot of people about the face peel, because I'm so young and the reaction would probably be seriously negative. But the women I've told react in a similar way; they congratulate me for my body care. Some say it makes me sound more gentle and sensitive, and into looking beautiful ... I should have done this years ago! I have no problem admitting I need help to be as attractive as possible if I get something [accolades] out of it.

In the above instance, Byron's story of cosmetic surgery closely resembles the bulk of literature on women's experiences with the practice (see Davis, 2002; Gillespie, 1996). When adopted to illustrate reverence toward established gender codes, cosmetic surgery for men and women is an act of embodied submission. Surgery is framed as a vehicle for garnering a hyper-commercialized and neo—liberal form of social distinction, and a raw text of physical capital that is both enabling and constraining. Cosmetic surgery displays one's sense of knowledge and membership within established cultural boundaries, but concomitantly signifies the degree to which individual bodies are inscribed by conformist identity (*gender*) codes.

At the same time, men's involvement in cosmetic surgery, especially invasive and painful forms, might be configured as an ironically self-aggressive response to cultural stereotypes linking masculinity and violence. As sociologists of the body comment through the study of tattooing and piercing (Atkinson, 2003), involvement in painful forms of body modification may be interpreted as a hyperbolically masculine solution to problems of emotional or psychological doubt and suffering. Kevin (39) suggests:

When the doctor stripped away the layers of fat from around my waist, he removed thirty years of anguish from my soul. I'd always been the fat outsider, the little boy who never quite made the cut for anything. Being inside a body that is a gelatinous prison kills a tiny piece of you every moment of your life ... when I woke up after the surgery and looked down,

I felt strong and confident as a man should. I could, never in my life, speak to anyone about how much being heavy hurt me emotionally, and now I don't have to ... surgery is the best psychotherapy offered on the market. You have to go through hell and the pain (of surgery) to come out on top. Being beaten up through surgery is temporary, but being beaten up socially can last a lifetime.

Kevin's perspective teaches us that the current boom in men's cosmetic surgery might be viewed as an indicator of the cultural imperative for men to not only meet emotional turmoil with self-aggression and self-abuse, but also as a measure of how established constructions of masculinity continue to include emotional withdrawal (i.e., to contain emotions within the male body's physiological boundaries).

Institutional control and masculine bodies

When telling stories about motivations underpinning cosmetic procedures, nearly three-quarters (74%) of the men interviewed talked about feeling threatened at work by younger, smarter and healthier women—especially in image-oriented business environments that equate outward appeal with intellectual competency and moral worth. It seems as women have secured preliminary in-roads to power sources in Western cultures like Canada, some men (especially in the Canadian middle-class) become rather fear-oriented in their disposition. Resultantly, changes to body regimen among men follow. Peter (54) teaches us:

Our company hired three new managers last year, and two of them didn't look any older than 25. What makes it worse is that they are well-spoken, bright, charming women who are gorgeous. So there is me, an ageing guy in a changing business environment who appears as if he's missed more nights of sleep than he should have. The superficiality of that realization kind of makes you sick...but these people won't want me around unless I adapt, unless I change.

Important is that Peter's fear-orientation encourages him to consider radical bodywork as a solution to incompetence anxieties. Peter's masculinity, partly affirmed by his ability to physically appear as competent in the workplace, as Sennett (1998) might predict, is reconciled through physical intervention. The outward ability to look good supersedes concerns about his ability to perform intellectually as a business administrator. The surgically altered male body is a simulation (Baudrillard, 1995) or even surrogate for institutional competence.

For other men, their ascribed social positions as workers within dense chains of interdependency are threatened by subtle implications that their bodies appear quintessentially non-masculine in a rather stereotypical sense. As Connell and Wood (2005) document through the study of masculine business cultures, one's achieved sense of masculinity is often validated by peers' positive comments (or at least lack of mockery) regarding one's body image and style while on the job. Therefore, when a man experiences persistent teasing about his body as lacking masculinity (i.e., the fat, unhealthy, powerless body), the passive ridicule may eventually manifest into a fear that others view him as inadequate socially. A man adopting such an interpretive mindset might associate his peers' lack of public acknowledgement of him as a business "expert" as an indicator of their collective interpretation of his deficient body image. Andrew (33) explains:

With my job, I don't have time to work out two or three hours a day, and I have to eat most meals on the run ... and most of it is not healthy. And, it's hard to lose weight, so the liposuction gave a little kick-start to the process. Now I'm not the office fat guy everyone pokes fun at and ignores. People listen to me and consider my opinions on practically everything. No one looks at a fat guy and says, there's a real go-getter ... they say the opposite; he's lazy, unmotivated and someone worth firing.

Andrew's cosmetic surgery narrative is filled with self-effacing accounts of his "bigness" and correlated social inferiority. For him, cosmetic surgery is an act of masculine re-establishment, and a self-directed technique of threat management. For men like Andrew, surgery is a more rational and controlled response to body problems than the styles of self-starvation among young men described by Braun et al. (1999).

The men who describe risk or threat at work as a motivator for cosmetic surgery strategically employ "techniques of neutralization" (Sykes and Matza, 1956) to account for their body projects. When interviewed and challenged about the source of their concerns at work, and the perceived lack of control experienced in the workplace, men typically respond by arguing that cosmetic bodywork is neither morally problematic nor physically dangerous. Further still, they highlight how the degree to which they are willing to sacrifice their bodies to look masculine jibes with a sense of worth and personal dedication to succeed. Buttressing these accounts is a stereotypically Western, consumeristic and present-centred mentality, in that the solution to their lack of work control must be immediate and discoverable in commodity/service form. Derrick, a 52

year-old marketing expert who regularly receives Botox and microdermabrasion treatments says:

I can't wait another twenty years to take action. I need to be the man who walks into the room and no one says, damn he looks tired. If that continues to happen, I'll be out the door. I could have experimented with herbal remedies, creams or lotions to erase the years from my face, but it might take years, if it even works. Why wait when I can have better results from a doctor in only one day?

For Derrick, any risk of potential long-term effects of the procedures is secondary to the immediate gains received from medical intervention. The means-end, here-and-now mentality is, of course, directly reflective of the commodified and highly rationalized manner by which people come to approach bodies (and body problems) in "civilized" figurations (Elias, 2002). Any service that cures his problems of masculinity is thus justified as worthwhile, particularly when the service may be purchased from a qualified medical professional with celerity and precision.

What the above narratives underscore is the process by which men come to frame and reframe their masculine bodies/identities through surgical intervention. For the men in the current study, actively responding to a perceived control/boundary threats through bodywork is interpreted as a very masculine endeavour. Surgery is interpretively configured as a technique of masculine bio-power, control, courage and leadership, as it helps men respond to the fear of the masculinity crisis head on (see Sargent, 2000) without the stereotypically uncivilised male aggression toward others. Resonant with White, Young and McTeer's (1994) description of how male athletes reframe the injury process as a silent testing ground of masculinity, cosmetic surgery patients often tell stories about how their willingness to endure painfully invasive surgeries re-establishes their ability to meet social threats with post-modern masculine resolve.

Knowledge production and masculine bodies

Compounding the threat some men perceive to exist regarding their masculinity in the workplace and across institutional settings, is the type of work men are performing and the lack of spare time exercise in which they partake. With more men than ever in service or information processing industries, the current generation of middle-class Canadian men (the vast majority of cosmetic surgery patients) are perhaps the most stationary workforce in the country's history. With decreasing amounts of spare

time, dietary habits revolving around high calorie fast food choices, and leisure time dominated by consumption and inactivity, the physical tolls on their bodies are evident (Critser, 2002). The post-industrial economy and associated lifestyles, it seems, are not easily reconciled with traditional images of the powerful, performing and dominant male (Faludi, 1999).

Men interviewed in the present study express a sense of frustration with the form and content of their work responsibilities. For these men, ritually performing disembodied or virtual work (i.e., computer-facilitated) every day encourages a mind-body separation and neglect (see Potts, 2002). Roger's (45) words are emblematic of the disaffection some men experience with their work:

Sitting at a desk for 10 hours a day, then a car for 2, and then on your couch for 3 more wears your body down. Not to mention that my skin barely ever sees the light of day. At times, I can feel my face literally sagging because of my posture ... Looking in the mirror when you're forty and having a road map for a face shouldn't be surprising. That's not who I am, that's not the image of my inside I want to project.

Men like Roger refuse to link marginalized external bodies with inner selves. Roger's body is further objectified and instrumentalized in the cosmetic surgery process, as he views his physical form as a site of much needed management. Such an interpretation of the body only exacerbates existing fears about their bodies as socially non-masculine or inferior. Cosmetic surgery provides a fast, efficient, and highly rational way of alleviating these psychological strains and social discomfort:

From the time I was 15 years old, I gained weight. I watched my diet and tried to work out, but I kept packing on inches. By the time I graduated school and started office work [computer programmer], it only grew worse ... literally. Liposuction saved me from my self-hatred and the ridicule I faced from others. It's like having the clock reset, or like a magic wand being waved and your troubles are gone. (Ray, 43)

Narratives about the role of cosmetic surgery in eliminating the unfortunate side effects of sedentary lifestyles are equally filled with constructions of the masculine body as victimised by established cultural expectations that men must labour for long hours. For men like Leo (37), a graphics designer living in Sarnia, Ontario, his "need" for facial surgeries results from a social pressure to work in support of his extended family: