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Rhetorical Autobiography: A Narrative Analysis of Aleshia Brevard's *The Woman I Was Not Born To Be: A Transsexual Journey*

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore autobiography as a rhetorical genre and to explore the personal narrative of Aleshia Brevard, an MTF (male to female) transsexual. The critical analysis employs a form of narrative criticism created from the work of several rhetorical critics. Narrative coherence is examined through looking at Brevard's arrangement of events, and narrative fidelity is examined through looking at Brevard's use of ultimate terms. This thesis suggests that the personal narratives told by transsexual individuals may constitute a previously undiscovered rhetorical genre and makes recommendations for future investigations of these narratives.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those who have suffered for being different and to those who fight for acceptance every day of their lives.

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Autobiography as Rhetoric: A Narrative Analysis of Aleshia Brevard's Autobiography
The Woman I Was Not Born To Be: A Transsexual Journey

“Mother never said I was not different” (Brevard, 2002, p. 1). This quote begins Aleshia Brevard's autobiography, and it foreshadows the theme of her memoir.

A male-to-female transsexual (MTF), Brevard spent most of her life feeling and being made to feel different and out of place. In writing her autobiography, Brevard illustrates how this feeling of being different affected her daily life and gave voice to the life experience of someone living outside of mainstream society. By critically analyzing Brevard's (2002) autobiography utilizing a form of narrative criticism, this thesis aims to demonstrate that Brevard's autobiography functions as a rhetorical autobiography, to show that the values contained within Brevard's autobiography are similar to those of mainstream society, and to expand the field of rhetoric by considering autobiography as rhetoric.

This thesis is a continuation of a previous line of research examining alternative life experiences that I began as an undergraduate. In an English class I took as a freshman, the theme of the semester was the experiences of “others” in American society and culture, and this concept has continued to interest me and inform my research. After becoming a communication major, I became fascinated with gender communication and the construction and production of gender norms, and I have become particularly interested in alternative gender identities. The gender identity of *transsexual* has been wrongly stereotyped by mainstream culture and media, and this thesis specifically aims to counter these stereotypes by bringing to light the life experiences of a person who claims this gender identity. Examining Brevard's autobiography also provides an opportunity to

expand the field of rhetorical criticism by demonstrating the significance of autobiographies as rhetorical artifacts

Although some scholarly attention has been paid to examining what it means to be transsexual, there are few studies dedicated to letting transsexual people speak for themselves. Traditionally, studies about transsexual people set them up as some kind of “other;” that is, the researchers portray them as a medical or political phenomenon rather than as individual people (Meyerowitz, 2002). This thesis will begin to remedy this vacuum by providing an analysis of a transsexual person’s autobiography, with the goal of discovering how one transsexual speaks about herself. In an online journal article, Jillian Sandall (1999) wrote that autobiography as a genre “is a powerful way for marginalized groups to tell their previously unheard stories.” Through autobiography, people typically ignored by mainstream society are given a chance to speak and to engage in consciousness raising. Since previous studies of transsexual people have focused on framing the transsexual experience as a psychological or social problem (Brevard, 2002; Meyerowitz, 2002), transsexuals represent a group that has been stereotyped or ignored by mainstream scholarship (Namaste, 2000). The methods of this thesis might be applied to future studies to continue bring to light the life experiences of transsexuals. Since the study of autobiography as rhetorical discourse has also been neglected by scholars and critics, this thesis fills a second gap in communication scholarship.

Aleshia Brevard’s autobiography *The Woman I Was Not Born To Be: A Transsexual Journey* was chosen for analysis because she is a fairly well-known transsexual figure. She was featured in the 2005 documentary *Screaming Queens: The*

Riot at Compton's Cafeteria and has performed in a variety of movies and TV shows¹. Also, Brevard's autobiography is one of a few written by a transsexual person. It is possible the lack of more autobiographies written by transsexuals can be explained by the social stigma still attached to being transsexual, as well as the fear of violence against a person who "outs" himself (Bornstein, 1994; Halberstam, 1998). Another example of an autobiography authored by an MTF is Kate Bornstein's (1994) *Gender Outlaw*. However, Brevard better fits the classical definition of the term *transsexual*, and it is more appropriate to analyze her autobiography for that reason.

The autobiography will be critically analyzed using two primary principles of the Narrative Paradigm and will be investigated with the goal of discovering the key ultimate terms. Because memoirs are self-narratives, it is appropriate to examine Brevard's autobiography with the goal of answering four questions guided by a narrative approach to rhetorical criticism. These elements will be described in greater depth in Chapter 3 but include the following. First, what are the major and minor life events of Brevard's autobiography, and how does Brevard arrange life events to create a coherent story? Second, does the arrangement of events match the arrangement of events in other critically analyzed personal narratives told by transsexuals? Previous critical analyses suggest that the personal narratives told by transsexual individuals feature a common arrangement of events (Benjamin, 1967; 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973; Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). Although the analysis performed in this thesis is not a comparative one, this element will be investigated to begin to determine if the personal narratives of

¹ Brevard's movie credits include *The Love God* (1969) and *The Female Bunch* (1969). Her television credits include appearances on *The Red Skelton Show* and *The Dean Martin Show*. For a complete list of her movie and TV credits, see her websites, www.aleshiabrevard.com.

transsexual people might constitute a previously unexplored rhetorical genre. This portion of the critical analysis might be utilized to form the basis for future research. Third, what are the ultimate terms Brevard uses, and what are the values the ultimate terms represent? Fourth, does Brevard show by example that the values represented by the ultimate terms are good values by which to live? After this critical analysis has been done, the discussion in Chapter 4 will address whether or not Brevard's autobiography is successful as a rhetorical autobiography.

Chapter I: The Definition and Historical Background of the term *Transsexual*

The concept of *transsexual* as a gender identity is not particularly new, though the actual word itself is. Although people in this group are not described as such, many other countries including India, Japan, and Thailand all have historical records of the existence of transsexual people (Lai, 1999; Mezur, 2005; Reini, 2006). Many Native American languages contained words to describe those who were neither male nor female, as well as words to describe those who were both (Epple, 1998). Because the term *transsexual* and the concept of *transsexualism* are currently used by so many different people in so many different contexts, it is necessary to investigate scholarly research focusing on the medical, social and political aspects of the concept. A review of each perspective will provide needed background for the eventual analysis for this thesis.

The Medical, Social, and Political Definitions of Transsexual

Meyerowitz (2002) and Billings and Urban (1982) have chronicled in detail the emergence of the word *transsexual*, demonstrating its historical evolution. The word *transsexual* appeared for the first time in the English language around the mid-1950s and was coined by two medical professionals, Dr. Harry Benjamin and Dr. David Cauldwell, who created the term to describe Christine Jorgensen, one of the first people to undergo sex-reassignment surgery (Benjamin, 1966; 1967; 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973; Meyerowitz, 2002). Doctors writing about transsexuality in medical journals in the 1950's defined *transsexuality* as a mental illness closely associated with cross-dressing (Meyerowitz, 2002; Billings and Urban, 1982). The term gradually evolved and came to describe a person who felt born into the wrong body and wanted to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. *Transsexual*, in the sense of a person who desires sex-reassignment

surgery, came into common use by surgeons, general practitioners, psychiatrists, and psychologists in the late 1950s and 1960s (Meyerowitz, 2002). Dr. Harry Benjamin's book on the subject *The Transsexual Phenomenon* was published in 1966, and he continued publishing articles on the subject in medical journals to further define and clarify the term (Benjamin, 1966; 1967; 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973). Billings and Urban (1982) detailed the gradual acceptance of the term by physicians and noted that the debate over the legality of sex reassignment surgery eventually shifted to a debate over on whom the surgery should be performed.

Transsexual in the medical sense of the word is currently defined as a person experiencing a life-long sense of identification with the opposite sex, early and persistent cross-dressing behavior with a lack of sexual arousal associated with it, and a rejection of or disdain for homosexual behavior (Billings and Urban, 1982). This widely accepted definition of *transsexual* originated from the writings of Dr. Harry Benjamin (1966; 1967; 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973). Benjamin described a transsexual as a person who wishes to change his sex organs to those of the opposite sex and who feels revulsion towards the sex organs with which he was born. The word *transsexual* describes a person whose psychological and physiological sexes do not match one another (Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973). This person feels a powerful need to undergo what Benjamin calls "conversion surgery" in order to become a sexually functioning member of the opposite sex because he has felt this desire from an early age. In Benjamin's investigations of the phenomenon, he emphasized that all of his patients reported having these feelings from a very early age; for example, male patients reported childhood instances of cross-dressing while pretending to be a woman. While describing the process of sex reassignment

surgery, Wollman (1967) agrees with Benjamin's definition and says the term *transsexual* refers to a person wishing to become a sexually functioning member of the opposite sex. Gagné and Tewksbury (1998) echo these definitions of the word *transsexual* as a term describing a person experiencing a disconnect between psychological sex and physiological sex.

Billings and Urban (1982) argued the term acquired too much legitimacy in the medical world, to the point that it became trendy to be a doctor treating a transsexual patient. Billings and Urban (1982) suggested general practitioners, surgeons, psychiatrists, and psychologists became too quick to diagnose patients as transsexual and pointed out that the process of diagnosis is completely reliant upon self-report. In other words, a patient diagnosed as transsexual is diagnosed as such because he tells the doctor he meets the standards of the medical definition. In order to diagnose mental disorders, today's physicians turn to The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV). The internet version of the DSM-IV defines *transsexualism*, or *gender identity disorder*, as "a strong and persistent identification with the opposite gender." The manual says people suffering from this sexual disorder may feel born into the wrong body.

Hubbard (1996) says the term came to describe a broader spectrum of people than the classical medical definition originally covered. *Transsexual* in the classic sense of the word references a person who feels born into the wrong body, while a more modern, socially constructed definition deemphasizes a person's surgical transformation and focuses on a person's psychological transformation. In other words, transsexual in the modern sense might describe a person who is physically female but identifies herself as a male.

Although transsexualism, currently referred to by psychologists as Gender Identity Disorder, is still recognized by doctors as a psychological disorder, the term takes on new meanings when viewed from other perspectives (Billings and Urban, 1982; Hubbard, 1996). Newer perspectives add to the original medical definition by saying that *transsexual* is a social role as well as a medical issue. Billings and Urban (1982) documented the movement of the term *transsexual* from the medical world into popular culture and specifically mention the appearance of *transsexual* in “Dear Abby” columns, which granted the term even more social legitimacy. Writing from a background in sociology, West and Zimmerman (1987) say that the term *transsexual* is a social category and carries with it certain social expectations. Just as American social norms dictate that men and women should look and behave a certain way, American social norms say that transsexuals should look and behave in a certain way. For example, drag queens, often mistakenly lumped into the category of transsexual, are expected to dress outrageously and wear gaudy make-up. The political use of *transsexual* generally refers to transsexual activists concerned with human rights, such as access to jobs or medical care. Within this group, emphasis is placed on “passing,” or being able to live and work as a member of the other sex. People within this category eventually seek sex reassignment surgery in order to gain social and political legitimacy (Roen, 2001).

Aside from the medical, social, and political definitions identified in this literature review, Kando (1972) suggests there is a fourth “popular” (p. 476) definition of the term *transsexual*. Before discussing the various definitions of the term transsexual, Kando establishes that no matter the type of definition, the term always refers to a person who as undergone sex reassignment surgery. The popular understanding of the word *transsexual*

is that it refers to a person who is stigmatized for wanting to become a member of the opposite sex. Kando specifically relates the popular definition to MTFs and discusses the social rejection and shaming men desirous of becoming women face if their identity as a transsexual is revealed.

Transsexual has many definitions, but the term essentially describes a person who desires to change his or her body and to become a sexually functioning member of the opposite sex. This desire is experienced from an early age, and transsexuals often report instances of cross-dressing or pretending to be the opposite sex as a child. Much research has been done in framing the term as a medical, social and political identity, but the voices of transsexual people have been lost in the process. Analyzing an autobiography of a transsexual individual as rhetorical discourse can offer a means of beginning to fill this gap in existing scholarship.

Chapter II: Rhetorical Autobiography, The Narrative Paradigm, Ultimate Terms, and
Methods of Analysis

Rhetorical Autobiography

An autobiography is generally defined as a self-account, a chronicle of the events of a person's life. Although autobiography has been in existence for a long time², rhetorical critic Charles Griffin (2000) notes that as recently as 1991, there were only two identifiable critical rhetorical studies addressing the significance of autobiography as a rhetorical genre. Even though autobiographies have not received much scholarly rhetorical attention, they provide an excellent medium for analyzing the and investigating the experiences of people typically ignored or stereotyped by the mainstream (Benson, 1974; Purnell, 2002; Sandall, 1999). A case in point is the autobiography of Malcolm X. Malcolm X was framed by the media as a pseudo-terrorist, someone for the public to fear. Benson (1974) used Malcolm X's autobiography to show that Malcolm X and his supporters saw him as a person who had been victimized by the media and who had been wrongly portrayed by popular culture.

Sandall (1999) and Purnell (2002) also recommend autobiography as a means for marginalized groups to engage in consciousness-raising. By analyzing the experiences of those outside mainstream culture, rhetorical critics give marginalized groups an opportunity to show how they relate to the world. Even if these groups are typically ignored or stereotyped by mainstream media and culture, they can find a voice by putting their story down in their own words. Autobiography humanizes people and helps the public better relate to life experiences outside their own.

² Griffin (2000) suggests rhetorical autobiography has been in existence for a long time but has yet to receive attention from rhetorical critics as a genre.

One major drawback of autobiography, especially published autobiography, is that the narrator does not necessarily appear as he or she was in life (Benson, 1974; Griffin, 1990; Sandall, 1999). While autobiography might provide important insights into a particular personal experience, the account of how a person was should be taken with a grain of salt. In autobiographies and memoirs, reality becomes what a person remembers; it is not necessarily a reality based upon historical fact or events. Autobiographies can be valuable rhetorical artifacts, but it is important for the rhetorical critic to realize they do not always accurately portray people and events, especially when written retrospectively. In sum, while it can be an especially effective means of investigating the lives of marginalized people, the genre of autobiography is valuable not necessarily for its accuracy in relating events or characterizing people but for its ability to shine light on an individual's life experiences and motivations.

Aside from serving as an account of a person's life, rhetorical critic Martha Solomon says autobiography also serves as persuasion by example; an autobiography is an attempt on the behalf of the narrator to persuade readers to adopt her values by demonstrating that her values are good ones by which to live. Solomon's (1991) critical analysis focuses on two major features of autobiography. First, she examines what she calls *emergent ideologies*, which could be described as the value systems an autobiographer develops over the course of his or her life. She discusses how Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Anna Howard Shaw's views of women's rights, specifically the right to vote, developed over the course of their lives. Second, Solomon critically examines the arrangement of events in the autobiographies. Solomon focuses on particular events in the women's lives to show how life events contribute to the development of an emergent

ideology. For example, in her autobiography, Elizabeth Cady Stanton notes the birth of a sister as the first time she realized women were less valuable to the family than men. Anna Howard Shaw notes how appalled she was by the treatment she received from male cohorts at seminary school, and she marks the events of that time in her life as having directly led to her involvement with the Suffrage Movement. Solomon refers to these life events as *consciousness-producing episodes*. *Consciousness-producing episodes* combine with one another to bring about an epiphany or realization that affects the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, and values and changes the course of his or her life. This acquisition of values greatly affects the narrator's motivations and actions in daily life. In Solomon's analysis of Cady Stanton's autobiography, for example, she points out that as a young girl, Cady Stanton visited her father's law office and observed first hand how women were treated unfairly by the law. This consciousness-producing episode motivated Cady Stanton to act, and she attempted to remedy the situation by going through her father's law books and crossing out laws that were unfair to women. From these and other events in Cady Stanton's autobiography an emergent ideology centered around the belief that the world was unfair to women becomes clear.

Solomon also offers a distinctive means of evaluating whether or not an autobiography succeeds as a rhetorical artifact. She says a successful rhetorical autobiography accomplishes three tasks. First, the consciousness-producing episodes in an autobiography must demonstrate how the narrator gradually came to a realization that made her aware of a problem in the world. Second, the narrator must demonstrate to the reader through her arrangement of consciousness-producing episodes how she acquired her values and demonstrate how and why the acquisition of new values caused her to take

action; it is not enough that the narrator simply state what her values are, she must demonstrate that they motivated and guided her actions in everyday life. Third, since the ultimate goal of rhetorical autobiography is to persuade by example, the narrator must prove that living and acting by her values affected her life in a positive way. Cady Stanton, for example, arranged the life events in her autobiography to demonstrate ways in which the values of the Suffrage Movement were still compatible with the values of family and marriage; in order to convince tradition-minded women to join the Suffrage Movement, she had to demonstrate that she was able to live by the values of the movement and still be successful as a wife and mother.

Griffin (1990) adopts Solomon's method, but he uses plot as a means to discover how a narrator persuades by example in an autobiography. *Plot* is the way an autobiographer puts events together to create a narrative with a clear beginning, middle, climax, and end. Griffin analyzes the autobiography of Charles W. Colson, the chief counsel to President Nixon, who was sent to prison on charges related to the Watergate scandal. While in prison, Colson became a Christian and claimed he had been made into a new man. Because Colson was known for being prideful and arrogant, he had to find a way to make this conversion believable. Griffin uses plot as a means to examine how Colson structured his narrative to make it believable to the reader. According to Griffin, the plot of the autobiography charts Colson's ongoing struggle with pride after his conversion. Griffin demonstrates how the structure of the plot in Colson's autobiography makes him believable as a convert to Christianity.

Griffin (2000) also employs Solomon's methods in his analysis of the arrangement of events in the autobiography of John Bartholomew Gough, outlining four

main goals to be accomplished. First, he aims to show that there is a special relationship between form and function in social movement autobiographies, because autobiography as a form of communication serves a specific function for its writers. In other words, social movement autobiographies serve a special purpose for their authors and are inherently different from other kinds of autobiographies. Second, he aims to show how the form of autobiography allows the purposes of self-definition and social advocacy to work together. The autobiographer is able to use her position within a social movement to define herself, and she is able to advocate the values put forth by the movement by showing how the values have impacted and changed a real person. Third, Griffin demonstrates how this process of self-definition and advocacy occurs through the use of a case study. Last, Griffin aims to contribute to existing theory by making suggestions for how his method of combining narrative criticism with an investigation of ultimate terms might be applied in future rhetorical studies.

Griffin also specifically looks at the arrangement of the events of Gough's autobiography and discusses how personal testimony and personal experience can be an effective means of persuasion. Griffin demonstrates events of Gough's life cause Gough to discard his personal values and adopt the values of the Temperance Movement. Griffin uses *ultimate terms*, a concept created by rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver, to discover the emergent ideologies in John Gough's autobiography. The concept of *ultimate terms* will be further defined and elaborated upon later in this chapter. Griffin's analysis of ultimate terms demonstrates how John Gough develops a coherent set of values over his lifetime and persuades his readers that the values of the Temperance Movement are good ones by which to live. The events of Gough's life before his involvement in the

Temperance Movement are framed in terms of *downwards* movement, while the events in Gough's life after being saved by the Temperance Movement are characterized in terms of *upwards* movement. The overall ideology of the autobiography as framed by the ultimate terms is that the Temperance movement can redeem drunkards, save them from hell, and get them closer to Heaven.

In agreement with Solomon (1991), Sandall (1999), and Griffin (2000), rhetorical critic Sonya Foss (2004) says there are major and minor events in a personal narrative. Major events, which Foss calls *kernels*, represent the life-changing moments of a person's existence. Foss's concept of *kernels* is related to Solomon's concept of *consciousness-producing episodes*. Kernels affect the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motives for acting. Minor events, which Foss refers to as *satellites*, "revolve" around *kernels* and serve two purposes. Satellites taking place before kernels function as lead-ins to kernels and justify to the audience why the kernels must happen. Satellites taking place after kernels demonstrate to the audience how kernels affect the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motivations for acting in daily life. By Solomon's (1991) and Griffin's (2000) standards, a kernel must have satellites that explain why it happens and satellites that explain how the change in beliefs, attitudes, values, or motivations produced by its occurrence affects the narrator's daily life. In a successful personal narrative, the author's arrangement of kernels and satellites works to create an organized story in order to manufacture narrative coherence.

Typically, a narrative contains a few kernels and many satellites. In the autobiography of John Gough, for example, the kernel is his pledge to join the Temperance Movement (Griffin, 2000). The decision to join the movement radically

changes Gough's values and thus his course in life. Examples of satellites in Gough's autobiography are his episodes of relapse. Griffin explains how Gough uses the relapses to his advantage and explains them away. The relapses are important, but they do not inspire some kind of major shift in Gough's ideology. Rather, they serve to emphasize and further demonstrate Gough's newfound commitment to the values of the Temperance Movement. Thus, by examining kernels and satellites, a critic can discover and evaluate narrative coherence.

In sum, autobiography is a significant means of communication that warrants further investigation as a form of rhetoric. Benson (1974), Griffin (1990; 2000), Solomon (1991), and Sandall (1999) place a great deal of weight on the significance of autobiography as a rhetorical and historical artifact. Benson and Sandall recommend autobiography as a medium for studying the experiences of marginalized groups, and Sandall suggests the analysis of autobiography can help erase misconceptions and stereotypes of groups of people. An analysis focusing on the autobiographer's arrangement of satellites and kernels gives insight into the daily lives of those with life experiences outside of the mainstream.

Ultimate Terms

Richard Weaver (1970) defined *ultimate terms* as words or concepts that have special persuasive power for a particular audience. His perspective on ultimate terms came from Weaver's fear of what he called "scientism," the idea that science is the answer to everything, including moral and ethical questions. According to Weaver, arguments based on science only appeal to logic and therefore only appeal to part of a person's "being." Weaver, on the other hand, saw people as creatures of both logic and

values. As a result, rhetoric, not science, is the way to persuade people, because rhetoric makes emotional appeals as well as logical appeals. It is not enough to just state facts; a speaker must make an appeal to his audience's emotions as well if he is to be successful in persuading them.

Weaver suggests language itself is a way of persuading people. Language, he says, is sermon-like in nature because it is value-laden. Simply put, personal and cultural values tell people what is good and what is bad. Values *create* attitudes and *guide* or *motivate* behaviors.

In American culture, values include social conformity, pioneer spirit, and progress (Steele and Redding, 1962). Although Steele and Redding published their findings in 1962, a more contemporary source suggests that Americans still value social conformity. Bornstein (1994) suggests Americans particularly value gender conformity, and there are distinct values that men and women are supposed to possess. For example, women are supposed to be nurturing and value family, while men are supposed to be aggressive and value hard work (Wood, 2004). Weaver would say that people use language to share values and to persuade others to live by their values.

Language functions as a ranking system that tells us what kinds of things are to be valued and what kinds of things are to be rejected. For example, there is a difference between saying "pillow," "hard pillow," and "soft pillow." If you tell a friend your new pillow is soft and you fall asleep faster because it is so comfortable, you are attempting to persuade your friend that this pillow is better than other pillows and your friend should try this pillow because she will sleep better at night. If you tell your friend the pillow is soft and it has been proven by doctors to cure neck pain in 19 out of 20 people, you have

fulfilled Weaver's requirements for persuasion. You have appealed to your friend's emotions by describing how soft and cuddly the pillow and appealed to your friend's logic with statistics.

Weaver (1970) says there are some words that are at the very top and the very bottom of the language hierarchy. These words have special persuasive power and are known as *ultimate terms*. Ultimate terms might also be defined as words that have a great deal of hidden or special cultural meaning. The words are more than words; their meaning goes beyond their dictionary definition.

Hart and Daughton (2005) agree that ultimate terms are abstract and hierarchical and add that ultimate terms are efficient, pre-emptive, and have unstable meanings. In other words, ultimate terms are a quick way for a rhetor to get an audience reaction and to take ownership of a rhetorical situation. For example, labeling an opponent in a debate as *un-American* turns the audience against him with little effort on behalf of the rhetor and instantly strips the opponent of credibility. He is forced to defend his character before he can begin to advocate for his side of the argument. Abstract in nature, ultimate terms are subject to changes in their definitions over time.

According to Weaver (1970), there are two kinds of ultimate terms: god terms and devil terms. God terms include those symbols or concepts that are highly privileged and gain favorable opinion when used in rhetorical situations. Logical in nature, god terms have a long history of use in a culture. For example, *progress* is a well-documented god term in American culture (Steele and Redding, 1962; Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, 1976). Returning to Hart and Daughton's (2005) discussion of ultimate terms, *progress* is also unstable in definition. At one time in American culture, *progress* meant advances in

agriculture or farming technology. Today, *progress* tends to be measured in terms of technological development. *Progress* is also efficient in terms of persuasive power. For example, Weaver would say that a drug advertised as a “progressive cancer-fighting drug” sounds like it is newer, better, and more efficient than other drugs already on the market, just because the word “progressive” is at the beginning of the phrase.

In contrast to god terms, devil terms are more often “from the moment.” They tend to be born of a specific moment in history rather than constructed over decades or centuries. Devil terms symbolize things or concepts that inhibit or block god terms from being fulfilled (Weaver, 1970; Fisher, 1982; Hart and Daughton, 2005).

Weaver says that *un-American* is the ultimate devil term in American culture. While the concept of *un-American* has been around for a long time, its definition tends to change depending upon current events. Currently, being un-American means being associated with terrorists. In the 1960s, being un-American meant being against the Vietnam War or wearing a peace sign. In the 1950s, being un-American meant being a communist or at least having Soviet sympathies. In the 1940s, being un-American meant being a Nazi. *Un-American* has undergone changes in definition over time and is impossible to define clearly, but everyone knows that it is bad to be un-American. It’s like trying to define obscenity. Everyone can tell you that it’s bad and that they know it when they see it, but no one, including the Supreme Court, can offer a solid definition. *Un-American* is also a devil term because it could inhibit *progress*. For example, the 9/11 terrorist attacks are clearly an example of un-American activity, or activity intended to harm America. The attacks had a huge impact on the economic *progress* of America

because so many financial companies had offices in the Twin Towers, and because New York was shut down for so long after the attacks.

In his analysis of *Time* magazine images after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, A. J. Grant (2005) demonstrates that devil terms move in cycles. Depending on the economic, political, and social climates, certain devil terms rise to prominence, while others fall out of fashion, only to be recycled again as time moves on. Grant uses *Arab* as an example of a devil term that has been revived and reconstructed to suit the modern political climate. *Arab* as a devil term doesn't just mean someone from the Middle East. It has come to mean a person (usually a man) who is shifty, dirty, unkempt, unsophisticated, barbaric, a Muslim, a terrorist, and sympathetic to Osama bin Laden. *Arab* is not a new devil term; Hollywood and American popular culture have been negatively stereotyping the *Arab* since the 1930s. However, recent events have caused the term to be revived and assigned new meaning.

God terms and devil terms can offer rhetoricians insight into a speaker's values. Walter Fisher (1982) evaluates Ronald Reagan's rhetoric using ultimate terms to predict Reagan's potential of becoming an American romantic hero. Fisher notes the presence of romantic themes in American history and politics, outlines some characteristics of presidential heroes, and examines the connection between romanticism and Reagan's rhetoric to predict Reagan's chances of being made into a romantic presidential hero. He claims that Reagan's persuasive power lies in his unique idea of the American Dream, as well as his unique conception of "the people." Fisher combines mythic analysis with ultimate terms in order to predict Reagan's chances of becoming an American romantic presidential hero. In the analysis he categorizes the verbs in Reagan's acceptance speech

as god terms and devil terms in investigating what kinds of values are expressed in Reagan's acceptance speech. According to Fisher, all of the god term verbs deal with reaffirmation; verbs such as *recapture*, *rebirth*, *renew*, *restore*, and *redeem* appear frequently in Reagan's speech. Fisher says this should not be surprising, given that the speech is a presidential acceptance speech, but taken with Reagan's view of Americanism, these verbs indicate that Reagan wants to return to American values of the past in order to create a better future. Combined with Reagan's particular beliefs, the god term *family* comes to mean a nuclear family; that is, a family that has a mom, a dad, and two kids. *Neighborhood* means that there is no bus system; everyone can afford a car and can afford to live in a suburb. *Work* means that everyone has a job to provide for themselves and there is no need for a Welfare system. The devil term is whatever denies people access to these concepts or inhibits their growth. Reagan declares that the *government* thwarts people who attempt to live by these values, and the American government needs to stop impeding Americans in their quest to achieve the American Dream. *Government* is the devil term because it inhibits the average American from fulfilling the values of *family*, *work*, and *neighborhood*. Fisher concludes the article by saying Reagan has great potential to become a romantic American hero because Reagan was able to tap into a discontent that was felt by many Americans at the time of his campaign for president. Through his use of god terms and devil terms, Reagan successfully established himself as a champion of the common people who wanted to restore America to her former glory.

Ultimate terms can also offer insight into the values of a group such as a social movement. Leland Griffin (1984) traces the development of god terms and devil terms in

the rhetoric of John F. Kennedy and his assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. Griffin says that Lee Harvey Oswald believed himself to be the leader of a social movement and wrote prolifically about his movement's goals. Even though the social movement is imaginary, it has a clear and discernable rhetorical vision. Griffin says John F. Kennedy also had a rhetorical vision and his vision conflicted with Oswald's. Because the values and goals of Oswald's and Kennedy's rhetorical visions conflicted, it was inevitable that the two men would clash and that a confrontation would end in violence. Griffin employs god terms and devil terms to as a method of discovering the specific values contained within Oswald's and Kennedy's discourse. Since he is examining Oswald's rhetorical vision as the rhetorical vision of a social movement, Griffin believes analyzing the ultimate terms used by militant social movements might prove useful in the future by helping to predict whether or not the group will commit acts of terrorism or assassination. If it could be determined, for example, that the ultimate terms used by a terrorist organization diametrically opposed the ultimate terms used by the United States, then critical rhetorical scholars might be able to predict and anticipate violence between the two.

Golden (2001) performs a similar kind of analysis to Griffin's (1982), examining the ultimate terms used by the Bush campaign in 2000. Bush used god terms to characterize himself as *credible*, *courageous*, *dignified*, a *role model*, and a *uniter*. Bush characterized Clinton and Gore, his opponents, as *dishonorable*, *disrespectful*, *liars*, *dividers*, and *bad role models*. Golden argues the use of god terms and devil terms by the Bush campaign placed Bush on a moral high ground and forced Clinton and Gore to defend their character from the very beginning to the very end of the race for the presidency. Bush successfully employed ultimate terms as a means of taking control of

the rhetorical situation and forcing his opponents to focus on their moral character rather than their political agenda.

Ultimate terms possess unique characteristics that render them rhetorically powerful. Ultimate terms are efficient and gain a quick audience response while allowing a rhetor to take full possession of a situation. Because ultimate terms are abstract and vaguely defined, their meanings change over time. Ultimate terms have a tendency to move in cycles, with old terms falling out of favor and then making a comeback as current events change the political, social, and economic climate. God terms must be logical and associated with history and tend to have more lasting, stable definitions. Devil terms are by nature illogical and tend to be transient in rhetorical power; because they are constructed from a specific moment in history, their impact is lessened over time. Ultimate terms provide critics analyzing autobiography with a means of identifying and tracking the formation of the emergent ideologies in a personal narrative.

The Narrative Paradigm and Narrative Criticism

The term *narrative* describes many different kinds of rhetorical artifacts, such as movies, comic books, and songs. A narrative is defined as a speech act in the form of a story that is then interpreted, judged, and acted upon by an audience (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1991). Narrative criticism has a long and rich history in English and other related fields, and in the communication discipline, Walter Fisher (1975, 1978) is largely credited with creating methods for doing a narrative analysis (Rybacki and Rybacki, 1991). Walter Fisher, the creator of the Narrative Paradigm, says narratives can persuade audiences to change their beliefs, attitudes, and values and are just as powerful as more traditional forms of rhetoric such as speeches. The way a narrator pieces together literary

elements such as plot or character affects the audience's ability to relate to the story (Carlson, 1991).

The Narrative Paradigm assumes humans are essentially story-telling and story-using creatures. In other words, people utilize stories every day in all kinds of interpersonal and group interactions. People use narratives to solve problems, to share ideas, to share values, and to share personal histories. The Narrative Paradigm also assumes narratives can be an effective means of persuasion. Narratives, just like formal speeches or advertising campaigns, have the ability to persuade audiences to believe or act in a certain way. This is not an explicit kind of persuasion but rather persuasion by demonstration and example. Narratives function as persuasion by example because they demonstrate the consequences of living or acting based upon a particular set of values. For example, the History Channel has recently begun running a series called *Gangland* (2008) examining the histories of different gangs in America. During portions of the show, former gang members share their stories and warn viewers that involvement with gang activities leads to prison sentences. Through personal narratives, the former gang members demonstrate the consequences of their behavior and attempt to persuade others not to engage in the same behavior.

Fisher's Narrative Paradigm hinges on two important concepts, narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. *Narrative coherence* deals with how well a story is put together or organized. Analyzing narrative coherence means examining narrative elements such as character, plot, and events. *Narrative fidelity* deals with how true a story sounds, and analyzing fidelity involves finding and judging the values in a story. Fisher

calls this combination of thinking and judging “good reasons” (Fisher, 1978, 1985). Good reasons are a combination of logical evaluation and moral evaluation.

Narrative coherence can be found in the literary elements of a story. Literary elements include plot, setting, character, events, narrator, and time. A critic might choose to focus on a particular element as a method of discovering and evaluating how a narrative is structured. For example, as discussed on page 18, Solomon (1991) examines and analyzes how the organization of events in Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s and Elizabeth Howard Shaw’s autobiographies creates narrative coherence. The main goal in evaluating the coherence of a story is to determine whether or not the story makes sense. If the story is disorganized, audiences will have a hard time relating to it. There is no hope of getting an audience to pay attention to the whole narrative if it contains characters that behave illogically or an incomprehensible plot line.

Critically analyzing narrative fidelity, or the believability of a story, involves judging the values contained within a story. Fisher (1975, 1978) says the values contained within a narrative are judged by whether or not they are good values by which to live. Narrative fidelity can be evaluated by identifying and judging the values represented by the ultimate terms a person uses. As discussed previously, Charles Griffin (2000) utilizes ultimate terms as a means of discovering and judging narrative fidelity in the autobiography of John Gough.

Earlier, it was established that autobiographies are a type of narrative in which a person provides an account of her life experiences. Autobiographies function in similar ways as other kinds of narratives, and they also serve to persuade an audience by example (Solomon, 1991; Griffin, 2000; Keller-Cohen and Gordon, 2003). An analysis of

autobiography as a rhetorical artifact can utilize narrative criticism to judge the effectiveness of the memoir in accomplishing its goals.

In sum, the Narrative Paradigm assumes people evaluate stories based on good reasons, a combination of logical and moral judgment. In terms of persuasion, narratives persuade by example and can be just as rhetorically powerful as traditional forms of rhetoric such as speeches. As a type of narrative, autobiographies possess the same kind of rhetorical power as narratives and can be critically analyzed and judged based on narrative coherence and narrative fidelity.

The Role of Narratives in Creating a Transsexual Self-Identity

Previous critical scholarship suggests that autobiographies and personal narratives play a significant role in helping transsexual people define their self-identity and organize their experiences (Benjamin, 1967, 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973; Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). In conjunction with these other critical analyses, Bacon (1998), discussing the role of coming out narratives in the construction of the self, suggests personal stories play a large role in explaining and shaping personal and community identity. Within the transsexual community, narratives have been shown to help people create a self-identity and share their personal experiences.

Mason-Schrock (1996) investigates how transsexual people share personal narratives to communicate and prove their self-identity. He was invited to attend transsexual support group meetings, after which he interviewed nine biologically born males and one biologically born female. His goal was to discover how personal narratives help transsexuals build an identity as a group and how that group identity translates to

personal identities. Mason-Schrock asserted that group narratives about personal identity help transsexual individuals explain why they feel the need to transition. Transsexuals turn to their personal histories or autobiographies as a basis for building a new identity and look to their pasts to explain how their new selves came into being. Mason-Schrock maintains that transsexuals pick out incidents where they felt or were made to feel they were different to show how their new selves came into being. For example, Mason-Schrock notes the presence of stories about childhood cross-dressing or feeling born into the wrong body for as long as the participants could remember. Mason-Schrock concludes that all transsexual group narratives have common threads and that transsexuals learn how to use these elements in telling their personal stories to friends and family in order to establish their identity.

Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury (1997) also discussed the significance of shared narratives. In their study, the authors interviewed 65 male-to-female transgendered individuals, and asserted that transsexual individuals actually participate in and reinforce traditional ideas about gender by creating and sharing personal narratives. Most participants originally had no idea others like them existed. The interviewees report a sense of being born into the wrong body from early childhood, but they don't discover that others feel the same way until much later in life. Once individuals became part of a community, they acquired new ways to talk about their self-identity and found new words and narrative forms to describe their experiences. This is related to the phenomenon Mason-Schrock (1996) observed. Through interaction with others, transsexual and transgendered individuals learned how to tell stories about themselves that justified and explained their new identity. Once again, narratives provide a way to shape self-identity

and to communicate that identity to others. In addition, although all the interviewees had non-traditional gender identities, they still held traditional gender values. Some of the participants still had traditional ideas about male and female roles in interpersonal and romantic relationships. For example, one male-to-female preoperative transsexual expressed the desire to be seen as and treated like a heterosexual woman rather than someone attempting to rebel against the gender binary.

A second study conducted by Gagné and Tewksbury (1998) looked at how the rhetorical act of bringing a transsexual identity into being both reinforces and resists the gender binary³. According to the authors, transsexual identities support and reinforce the gender binary in the sense that many of those interviewed wanted to pass as a woman and to be fully integrated into society as such. These interviewees wanted traditional feminine roles and wanted to be treated like women. Other interviewees saw themselves as something outside the gender binary entirely and saw coming out as an act of defiance against the gender binary, openly displaying the fact that they did not fit into a clear gender category. In accordance with the other studies discussed in this chapter, the authors conclude that transsexual narratives serve a number of roles. First, the narratives allow a person to explain his self-identity to himself. He is able to chronicle all the ways in which he feels different and is able to demonstrate to himself why the creation of a

³ The gender binary posits three things. One, sex is biological and something we are born having. Two, gender is a social construction that is learned or taught. Three, there are two socially and medically acceptable gender possibilities: a masculine man or feminine woman. Queer Theory refutes the notion of a binary and suggests multiple genders are possible. See one of the following for a good overview of Queer Theory:

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble*. New York, Routledge.

Sullivan, Nikki (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York, New York University Press.

new self-identity is necessary. Second, narratives told by transsexual individuals help communicate these new identities to others. Third, narratives help communicate and affirm common experiences; for example, almost all transsexual narratives contain a theme of feeling different from childhood. Fourth, personal narratives help transsexual or persons situate themselves in relation to traditional gender roles⁴. The individual gets to decide whether to participate in the gender binary or to defy it. Those attempting to fit in will have very different narratives from those attempting to rebel.

Methods of Analysis

Now that the key concepts have been defined, the possibility of autobiography as a rhetorical artifact has been established, and the role of narrative in creating a transsexual identity has been outlined, it is time to turn to the analytical aspects to be used in examining Aleshia Brevard's (2002) autobiography *The Woman I Was Not Born to Be*. The method to be used in evaluating Brevard's autobiography is a form of narrative criticism blending the contributions of several critics. Solomon's (1991), Griffin's (2000), and Foss's (2004) narrative analysis techniques will be combined with Weaver's concept of ultimate terms in order to discover narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. The critical analysis of Brevard's autobiography will also seek to discover if her personal narrative accomplishes the same tasks and contains the same common events and themes as previously researched personal narratives of transsexual individuals.

The first set of analyses will investigate narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Drawing from Foss, the critical analysis of Brevard's autobiography first will

⁴ Bagemihl (1997) says that socially and politically oppressed groups often adopt and then change the language of their oppressors. He mentions Yiddish as a specific example. Jewish people took the German language and adapted it to their own use. In the same way, oppressed gender groups tend to adopt gendered norms for their own uses.

focus on Brevard's arrangement of kernels and satellites as a means of judging narrative coherence. The analysis of narrative fidelity will blend Solomon's (1991) and Griffin's (2000) methods by first identifying the values represented by Brevard's ultimate terms and then discovering if Brevard successfully demonstrates that her values are good ones by which to live. This critical analysis will follow a six step process; the first four steps are designed to identify elements of narrative coherence, and the last two are designed to identify elements of narrative fidelity.

First, in beginning the critical analysis of narrative coherence, the kernels will be identified and analyzed according to Foss's (2004) standards of what tasks a kernel must perform. According to Foss, kernels in autobiographies represent the major life events that change or affect the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motives. Second, the satellites will be identified and sorted into groups to discover if Brevard's arrangement of satellites follows the same pattern of satellites in previously critically analyzed transsexual narratives. Satellites serve as prequels and sequels to kernels; they explain why the kernel must happen, and they prove to the reader that the kernel changes the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motives. As established previously, the transsexual narratives thus far critically evaluated by scholars generally contain similar kinds of satellites that accomplish specific tasks. First, a personal narrative helps a transsexual person explain his gender identity to himself, and allows him to explain why the creation of a new self-identity is necessary. Second, personal narratives told by transsexual people help explain the necessity of the creation of these new self identities to others. Third, transsexual narratives communicate and affirm common life experiences. Fourth, personal narratives help transsexual individuals relate their identity to traditional gender

roles (Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). Transsexual narratives also contain common sets of life events which are episodes of cross-dressing, experiencing the desire to be the opposite sex from an early age, and experiencing or being made to experience a sense of difference (Benjamin, 1966, 1969; Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). Third, Brevard's arrangement of satellites will be analyzed according to Foss's (2004) standards of what functions a satellite must perform. Fourth, in beginning the analysis of narrative fidelity, Brevard's ultimate terms and the values they represent will be identified and then evaluated based upon the previously discussed criteria that ultimate terms must meet. Fifth, the analysis of narrative fidelity will seek to discover if Brevard demonstrates by example that the values reflected in her use of ultimate terms by which to live. Sixth, the overall success of Brevard's autobiography as a rhetorical work will be judged based upon Solomon's (1991), Griffin's (2000), and Foss's standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Solomon's (1991) and Griffin's (2000) methods of critically analyzing narrative fidelity have been combined with Foss's (2004) methods of critically analyzing narrative coherence. Solomon's and Griffin's methods were chosen because they are the only two examples of how narrative criticism has been used to look at autobiography, and their articles are also two of only four articles that consider autobiography as rhetorical discourse.

Once narrative fidelity and narrative coherence have been critically analyzed, the second portion of the analysis will turn to evaluating Brevard's autobiography as a personal narrative told by a transsexual individual. Brevard's (2002) autobiography will be evaluated to determine if Brevard's arrangement of life events reflects this pattern.

The satellites will be placed in categories based upon the four tasks transsexual narratives generally accomplish and the kinds of life events transsexual narratives usually contain. Because so little research critically analyzing the personal narratives of transsexuals has been done, this method of analysis provides an opportunity to break new ground in the fields of gender communication and rhetoric by attempting to begin to discover if transsexual narratives constitute a previously unidentified rhetorical genre. Although this thesis examines one MTF personal narrative, these methods could be applied to future studies to discover if all transsexual narratives function in the same fashion.

The critical analysis of Brevard's autobiography also provides an opportunity to break new ground by considering autobiography as rhetorical discourse. The scarcity of rhetorical criticism of autobiography means that this is an opportunity to break new ground by demonstrating the significance of autobiography as rhetorical discourse and as a means of discovering the life experiences of marginalized groups.

Chapter III: Narrative Analysis of *The Woman I was Not Born to Be: A Transsexual Journey*

Background of Author and Artifact

Aleshia Brevard was a patient of Dr. Harry Benjamin, the doctor who famously pioneered sex reassignment surgery, coined the term *transsexual*, and created standards for diagnosing a patient as being transsexual (Brevard, 2002; Meyerowitz, 2002; Benjamin 1966; 1967; 1969). Known for her career as an actress, Brevard is also known for her appearance in the 2005 documentary *Screaming Queens: The Riot at Compton's Cafeteria* as well as other roles in film and television. The riot at Compton's cafeteria in August 1966 is considered to be the first act of resistance against discrimination by transsexual people, and since Brevard lived and worked in the area at the time, she was asked by film makers to share her experiences and memories of the riot.

In explaining her arrangement of events in her memoir, Brevard writes “when one's existence and self-image have been dependent on the affection and attention of men, the presence of a man in the plot development becomes mandatory” (p. 243). The analysis of satellites, kernels, and ultimate terms contained within Brevard's autobiography will reveal how her actions and relationships with those around her were affected by the set of values by which she lived her life. Brevard's autobiography offers a unique opportunity to study the life of a member of a traditionally marginalized and stereotyped group by critically examining her personal narrative. At the end of the autobiography, Brevard says that she wrote her memoir to counter the “talk-show notion that all transsexuals are dishonest, amoral, social rejects” (p. 243). An analysis of her

autobiography will further her goal by bringing to light her experiences and demonstrating that her values are similar to those of mainstream society.

Analysis of the Kernels

As discussed in Chapter 2, *kernels* are the major life events in an autobiography that change the narrator's beliefs, attitudes, values, or motivations for acting. Brevard's (2002) autobiography contains two kernels that affect her motives for acting. Her sex-reassignment surgery and her realization upon her mother's death that she could be a fulfilled woman without a man are the two moments in Brevard's life that change her course of action.

Brevard's discussion of her sex-reassignment surgery is couched in terms of birth and new life. She never mentions being born as a baby boy but instead marks her sex reassignment surgery as the moment she was born. Recalling how she felt after surgery was over, she says,

I was groggy and disoriented, but I recognized this moment as the milestone of my life. My life began at Westlake Clinic on that day in 1962. Gone was my "birth defect." From this day forward, I could react to life emotionally, pursue my own feminine dreams of success, and live as an equal partner with the man I loved. I had been reborn woman. I was free (p. 81).

At the end of her autobiography, she writes,

From earliest childhood I lived two lives. There was me and there was the public boy. They were both an embarrassment. From that standpoint, the years before surgery are not a happy period to recall. My life began in Los Angeles, at Westlake Clinic in 1962.

The last line is indented and set apart from the rest of the text, marking it as a significant statement. In writing about influences on her decision to undergo surgery, she says that "[i]n no way, however, do I feel that my father was the catalyst for my surgical transformation. I believe my gender destiny was programmed from birth" (p. 243).

Throughout her life, Brevard struggled to find acceptance from her family and society. She grew up believing that she was too different to be loved, but if she could take on the gender identity of *transsexual* she could undergo sex reassignment surgery, become a woman, and find a place as a valued member of society. She says that she thought “doors would be opened for me and society would rush forward to reward my femininity with an honored place in heterosexual society” (p. 81) After surgery, her motivations for acting change; before reassignment surgery, her desire to “pass” as a woman motivates her to become a female impersonator, to take female hormones, and to alter her body to make it look more feminine. Brevard comes to believe that at last “my excessively submissive nature would earn me respect. By being emotionally fragile I would now be universally desired, and for being a nurturer, I would be cherished” (p. 81), and she attempts to live by traditionally female values. She writes that given a fresh start,

I immediately began to mar it. In those first moments of womanhood, all I wanted was Hank [her fiancé]. I hadn’t been complete for an hour, and already I was attaching my lifeline to a man. I had no notion of my folly, and the women in my world did not see my error. In the early 1960s, the majority of American women were still pursuing the idea that without a man, a woman is worthless. Few women had found their stronger voice – and I was so desperately trying to soften mine (p. 81).

In undergoing sex reassignment surgery, she believed her years of feeling different and of not belonging would be left behind, and she could gain respect from her family, peers, and society. Before her sex reassignment surgery, Brevard’s actions are motivated by her desire to have a gender identity and to not be different. She says that before surgery “most of my time was spent trying to divert attention from myself. I was a big sissy for heaven’s sake! I didn’t want anyone noticing that” (p. 110). After sex reassignment surgery, her desire to be a respectable woman with a niche in mainstream society

motivates her actions. Seven satellites demonstrating Brevard's change in motives and values will be critically examined later in this chapter.

The second kernel of Brevard's autobiography is her realization that she can be a fulfilled, complete woman without the presence of a man to affirm her femininity. This realization occurs after the death of her mother, Mozelle, who was an important figure in her life. In reflecting on her mother's contributions to her identity and independence, Brevard says

I am the woman I was not born to be – the spiritual essence that Mozelle nourished. Mother engendered me. My style, my sense of humor, my strength come directly from her. She loved me unconditionally (p. 243).

Brevard's mother fully supported her reassignment surgery and was the first to love and accept her new daughter. Terrified her new body was somehow abnormal, Brevard had a moment of panic that she would be unattractive to men and therefore unacceptable as a woman. Brevard says "I wanted something aesthetically pleasing. This thing had folds!" (p. 84). A shy and modest person, Brevard's mother lifted her skirt to give Brevard a point of comparison and went out of her way to assure Brevard her new body looked like a biological woman's. Brevard writes,

My mother and the Westlake Clinic's charge nurse both lifted their skirts, presenting me a view of not one but two naturally born vaginas. By golly, they did have folds. There were four outer labial folds on each vagina. Satisfied that I was normal, I drifted off to sleep (p. 84).

Her mother's death is the last event of the book, and this life event helped Brevard realize that she could live alone and be a fulfilled woman without a man in her life. Up to the time of her mother's death, Brevard's sole goal in life had been to find a man and get married, and the events taking place after her sex reassignment surgery clearly reflect this (p. 81, 241). The realization that she could be complete without a man prompted a change

in her beliefs, values, and motives. She gave up her quest to find fulfillment through marriage, and she was able to accept herself as she was. After this realization, Brevard writes

Now, at sixty-three, I fully realize that to deny one's history is to deny oneself. This gender truth wasn't mine, however, until after I awoke one morning in my mid-fifties to discover that, overnight, men had stopped turning around in the street to watch me sashay past. No longer being a sexual object leaves a woman a lot of time to think (p. 241).

As a mature adult, she came to realize that acceptance by others didn't matter if she couldn't accept herself. Brevard's statement that her "startling discovery was that I could be a complete woman even without a partner" (p. 241) best sums up her new outlook on life. She rejects her value of marriage and no longer acts based upon the belief that marriage and a husband are necessary to her self-identity as a woman. Instead, she is motivated to act by the value of self-acceptance. There are no satellites that take place after this kernel to prove to the reader that Brevard lived by her new values.

The two kernels in Brevard's autobiography, her sex reassignment surgery and her realization that she can be happy without a man, lead Brevard to change her beliefs, values and motivations. The analysis of satellites will reveal that the satellites surrounding the kernels explain why these major life events happen. Satellites surrounding the first kernel, sex reassignment surgery, also prove to the audience that Brevard's daily life was affected by the changes in her beliefs, values, and motivations after the first kernel.

Analysis of Satellites

As outlined previously, in transsexual narratives, satellites serve a unique purpose. Previous writers on the subject have pointed out that transsexual narratives help

a transsexual person explain his identity to himself as well as to his friends, family, and community. These narratives are characterized by satellites that explain a life-long struggle with gender identity and justify sex reassignment surgery. Transsexuals' personal narratives also illustrate individuals' attempts to relate their identity as transsexuals to the gender binary (Benjamin, 1967; 1969; Benjamin and Ihlenfeld, 1973; Billings and Urban, 1982; Mason-Schrock, 1963).

It has already been established that sex reassignment surgery is the first kernel of Brevard's autobiography. The five satellites in Brevard's (2002) autobiography that take place before sex reassignment surgery explain why the surgery was a necessary life event and demonstrate why Brevard was motivated to become like everyone else. The two satellites occurring after sex reassignment surgery demonstrate how highly Brevard valued being socially acceptable as a woman and how this value motivated her actions in daily life. The two satellites taking place before the second kernel, her realization that she could be a socially acceptable woman without the presence of a man to affirm her self-identity, explain how the events of Brevard's life prompt this realization.

Analysis of Satellites Surrounding Sex Reassignment Surgery

The five satellites occurring before Brevard's sex reassignment surgery explain why she felt it necessary to create a new self-identity, why she was motivated to become like everyone else, and chronicle the process by which she established her self-identity of *transsexual*. Specifically, these satellites are her experiences of feeling and being made to feel different from an early age, her experiences of cross-dressing from an early age and into adulthood, her experiences of altering her body to make herself appear biologically

female, her struggle to find words to explain her new self-identity, and Brevard's explanation of where her ideas of what a woman should be came from.

The first satellite is Brevard's experience of feeling and being made to feel dissimilar to her family, peers, and society. At an early age, Brevard figured out that she was different from the other boys in her peer group, and the treatment that she received at the hands of her peers reinforced her belief that something was wrong with her. The first example of Brevard's experience of feeling different occurs when Brevard was in grade school. She writes,

When, in 1952, Christine Jorgensen's gender reassignment surgery became headline news all over the world, I was mortified. I feared that people would now watch me too closely. Miss Jorgensen's public spotlight might spill over onto me. I didn't yet understand that Christine and I were akin, but I knew I differed from the male standard. I was in danger of being stained by her transsexual notoriety (p. 6).

Her fears that people would make a connection between Jorgensen and herself were justified when a classmate passed a note around the room that read "Buddy's caught the same thing that Christine Jorgensen got" (p. 6). A second example illustrating how made to feel socially unacceptable by her peers occurs multiple times during her childhood.

Brevard says

From the time until my graduation from high school, one playmate or another was crawling on top of me. That was one randy group of little boys. Regularly, in elementary school, the boys would de-pant me and threaten to castrate me "like a pig." Having a knife brandished around my genitals was part of my public humiliation for being different (p. 26).

A third example of this satellite reinforces her feelings of failing to measure up to standards of masculinity. Brevard writes about a shopping trip into town with a favorite aunt and some cousins. While on the shopping trip, the group ran into some of the cousins' friends, who told Brevard what a pretty girl she was. Brevard writes

I didn't say a word; neither did Bobby Jean. Instead, my young aunt turned a bright red. Nothing else was said. My aunt Bobbie Jean and her friends forgot all about my gender; conversation skipped from one topic to another, and I stood there unnoticed. I was the only one overwhelmed by the incident. I'd always known something was wrong, and now I knew what it was. The way I looked was wrong. I looked like a girl (p. 18).

In the fourth example, a childhood friend named Helen forced Brevard to dress up as a girl. Brevard writes that Helen,

roughly zipped me up, smeared garishly red lipstick across my mouth, ran across the room, and threw open the bedroom door. There Helen stood with her two grown brothers and her teenage sister. Together they stood in the doorway, laughing and pointing. Everyone laughed (p. 19).

In the fifth example, Brevard was participating in the local choir when her singing was mistaken for a female soprano's voice. The choir instructor grew frustrated because he could hear a soprano singing with the men, but refused to acknowledge it was Brevard. Brevard says "Mr. Swenson never acknowledged that the troublesome voice had been mine. To the end he maintained that there had indeed been some disruptive soprano. We both knew the truth" (p. 31). In the sixth example, a choreographer hired to direct the local Lions Club fundraising play went out of her way to tell Brevard that she looked pretty and feminine. Brevard (2002) says that the director either "did not understand rural America, or she did not have my best interests at heart" (p. 31). These six examples demonstrate that prior to her sex reassignment surgery, Brevard experienced feelings of difference and was punished by her peers and her community for failing to conform to standards of masculinity.

The second satellite in Brevard's autobiography is her attempts at cross-dressing and female impersonation. In the first example of this satellite, Brevard (2002) explains

how she used to use her grandmother's shawl as a dress while dancing around pretending to be Ginger Rogers (p. 17). She writes,

I danced in Gran's gray crocheted shawl with the rust scalloped trim. Gran's bed shawl was my lovely long skirt. When closed, the one throat button caused the garment to fit snugly around my waist. With my skirt secured, I would twirl and twirl around the guest room, now and then catching a glimpse of myself as I swirled past the chifforobe's full-length mirror. I was a whirling dervish in my grandmother's gray crocheted shawl with rust scalloped trim (p. 17).

Brevard goes on to say that only "in those moments of freedom was I totally happy as a child. My real life existed in the world of my imagination – there I was safe" (p. 17). In the second example of this satellite, Brevard recalls how she earned her grandparents' nickname for her, Rosy. Left to the care of her grandparents while her parents were out, Brevard was inconsolable once she found her parents had left the house. She says "When I found my parents gone, nothing would quiet me. I was inconsolable. I squalled until Granddaddy dressed me in Aunt Bobbie Jean's skirt, put a red ribbon in my curls, and called me Rosy" (p. 89). When her parents returned, they "found their three-year-old "Rosy" dancing up and down the stairs. I was entertaining the entire family" (p. 89). The third example that illustrates this satellite occurs later in the autobiography. Brevard says she frequented "seedy" night clubs cross-dressed, because it allowed her to be seen by society as a woman. In describing a club called Streets of Paris, she says that the "*Sewers* of Paris would have been more apt. I loved the joint. I convinced myself that here I was living life as a real girl" (p. 59). In the fourth example, her identity as a transsexual is further reinforced when she is hired as a female impersonator at Finocchio's, a San Francisco night club that specialized in drag shows. Brevard writes,

San Francisco opened a dramatic new chapter in my life. I was still stuck with someone else's concept of gender-appropriate behavior, but the conventional path

I'd been following had made a sharp turn to the left. I was a drag queen. Correction! I was a celebrated, union-carded, female-impersonating entertainer. I didn't like thinking of myself as a drag queen" (p. 43).

The examples relating to this satellite of cross-dressing and female impersonation demonstrate how Brevard's belief that she should be a woman motivated her to act.

The third satellite in Brevard's autobiography is her attempts to alter her body to make it appear more like that of a biological woman's. The first example occurs shortly before Brevard undergoes sex reassignment surgery. Once Brevard had decided to have surgery, she decided there was one step she had to take before going in for the procedure. Part of sex reassignment surgery for MTFs involves pushing the testacies inside the body. Brevard says she could not bear the thought of having this done to her, because it would make her feel contaminated by male hormones. To avoid this portion of the procedure, Brevard castrated herself with the help of a friend (p. 11). She says,

[i]f I was to have surgery in this country, first I had to get a castration. That was that. Otherwise, the testicles would be places inside my body during the operation. The ol' testosterone would keep right on pumping. That was the standard practice in America. For some reason, known only to man, testosterone was sacrosanct. In the United States, it was unlawful to tamper with that particular part of the reproductive system (p. 11).

The second example of Brevard's attempts to alter her body occurs later in the book, while Brevard was working at Finocchio's. A friend and fellow performer named Stormy gave Brevard her first dose of female hormones, a drug called Premarin. She says

"Standing by the bathroom sink in a basement apartment at 860 Gray street, I made a commitment to becoming myself, fully, as I took my first female hormone" (p. 58).

This drug caused Brevard's breasts to grow and made her begin to appear more feminine. In the third example, Stormy introduced Brevard to her physician, Dr. Harry Benjamin, who would eventually diagnose Brevard as being transsexual. Brevard writes "Stormy

introduced me to her physician, Dr. Harry S. Benjamin. After a physical examination, he accepted me as his newest transsexual patient” (p. 58).

Brevard’s struggle to find language to describe her gender identity is the fourth satellite contained within her autobiography. In the first example of this struggle, Brevard comes to the realization that there are no terms to describe her gender identity. In the second example, Brevard explains why, despite her failure to measure up to traditional standards of masculinity and her career as a female impersonator, there are certain words she refused to use to describe her self-identity. Brevard writes that she had trouble thinking of herself as being “queer” because,

The word was used to describe the dirtiest and most vile of beings. It was a word generally uttered in hushed asides, whispered to quickly describe the unspeakable. Fortunately, I had never encountered such lecherous molesters of children (p. 27).

The second example of this satellite occurs in high school. When football players demonstrated sexual interest in Brevard, she realized that there was “something wrong with me-but I simply could not be queer” (p. 25). The third example demonstrates why she refused to use the word *homosexual* to describe her gender identity, and it explains how Brevard learned to be repulsed by homosexuals. In talking about her mother’s opinions, Brevard says,

In Mozelle’s world, anything smacking of deviant behavior had always been swept under the rug. To digress from the sexually permissible was to be queer. She, like most of the nation, held homosexuals in very low esteem. They were perverts and child molesters. Mother didn’t know any homosexuals, but she knew they were repulsive. I’d seen her in action (p. 85).

While at a bus stop, her mother openly made fun of a man in drag. Brevard writes,

As we waited for our return bus trip home, we sat on a wooden bench watching people pass through the Greyhound bus terminal. People watching was a favored pastime, and we generally conducted a running dialogue as the world paraded

past. One person, a flamboyant black queen, noticeably stood out from the crowd. Flamboyant didn't cover it. This queen didn't pass through a space; he flounced through, making a grotesque statement about his life in transit (p. 85).

Brevard feared her mother might associate her with "that outrageous, disgusting person prancing around the bus station, yet I knew there was somehow a link between that 'sissy' and me" (p. 85). Until Christine Jorgensen's sex reassignment surgery was made public, there was no word to describe being transsexual except *queer*, which "meant you were a degenerate" (p. 86). In the fourth example of this satellite, Brevard comes to the realization that using the phrase *drag queen* to describe her identity is no better than using the word *queer*. She disliked the term *drag queen* because drag queens "have always gotten a bum rap" and their "detractors live on both sides of society's sexual barbed wire" (p. 43). She writes that after Stonewall

drag became the gay stigma. Many male homosexuals, terrified that mainstream society would believe all gay men wore dresses, began to shun the more outrageous drag members of the community (p. 43).

The term *drag queen* carried so many negative connotations that Brevard hesitated to use the term in describing her identity. These examples demonstrate how Brevard learned to devalue homosexuals as a group and explain why she refused to describe herself as *homosexual*.

The fifth satellite occurring before Brevard's reassignment surgery explains how Brevard acquired her beliefs about what a good woman should be and do. She acquired these values by observing the relationships of couples in her family and by observing the relationships of couples in her social circle. In the first example of this satellite, Brevard came to believe that it was not possible to be both a woman and independent through

observing her parent's relationship (p. 82). She learned the same things about womanhood from observing less traditional relationships. She says

Stormy was not only my mentor; she was, in the terminology of our subterranean world, a "married woman". A long-term relationship gave queens extra clout in drag circles, where a "real man" was a highly prized accessory. Stormy took very seriously the role-playing that was typical of gay and lesbian relationships prior to the 1980s. She knew no bounds where her man's creature comforts were concerned and played her subservient role to the queenly hilt (p. 49).

Brevard and Stormy shared the goal of social legitimacy, and they both felt they could achieve this by behaving like real women. As they saw it, their job as women was to make a man's life more comfortable. Brevard writes their "role in life, as we saw it, was to be supportive of our man and to bring comfort to him" (p. 116). She says that because we [Brevard and Stormy] shared this feeling of about marriage, hearth, and home, that the male doctors of our day thought us unbelievably women" (p. 116).

The third example of this satellite occurs later in the autobiography. In describing her reasons for continuing her search for a husband, Brevard says she came to the conclusion that no respectable woman "except a lesbian, could live a complete, fulfilling life without a man by her side" (p. 145).

After the first kernel, sex reassignment surgery, Brevard's arrangement of satellites portrays her new goals and motivations for acting. In order to find a place in society as a woman, she attempts to leave her past and her identity as a transsexual behind her. To Brevard, having a man love her and want her as his wife was the ultimate affirmation of her womanhood. She came to value marriage, and the satellites demonstrate that she was motivated to act based on this value. Brevard also comes to value being seen as a woman by the world at large, and she also acts based on her belief that deviating from behavioral norms means she won't be acceptable to society. In

addition, there are two satellites that occur after Brevard's sex reassignment surgery: Brevard's illustrations of how she attempts to find happiness and self-acceptance through marriage and Brevard's attempt to act as she believed a socially acceptable woman should.

The first satellite taking place after Brevard's sex reassignment surgery is her attempt to affirm her identity as a woman through marriage. The initial example of this satellite occurs immediately after her reassignment surgery, and it illustrates her need to have a man in her life in order to feel legitimized as a woman. After her sex reassignment surgery was over, Brevard says she could not wait to get out of the recovery room and see her fiancé, Hank Foyle. She says "I hadn't been complete for an hour, and already I was attaching my lifeline to a man" (p. 81). On the next page, Brevard writes "It would be more than ten years before a feminist friend would inform me, 'A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.' I did not believe her" (p. 82). The second example of this satellite occurs after Brevard returned to her hometown post sex reassignment surgery. In this example, she describes how Hank's presence in her life helped ease some of her family's and home town community's negative attitudes towards her sex reassignment surgery. Brevard writes that because "Hank was seen as a man, I was allowed to be a woman" (p. 93). Brevard's engagement to Hank was later called off because Hank couldn't financially support Brevard, and her family made her end the engagement (p. 97, 98). The third example related to this satellite is Brevard's first marriage, to a man named Martin Gene Lee. To Brevard, marriage meant everything because it affirmed her identity as a woman (p. 145). After the ceremony, Lee informs her that the marriage "doesn't mean a hell of a lot" to him. Brevard says that for all her "bravado, marriage did mean

something to me. It meant everything” (p. 145). Her marriage to Lee was the culmination of a lifetime of plotting to get a ring on her finger. In the fourth example, Brevard continued in her quest for matrimonial bliss because “[i]n spite of maturing political convictions, professional progress, and financial security, I was an eight-year old transwoman who still believed that life was meaningless without a man to guide it” (p. 193). In the fifth example, Brevard married a second time to James Melton, whom she later caught in the act of cheating on her. Her mother told her she couldn’t divorce him because “he’s a man,” and “has sexual cravings beyond his control” (p. 202). Brevard doesn’t quite buy this explanation, writing that even “southern, male-biased religious dogma” couldn’t excuse her husband’s actions. She accepted that “a husband should have the final word in any family disagreement,” and she writes “I knuckled under to his wishes on every topic from sex to shopping – but I carried a serious grudge” (p. 203). In the sixth example, Brevard is honored when Jim’s son Mark asks if the two of them can tell people he is her son instead of her step-son. She says “I loved the idea. This marriage would have its perks, after all” (p. 194). Being able to claim motherhood was important because many “early transsexuals feared their barren state might provide a tip-off to a transgendered sexual history” (p. 195). To her, a husband and children are valuable because being a wife and a mother affirm her identity as a real woman. In the seventh example, Brevard writes that in lieu of the failure of her first two marriages, she believed a third might not work out well either, but still she “opted for the social safe haven” of marriage”; the “romantic dream was enough to rekindle my desire for a successful commitment” (p. 231). An eighth example occurs later in the autobiography when Brevard begins a career as a an actress in Los Angeles. She dates various men and says at

this point, the men in her life had become interchangeable because she “desperately seeking something on which to base her life (p. 217).

The second satellite is Brevard’s attempts to act as she believed a socially acceptable woman should. She hesitated to engage in any behavior that would make her appear unwomanly. In the first example, Brevard discusses being unsure of what is expected of her as a woman after her surgery, and she describes an incident in which she is assaulted by a date. She writes,

I was shoved against his car door, with the steel handle painfully gouging a whole in my side, and I was having some difficulty understanding his reasoning. I did not want “it,” “that,” or any other part of his anatomy. It was clear, however, that my night was not going to end with a simple “Thank you for a lovely evening.” I was trapped and could not make the man stop touching me (p. 111).

Despite the fact that she is being assaulted, she “was afraid to slug him – that might not be ladylike” (p. 111). In the second example, Brevard is fired from a job for defending herself from a customer. After a move to Las Vegas, Brevard gets a job as a burlesque dancer, and rumors circulate that she is not really a woman. The manager of the club, a woman, forces her to strip for an inspection (p. 120). Although she passes the manager’s inspection, Brevard is later fired for protecting herself from an overly friendly customer. Having passed the manager’s “vaginal inspection, she expected a woman to know better than to cold-cock a paying customer” (126). In the third example of this satellite, Brevard explains her reasons for her refusal to join the women’s movements going on during her lifetime. In spite of her exposure to the beginnings of the women’s movement, never accepted its values because

“chronologically beyond the age of consent, as a woman I was an infant. I wasn’t interested in changing the world or becoming a warrior in the battle between the sexes. I wasn’t secure enough for such a fight. I would accept any gender bias that society directed toward me – as long as men considered me womanly” (p. 114).

She expresses shock that any biologically born woman could see having a husband and children as a burden rather than something to be valued. To her, having a husband was everything because it would confirm her identity as a socially acceptable woman, and this belief motivated her actions in daily life.

Brevard's first kernel of her sex-assignment surgery was marked by five pre-surgery satellites and two post-surgery ones that explain why surgery had to happen and prove to the reader that it had a major effect on her life afterwards. The satellites surrounding sex-reassignment surgery demonstrate that it was an inevitable event, demonstrate that it changed Brevard's motivations for acting, and support sex-reassignment surgery as a kernel. The critical analysis of narrative coherence will now turn to an examination of the satellites surrounding the second kernel.

Analysis of Satellites Surrounding Brevard's Realization

The second kernel of Brevard's autobiography, her realization upon her mother's death that she can be fulfilled without a man, possesses two satellites that occur before it. The first satellite taking place before the second kernel that she can be complete without a man is Brevard's growing frustration with the lack of support she receives from her husband. Brevard writes,

Before leaving Nashville, my husband told friends that Mother's death would end our marriage. In the end, he made this a self-fulfilling prophecy. Emotionally, he was not there for me. At a time when, more than anything, I needed someone by my side, there was no one there. I was alone (p. 237).

In the second example, Brevard sat under a tree at her parents' home and reflected on the fact that she was left alone to grieve while her husband was out drinking at a seedy bar. She says that Michael "sat drinking beer in a seedy, downtown bar" while "drowning his

sorrows” (p. 237). The third example occurs at the end of the chapter, when Brevard tracks her husband down at the bar. She says that “I saw Michael walking two women to their parked car. Then, pulling my car to the curb, I watched my husband make a drug transaction” (p. 238). He finished the transaction “by kissing both women” (p. 238). In realizing that her husband could not make her happy, Brevard finally became the person she had set out to be.

The second satellite occurring before her realization is her mother’s death. Brevard says that her mother knew she was free to leave because her “transsexual daughter, Aleshia, had just turned twenty-one. The woman I was not born to be had come of age” (p. 238). Her mother’s death marks a coming-of-age moment which, combined with Brevard’s disillusionment with marriage, brings about the second kernel. The satellites that occur before Brevard’s realization explain how and why she came to discard her belief that she needed a man to affirm her feminine self-identity and to help her gain legitimacy in the eyes of her family and society.

The first satellite taking place after her realization that she can be complete without a man is Brevard’s relinquishment of her value of marriage and her belief that a woman needs a man to affirm her identity (p. 241). Although Brevard tells the reader that she gave up her old beliefs values and gained new motives for acting, no examples of satellites illustrate this to the reader. The reader must accept that Brevard changed her beliefs, values, and motives for acting based on her assertions that she came to believe she could be complete without a man.

The second kernel, Brevard’s realization, changes her motives for acting and sets her on a new course in her life. The satellites occurring before this realization

demonstrate to the reader why it happened. Because there are no satellites that occur after the second kernel, there is no proof that it actually contributed to a significant change in Brevard's life.

Taken together, this analysis of two kernels and nine satellites identifies Brevard's arrangement and use of events to create narrative coherence. Now that the first element of the narrative analysis has been accomplished, the focus will shift to the second element, an analysis of narrative fidelity.

Identification and Analysis of Ultimate Terms

As explained in Chapter Two, the ultimate terms contained within an autobiography symbolize the narrator's values. Through her arrangement and use of god terms, the narrator illustrates what she values above everything else, and through her arrangement and use of devil terms, she illustrates what she tries to escape or reject. Brevard's use of god terms demonstrates the high value she places on having a normal life as a woman, while her use of devil terms demonstrates the low value she places on her gender difference. Brevard's god term of *normal* and related words such as *acceptance* and *creditable* symbolize her life-long quest to be loved and accepted by mainstream society. The god term *marriage* mainly functions as a pre-emptive ultimate term, and it serves to bar arguments that Brevard is not or should not become a woman. Brevard's devil terms of *different*, *queer*, and words associated with *queer*, such as *drag queen* and *sissy*, symbolize her rejection of her gender difference and her identity as a transsexual.

As an ultimate term, *normal* functions as an abstract, pre-emptive, efficient, and hierarchical god term. *Normal* symbolizes what Brevard values most, acceptance into

mainstream society. On the first page of the book, she says that nothing could be better “than being exactly like everyone else” (p. 1). She also says the thing she wanted most “was to be accepted, and I could not get past my belief that if I loved strongly enough, I’d be loved in return” (p.57). The god term *normal* is abstract because its definition is not clear, and to Brevard, it symbolizes something beyond its dictionary definition. Being normal doesn’t just meant being like everyone else; as a god term, *normal* symbolizes acceptance by her family, peers, and community. Brevard’s whole life is a quest to find a place in society as a normal person; her desire to be normal is the reason she undergoes sex-reassignment surgery. After her surgery is over, she says that she trusted that as a woman “I would be instantly creditable, acceptable, and understood” (p. 81). She also writes that her surgery gave her “a second chance at life-I could now make a life in the social mainstream” (p. 81). Normalcy is the thing Brevard values the most and thus is in conflict with and in opposition to other ultimate terms such as *queer* and *drag queen*. *Normal* functions as a pre-emptive and efficient god term because it bars argument that Brevard is different and should thus be punished and excluded from society; Brevard chooses to undergo sex-reassignment surgery because “one could quietly have surgery with the promise of a ‘normal’ existence to follow” (p. 29).

Marriage functions as an abstract, pre-emptive, and efficient god term; it quickly and effectively bars argument against Brevard becoming a woman and finding a niche in society as such. If she desires to be married and to perform wifely duties for a man, then she must be a “real” woman. Brevard says that marriage “meant everything. I’d plotted my destiny as artfully as Frank Lloyd Wright designed his houses”, and getting married was the culmination of a life-long quest (p. 145). Brevard lists all of the reasons she is

considered a woman, and she says that in addition to qualifying for surgery based on a psychological evaluation,

there was proof that I should be a woman: I was engaged to marry a card-carrying man. In the 1960's, desiring to be a housewife carried a lot of weight. The fact that a man wanted me as his legal wife probably cinched my claim to womanly status (p. 7).

After undergoing surgery and returning to her hometown engaged to Hank Foyle,

Brevard writes,

Hank's presence stemmed much of the community's negativity towards me. It was the same story all over again. Hank was a handsome, brown-eyed, strapping six-three figure of a man. Because Hank was seen as a man, I was allowed to be a woman (p. 93).

The fact that she was engaged to marry a man earned Brevard status as a real woman within the community. Her desire to be married convinced the townspeople that she should be a woman in the same way her desire to be married had convinced doctors that she should be a woman. *Marriage* also functions as an abstract god term because its definition goes beyond its meaning of a union between a man and a woman. Like the god term *normal*, the god term *marriage* symbolizes acceptance into mainstream society as a woman.

According to the definition of a devil term (Fisher, 1984; Hart and Daughton, 2005; Weaver, 1970) a devil term can be something that impedes the fulfillment of a god term. As an ultimate term, the devil term *difference* impedes Brevard from fulfilling her desire to be *normal* and to find a place in the social mainstream. *Difference* is in opposition to the thing Brevard values most, being normal. As a devil term, *difference* is abstract in nature because it symbolizes what Brevard fears most, rejection by her family and peers. On the first page of the book, Brevard says that her mother "knew I was not

like other boys and realized the suffering that dissimilarity caused me” (p. 1). From the very beginning of the autobiography, she establishes that she is different and that this difference causes her emotional and mental distress. Brevard’s sense of feeling different came from her ambiguous gender identity. Brevard writes that the world “was apparently divided into two distinct sexual groupings, and I didn’t fit into either one” (p. 5). Brevard spent much of her life believing that being different made her unacceptable to other people, especially to her father. She says that because “I was not like other boys, I felt I must be despicable. Daddy recognized it. I was sure he saw my difference” (p. 85). Brevard’s gender difference is something she attempts to hide, and she says this is not an uncommon thing for transsexual people to feel. She says that in order to be accepted, transsexual people must hide their true gender identity, and “we must create another person, an acceptable substitute” (p. 86). In describing the lack of terminology to describe her gender identity, Brevard writes that it didn’t matter what she was called; naming her gender identity could not erase the fact that she was different and therefore unacceptable to society. She says that no matter what they were called, “[p]eople like me had realized we were “different” from the very beginning” (p. 29). Sex-reassignment surgery offers a chance to be normal and to escape her gender difference. Brevard writes that after her surgery was behind her, “so were my years of not belonging” (p. 81). At the end of her autobiography, Brevard reflects on her experiences with difference and writes,

Life had taught that androgyny in any form was not acceptable. You must be either a *masculine* man or *feminine* woman. I had never been comfortable on the masculine end of the gender scale. I knew where I belonged. Now, due to a painful and invasive surgery, I could accept my feminine place in society – would society accept me? (p. 239).

The devil term *difference* impedes Brevard from being able to have a life as a normal, acceptable person. In Brevard's view, her gender difference and her failure to measure up to standards of masculinity impeded her from having a place in the social mainstream.

The devil term *queer* also prevents Brevard from fulfilling her desire to be normal. *Queer* functions as an abstract and efficient ultimate term because its definition changes across Brevard's memoir and its use instantly calls into question a person's character. The devil term *queer* is also abstract because, like the devil term *difference*, it symbolizes the thing Brevard fears most, rejection by her family and peers. Also like the devil term *difference*, *queer* is in opposition to Brevard's god term normal. *Queer* prevents Brevard from fulfilling her goal of normalcy. At various places in her autobiography, Brevard defines what the term *queer* means to her, and the definition changes over the course of her narrative. First, the word *queer* means a male who attracts sexual interest from other males. Writing about her primary education, Brevard says that during her high school years,

a number of young football heroes tossed a ball or two my way. I didn't understand why. I did not believe it was because I was "queer" – certainly not in the homosexual sense. I knew something was wrong with me – but I simply could not be queer (p. 25).

Second, *queer* is associated with other offensive terms that describe alternative gender identities and sexualities. Brevard writes,

Drag queen, faggot, impersonator, transsexual, queer, gay, sissy, dyke, lesbian—all are dark synonyms for the word *freak*. They are ugly words used to inflict shame. It is society's language for telling you that you're not welcome. I'd sensed my difference from my earliest days (p. 45).

Third, the devil term *queer* serves as a blanket term for anyone who fails to measure up to social standards of masculinity. Brevard says that "[u]ntil Christine Jorgensen made

headlines, “everyone different was labeled *queer*” (p. 86). Fourth, the devil term *queer* denotes someone who is a “molester of children” and a “degenerate” (p. 27, p. 85). Fifth, being queer is associated with being unmanly; Brevard says to be queer “meant you were so sissy you squatted to pee” (p. 86). As a devil term, *queer* functions as an abstract and efficient means of persuasion. The exact meaning of the term is unclear, but the meaning of the devil term *queer* goes beyond its dictionary definition of someone who is gay. Using the term to describe a person instantly calls into question their character, which is why Brevard would not use the word to describe her gender identity.

Brevard’s arrangement of kernels and satellites works with her use of ultimate terms to give the reader a portrait the events of her life, her beliefs, and her motives for acting. The next chapter will discuss the findings of this critical analysis and determine if Brevard’s autobiography succeeds rhetorically.

Chapter IV: Discussion and Evaluation of Narrative Coherence and Narrative Fidelity,
Conclusions, and New Directions

Taken together, the critical analysis of Brevard's ultimate terms and the critical analysis of Brevard's arrangement of kernels and satellites reveal that her autobiography only partially succeeds as rhetoric. Brevard's autobiography partly fails the tests of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity as outlined by Solomon (1991), Griffin (2000), and Foss (2004).

Discussion of Narrative Coherence, Kernels, and Satellites

In terms of narrative coherence, Brevard's autobiography partially meets the standards outlined in Chapter 2. Brevard's arrangement of satellites successfully demonstrates how she came by her beliefs, values, and motives for acting; explains why the kernels had to occur; and demonstrates how the kernels affect her beliefs, values, and motives for acting. Narrative coherence fails because the second kernel, Brevard's realization upon her mother's death that she could be fulfilled without a man, does not have satellites that occur after it to prove that it changed Brevard's values and motives for acting in her daily life as required by Solomon's (1991) and Foss's (2004) methodology.

The first kernel, sex-reassignment surgery, succeeds as a kernel because it possesses satellites that explain why it happens and satellites that explain how it altered Brevard's motivations for acting. The satellites that occur before sex-reassignment surgery clearly explain why sex-reassignment surgery was an inevitable occurrence. Brevard's experiences of feeling and being made to feel different from an early age, her experiences of cross-dressing from an early age and into adulthood, and her experiences of altering her body to make herself appear biologically female all demonstrate that she

was motivated to pass as a woman in order to deal with her gender difference. Sex reassignment surgery then became the logical way to purge her feelings of difference. The surgery clearly changes her motives for acting; after sex-reassignment surgery, the satellites demonstrate how Brevard was motivated not just to “pass” but to find a niche in society as a respectable, biologically born woman. The satellites that take place after sex reassignment surgery also demonstrate Brevard’s attempts to live by feminine values and demonstrate how those values affected her motivations for acting. For example, Brevard believed that a good woman had to have a husband to affirm her female identity, and she acted on that belief by marrying three times.

The analysis of satellites also finds that the arrangement of events before Brevard’s sex reassignment surgery follows the same pattern as other personal narratives told by transsexuals (Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). Satellites occurring before Brevard’s reassignment surgery chronicle her experiences of feeling and being made to feel different from an early age, her experiences of cross-dressing from an early age and into adulthood, and her struggle to find words to explain her new self-identity.

Taken together, Brevard’s arrangement of kernels and satellites partly fails the test of narrative coherence, because the second kernel, Brevard’s realization that she can be fulfilled without a man, possesses no satellites taking place after it to prove that it affected her beliefs, values, and motivations for acting. In terms of narrative coherence, Brevard’s autobiography partially fails as rhetorical autobiography.

Discussion of Narrative Fidelity and Ultimate Terms

In terms of narrative fidelity, Brevard's autobiography only partially meets the standards outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. Although Brevard's arrangement of kernels and satellites demonstrates how she came by her values, she fails to show that her values are good ones by which to live.

From the very beginning of the autobiography, the satellites clearly demonstrate why Brevard so values *normalcy* and *acceptance* and rejects *difference*. The satellites occurring before her sex-reassignment surgery demonstrate over and over again how she was punished by society and picked on by her peers for failing to measure up to traditional standards of masculinity (p. 6, 19, 26, 31). Brevard underwent sex-reassignment surgery as a direct result of this exclusion from mainstream society in an attempt to find social acceptance as a woman (p. 29, 81). She clearly demonstrates how she acquires her value of *normalcy* and her rejection of *difference* affected her actions and her motivations. Her desire to be *normal*, to not be a *freak* or a *degenerate*, caused her to seek sex-reassignment surgery

Brevard also clearly demonstrates where her value of *marriage* comes from. Her observations of her parents' marriage, as well as observations of the romantic relationships in her social circle, taught her how to act as a woman and as a wife (p. 49, 116). Brevard learns that a good woman is submissive and obedient and that *marriage* is the end goal of all women. She comes to value *marriage* because that is what a good woman values, and she spends much of her life seeking social acceptance as a married woman; marriage affirms her feminine identity (p. 7, 93, 145). Brevard also clearly demonstrates how the value of *marriage* affected her actions in daily life.

Brevard's autobiography does not pass Solomon's (1991) and Foss's (2004) second test of narrative fidelity, because she fails to show that her values are good ones by which to live. Several times she is assaulted by men because she is so desperate for their approval and is afraid to engage in any behavior that makes her appear unwomanly (p. 111, 114, 126). At the end of her autobiography, she says that through her life her "need for love and acceptance, when coupled with an overwhelming lack of self-esteem, made me a willing victim" (p. 240). Brevard says that she eventually rejected the values she lived by through most of her life, saying that,

Domination by husbands, boyfriends, and my own irrational fears had become increasingly intolerable with each passing year, but no remarkable revelations, no great insight changed me into a self-sufficient woman. Rather, as with all developed beings, I'd quietly become the sum of my experiences" (p. 242).

Later on the same page she says that discovering "that I can exist, happily, without a man has also been a tedious, ongoing process" (p. 242). By rejecting some of her values and admitting that they were not good ones by which to guide her life, Brevard fails to demonstrate that her values are good ones for the reader to acquire.

The analysis of ultimate terms reveals that many of the values represented by Brevard's use of god terms and devil terms are similar to the values of mainstream society. Americans value group conformity and tend to socially reject those who don't meet cultural standards (Steele and Redding, 1962). Brevard says that the other MTFs she knew "were willing to risk everything in order to live their lives in sync with the American standard of womanhood. That was our American Dream" (p. 164). The critical analysis of ultimate terms reveals that Brevard clearly values acceptance and rejects difference in the form of her non-traditional gender identity and her failure to live up to social standards of masculinity. In Brevard's eyes, her difference bars her from

membership in legitimate society. As a woman, Brevard attempts to find happiness through marriage, which is a traditional feminine value. Previous critical scholarship has indicated that many transsexual people still possess traditional gender values; that is, a number of MTFs want to take on traditional female social, work, and familial roles (Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998). Brevard's use of ultimate terms demonstrates that her values are the same as traditional American feminine values and that her values are similar to those of members of American culture. Even though she rejects these particular values at the end of her autobiography, her new values are still similar to those of mainstream society.

Turning to the last element of the critical analysis, Brevard's autobiography contains types of satellites that are common to personal narratives told by transsexual individuals that help explain why they need to create a new self-identity. Brevard clearly demonstrates that there is a need for her to create a new identity, because she is not like her peers and there are no words to describe what she is; as demonstrated previously in the analysis, the blanket term *queer* does not suffice. Because Brevard's memoir contains the same themes as other personal narratives told by transsexuals, there is reason to suggest that the personal narratives of transsexual persons may constitute a previously unidentified rhetorical genre. Although only one memoir was analyzed in this thesis, the findings of this critical analysis, combined with previous research, provides justification to continue this line of inquiry.

Successful Elements of Brevard's Autobiography

Despite the fact that Brevard's autobiography only partly meets Foss's (2004) standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity, it is still a good story that "rings

true.” There are several ways in which Brevard’s autobiography succeeds, despite its failure to completely measure up to standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. Brevard’s autobiography functions as an organized, coherent narrative that successfully persuades the audience to live or act in a certain way.

In terms of narrative coherence, Brevard’s autobiography is successful because, as demonstrated in the analysis, the events work together to create an organized story. It is possible that in the case of autobiography, it is not necessary for every kernel, especially the last one, to possess satellites that demonstrate how it affected the narrator’s beliefs, attitudes, actions, and motives. After all, the story has to end at some point, and if there is a satisfying conclusion, the audience still “buys” the story. In the case of Brevard’s the story ends with her realization that she has become a mature woman. This is a satisfying ending, because although Brevard’s life is not over, one phase of it is. By concluding the book at that particular point, Brevard leaves the reader satisfied that she is all grown up and ready to face the world; one part of her life is over, and another part of her life is just beginning. Foss’s (2004) standards were created to apply to narratives in general, not autobiography specifically. Because it is a special kind of story, autobiography may need to be judged by different standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to begin to suggest or outline these standards, but it does provide grounds for future research.

In terms of narrative fidelity, Brevard’s autobiography is successful because it persuades the audience to live (or not to live) by certain values. The moral of Brevard’s autobiography is that one can’t rely on others for happiness and self-fulfillment. As discussed in the analysis, Brevard demonstrates over and over again how she is betrayed

by the men around her. The satellites she employs clearly show that she searched for self-affirmation through romantic relationships and marriages. She never found it, and Brevard admits at the end of her autobiography that this was a bad way to live (p. 240, 242). She says that her life-long quest for acceptance resulted in her being abused and victimized. Through Brevard's experiences, the audience learns along with her that acceptance must start on the inside; until a person can accept herself, she will not find happiness. One can't rely upon others for happiness, fulfillment, and acceptance. The moral of Brevard's autobiography promotes good values by which to live, and thus her autobiography is successful in persuading people to live and act in a certain way.

In terms of target audience, Brevard's autobiography succeeds in two ways. The specific audience, other transsexual persons, is given access to the life experience of someone just like them. In this instance, Brevard's autobiography serves as a kind of cautionary tale, warning other transsexual people to not spend their lives being victimized and belittled out of desperation for acceptance. Brevard's narrative encourages this audience to remain true to themselves and to not make her mistakes. The general audience, anyone that happens to pick up the book, is also successfully persuaded by Brevard's story. As discussed above, Brevard's autobiography contains a good moral, and the audience learns along with Brevard that one can't rely on others for personal happiness and fulfillment.

In sum, Brevard's autobiography is still a satisfying story because it "rings true". Everyone has had experiences of feeling different and feeling rejected because of that difference, and everyone could potentially believe that it is not possible to find happiness by relying upon other people to define and quantify one's self-worth. The story is also

successful because Brevard's arrangement of events proves that she lived by her values through the whole story, so it is reasonable to believe that she lived by the new values she adopted after her realization. Brevard's autobiography serves as a kind of coming-of-age story because by the end, she becomes a complete, individual person.

The critical narrative analysis of Brevard's autobiography reveals that her personal narrative partially fails as rhetorical autobiography when judged by the standards of Solomon (1991), Griffin (2000), and Foss (2004). However, the fact that the values represented by her use of ultimate terms mesh with those of mainstream society means that her autobiography is successful by her standards. Previously in the analysis, it was noted that Brevard wrote her autobiography with the goal of erasing stereotypes of transsexual individuals. Brevard's autobiography is also successful in terms of addressing her audience; the autobiography lets other transsexual persons know that others like them exist and that it is possible to find self-acceptance. Brevard also successfully persuades both her target audience and her general audience to live and act in certain ways. By demonstrating that her values are similar to those of society, Brevard helps to combat the notion that all transsexuals are corrupted, immoral people.

Chapter V: Conclusions, Limitations, and New Directions

Conclusions and Implications

This thesis aimed to demonstrate that Brevard's autobiography successfully functions as a rhetorical autobiography, to show that the values contained within Brevard's autobiography are similar to those of mainstream society, to expand the fields of gender communication and rhetoric by demonstrating that Brevard's memoir contains themes common to narratives told by transsexual individuals, and to expand the field of rhetoric by considering autobiography as rhetoric. Although the critical narrative analysis demonstrates that Brevard's autobiography is unsuccessful in terms of fully meeting the standards of narrative coherence and narrative fidelity, it successfully expands the fields of gender communication and rhetoric by demonstrating that the arrangement of events in Brevard's autobiography follows a similar pattern to the arrangement of events in other personal narratives told by transsexual individuals. This finding provides grounds to continue this line of inquiry and to suggest that personal narratives told by transsexual people may constitute a new rhetorical genre. The analysis also achieves the goal of demonstrating that the values contained within Brevard's autobiography are similar to those of mainstream society. Brevard values belonging and normalcy, which previous research has demonstrated most Americans also value (Steele and Redding, 1962; Bornstein, 1994). Brevard rejects her gender difference, and her desire to be normal motivates her actions. While this thesis only partially meets its goals, it has successfully created grounds for expansion and for new research.

Limitations

Although this thesis does break new ground in the areas of rhetorical criticism and gender communication, there are several limitations to its scope. First, only one autobiography written by a MTF transsexual was analyzed. While there is research to indicate that all transsexual narratives are arranged and perform in similar ways (Mason-Schrock, 1996; Gagné, McGaughey, and Tewksbury, 1997; Gagné and Tewksbury, 1998), there is the possibility that this is not always the case. Other personal narratives written by transsexuals might not have the same characteristics as Brevard's autobiography. For example, the personal narratives of female to male transsexuals (FTMs) might be much different from those of MTFs. Since FTMs and MTFs begin life with different perspectives, it follows logically that there would be a difference in their personal narratives.

The second limitation of this thesis is that it only examined an autobiography written by a person that fits the classical, medical definition of the term *transsexual*. It has been established that there are other kinds of definitions of the word *transsexual*, and it is logical to suggest that the personal narratives of people fitting other definitions of the word might be different. For example, the memoirs of a person with a self-identity that fits the medical definition of the term *transsexual* might be different from someone with a self-identity that fits the social definition of the term. Continuing the line of research begun in this thesis into the future provides an opportunity to address and eliminate the two limitations discussed in this section.

Future Research and New Directions

The line of research begun in this thesis will be carried on into the future, and there are several directions it might follow: employing the methods used to critically analyze Brevard's (2002) autobiography to critically analyze other personal narratives of transsexual individuals, employing the methods used in this thesis to critically analyze the personal narratives of members of other marginalized groups, and employing the methods used in this thesis to critically analyze other autobiographies.

The first direction of this line of inquiry is to utilize the same methods of narrative criticism used in this thesis to examine other kinds of transsexual narratives. For example, narrative analysis of internet discussion boards has the potential to produce further research because it would provide access to a different kind of personal narrative. Gauthier and Chaudoir (2003) were able to discover the personal narratives of FTMs, a group that is typically fearful of exposure (Halberstam, 1998). Personal narratives shared on the internet might be inherently different from personal narratives that have been edited for publication. For example, internet narratives might be more honest and more authentic than a narrative that has been heavily edited to meet standards of the publishing industry. Analyzing these narratives would bring further light to the life experiences of transsexuals and help further combat some of the stereotypes that have been applied to this group of people. This kind of critical analysis would also help to cement the personal narratives of transsexual individuals as a rhetorical genre.

The second possibility for carrying on this line of inquiry is to employ the methods of narrative analysis outlined and utilized for critically evaluating Brevard's (2002) autobiography to critically analyze the personal narratives of members of other

marginalized gender or social groups. Using ultimate terms to evaluate narrative fidelity gives a critic unique insight into the values contained within a memoir, and the critic can discover if the values symbolized by the ultimate terms used by the narrator match or conflict with the values of mainstream society. If it could be suggested through this kind of critical examination of discourse that a marginalized group possesses the same values as mainstream society, then that group could gain more social and political legitimacy. This kind of analysis could potentially combat and erase stereotypes applied to marginalized groups.

The third direction for this research to go is to continue using the methods of narrative criticism utilized in this thesis to examine different kinds of autobiographies. In doing so, the significance of autobiography as a rhetorical artifact might be further demonstrated, and autobiography as a rhetorical genre could be further explored. It could be discovered if different kinds of rhetorical autobiographies have common features and common characteristics. In doing so, the field of rhetoric might be expanded by further considering autobiography as rhetorical discourse.

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