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Mapping Performativity: A Performance as Research Enquiry to how Performative Embodied Repetition of Gendered Acts Can Challenge Perceptions of Gendered Expectations as a Woman.

Masters in Applied Theatre
Final Research Report

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ABSTRACT:

This research explores performance as an enquiry into how performative embodied gendered acts can challenge perceptions of gendered expectations of women. These expectations are predominantly ones of beauty and appearance in order to be perceived as a woman. This research uses the metaphor of a map to map out the ways in which gender is performed using objects that interact with the body, with a focus on high heeled shoes. It explores *how* a conscious awareness of repeated acts through active doing and witnessing or perceiving can challenge and shift understanding and perceptions of the lived bodily experiences of women. It also explores how performativity is not necessarily acknowledged by the subject but is always active.

Previous research has worked with the body and performance to explore gender and break conventions around gendered expectations; however, it does not explore internal and visceral shifts in understanding one's own phenomenological experiences with gendered *objects* and how a conscious awareness of them used in performativity can change perceptions. This mapping moves from a sensory experience to a psychological consciousness and shifts between the two, amplified by the use of repetition. This conscious awareness has the potential to shift perceptual norms that women have on how to present themselves as a woman. *How* this shift takes place is what this research comes to answer.

Through a self-exploration of body mapping and embodied performance workshops, I work with five women who are trained performers and five non-trained women, all of whom identify as a woman, to map through and with the body in order to uncover a sense of a shared phenomenological experience between women. High heels are the central gendered object of focus throughout the mapping. As a result of the process of embodied repetition we note the immediate effect it has on the body and the way it presents itself outwardly to the world.

KEYWORDS: PERFORMANCE, GENDER PERFORMATIVITY, PHENOMENOLOGY, PERCEPTION, EMBODIED PERFORMANCE, REPETITION, GENDERED ACTS, LIVED BODY, BODY-MAPPING.

<u>"What makes me a woman?"</u>

Is it in the way I wear my hair down,
or up or brushed, or what if I don't want long hair?
What if I like to wear sneakers and baggy jeans?
Does that make me less than a woman?
What if I chose to wear pants instead of skirts
or didn't like make-up on my face
or the way that heels make my feet feel,
does this make me less of a woman?
How have the curves of shoes come to define me?

- ***Excerpt from personal journal reflections on self-explorations***

I. INTRODUCTION

here lies a map…

"In current cultural theory, "location" is imagined as an itinerary instead of a fixed point" (Conquergood, 2002: 145). If a map is a diagrammatic representation of an area, what happens when we map performativity and locate it in the body? The body, which represents this possible itinerary, can locate the various points where performativity becomes, sits, moves and travels, and once we locate these points, *how* do we find ways to depart from them, through performance as an enquiry?

This research attempts to get to the core of this question by exploring gender expectations of women in society and the various spaces they occupy daily with regards to their appearance and beauty. This enquiry considers performativity as a map, one that can be traced from one point to another, one that can be followed if you 'look' hard enough, and one that can possibly be redrawn once there is understanding of the written routes that have been placed on women's bodies without their permission. In this way, the body becomes the map in which performativity travels through, discovering the different directions, terrains, gradients, and the mountains and rivers where the body flows through and within lived bodily experiences of gendered acts[1]. Then finally, the objects are used as a map; every curve and bend on a pair of heels, in this research, indicates a journey, a route that ever so stereotypically leads to that of a 'woman'.

I explore the method of body-mapping as an entry point that departs from a phenomenological embodied experience, as mentioned with Whole-body mapping,

> "Whole-body mapping involves tracing around a person's body to create a life-sized outline, which is filled in during a creative and reflective process, producing an image representing multiple aspects of their embodied experience" (de Jager, et al., 2016: 2).

This embodied experience is the starting point which begins with the body and then unravels the roads that lead to gender performativity. This is what informs our perceptions and phenomenological lived bodily experiences.
By gender performativity, I refer to Butler's definition of performativity in that gender is performed and,

> "if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (Butler, 1988: 520).

Butler speaks to the 'construction' of identity that is continuous, internally. That the performative is followed 'mundanely', a repetitious act that society has come to accept over

[1] In relation to Judith Butler's definition of gender performativity, gendered acts as a woman includes actions such as wearing skirts, make-up, jewelry, sitting crossed legs, wearing feminine colors, etc.

time. This echoes the socio-historical structures of how women are perceived, as we are so used to the 'performance' as the social audience, that it has become the 'norm'.
This body-mapping – the exploration of embodied repetition attempts to re-look at the 'norm' and question what that actually means. Returning to the body means re-writing that map for ones' own body.

"Why do I do this?" – Workshop Participant #3

If I must *become* a woman before I can *be* a woman, I must be able to trace the process and journey of becoming on a map. A bodily map begins with the things I do and say, the things I choose to interact with and the way I see and perceive, right down to the way I feel, both physically and internally.

> "Body-mapping draws participants' attention to their bodies and embodied experience, encouraging awareness and reflection on that embodied experience" (de Jager, et al., 2016: 6).

Through the acknowledgement of performativity and the developing of an awareness through repeated gendered acts using stereotyped feminine objects[2], the research wants to find out whether the possibility of challenging perceptions and expectations of women that is influenced by pre-existing socio-historical structures[3] exists, in and through performance, and if so, *how* does it do this? Noting that performance is a bodily practice that produces meaning, and that performativity is where the performance of self is repeated and is dependent on a social audience we can then say that we are constantly producing meaning and performing our place in society in order to fit in to a specific expectation.

This knowledge was uncovered by a certain 'knowing by doing' and by considering its performance and perception as a phenomenological experience. The research is located in an embodied form of research and explores the ways in which the body produces knowledge in action, how this knowledge affects perception and the way gender performativity is experienced.

There is a link between embodied experiences and the way perception is formed. Merleau-Ponty details on perception and the connection it has to the body itself saying that,

> "it is not just contingently but *essentially* bodily. Perception is not a private mental event, nor is our own body just one more thing in the world alongside others. We are consequently in danger of losing sight of perception altogether when we place it on either side of the distinction between inner subjective experiences and external objective facts. Interior and exterior, mental and physical, subjective and objective – these notions are too crude and misleading to capture the phenomenon.

[2] Stereotyped objects such as high heels, lipstick, make-up, dresses and stockings. These are objects stereotypically worn or used by women. To be seen in them is to be defined as a woman. (Wolf, 2002)
[3] As by definition, involving a combination of social and historical factors. For example, the way history over time has portrayed the image of women and their role in society/societies.

> Perception is both intentional and bodily, both sensory and motor, and so, neither merely subjective nor objective, inner nor outer, spiritual nor mechanical" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: xiii).

The repeated acts of performing and 'becoming' our genders inform the way we see ourselves as well as the way we are perceived and experienced by other people's expectations of how we should present ourselves.

The mapping began with my own story and experience as a gendered body. The map led to a very specific moment in my own experience when I cut my hair into what is termed a 'boys cut'[4], and it was pointed out that it's not a very 'feminine' thing to do. And if I don't wear make-up, I am not as pretty as I could be as when I am wearing it. I then questioned what it meant to really pay attention to these 'acts' we perform and why they are so critical in defining women as feminine or just that – a woman. I noted that by paying close attention to the acts themselves, they revealed answers around disrupting gender performativity and perceptions.

> "***I cut my hair again yesterday, all of it – off. Strange, how I feel more like 'myself' without the thing that usually defines my gender or associates me with being 'feminine' or whatever is definable according to society. What does 'myself' mean? What does it even mean to be a woman? What makes me a woman, then? Am I mis-performing my gender by having cut my hair? When does my performativity become a performance? Who is it even for? The simple act of cutting my hair, of going against the 'norm' makes everyone question if I am still to be considered 'woman enough." (Personal Journal Entry – 31/03/2020)***

I had never considered myself as 'less of a woman' based on the way I dress – which is usually very masculine – or the shortness with which I choose to cut my hair. Until the moment it was pointed out by someone else that it's not feminine, I did not weigh my femininity on the make-up I wore or didn't wear, or the shoes I chose to wear, but that my 'womanness' is based on the fact that I identify as one. From that point forward, how I perceived myself as a woman was based on the feminine expectations that society have of women, specifically the expectation to dress and look a certain way in public spaces. It was not until engaging with other aspects and knowledge that I questioned the possibility of women existing fully and comfortably without the inherent need to perform their genders, based on external expectations.

I then began to explore the map of gender performativity and how a deliberate repetition of gendered acts with typically stereotyped gendered objects[5] can change perceptions of self as a woman. The research is set to map out performativity in order to find a path that can deconstruct and/or re-construct perceptions and challenge existing ideas of the effects this has on the individual woman. It interrogates these perceptions that she holds of her body, the way she should 'be' and how she presents herself to the world. With my experience as the starting point on the map, I wanted to work with various women to find out

[4] Similar to a brush cut. Very close shaven to the scalp.

[5] Gendered objects such as high heels, make-up, dresses, skirts, wigs, lipstick, stockings, etc.

if this experience is shared in any way. Perhaps, if I travelled this journey through and with my body and presented the same map for others to follow, will we experience the same 'views' on the way? I ask questions like: *is my experience mine because I depart from a trained performers' body? Can women who are not trained performers relate to this internal conflict of performativity? Can a similar map be drawn to link the parallel locations in women's bodies?*

Through a process of embodied workshops as well as a performance-based workshop, the research locates these various points in women who have similar lived bodily experiences of gender expectations. It is in finding the location in the bodily 'map' that we can find alternative ways of perceiving, of being, as women.

Women are faced with platitudes of rules, conditions, conventions, expectations and 'norms' that they have to follow and live up to. I have learned that I cannot simply exist as I please within my own body in this world. The way I had come to dress, walk, eat or be was learnt over time, constantly shifting to what the perception of women was, according to society, questioning whether I chose to 'be' this way or was this map chosen for me and I just followed it? At what point then do I find my own way of 'being' outside of the set map of performativity?

Despite the ever-changing times and trends, the 'ideal' woman is still being dictated to by the external – being shown the way on the performative map, as opposed to departing from the comfort and journey of the body itself. And perhaps, to some extent, is now being seen as 'less feminine'; but is femininity determined by what we wear or is it an internal cognisance? As noted by de Beauvoir,

> "So not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity. Is femininity secreted by the ovaries? Is it enshrined in a Platonic heaven? Is a frilly petticoat enough to bring it down to earth?" (de Beauvoir, 2011: 23).

This research enquires into this idea of femininity and 'womanness', traveling through the body, by using gendered objects in the workshops throughout the process.

"As much as we do things for ourselves, there's always a 'someone is going to look at me' or 'someone is going to have something to say." – Workshop Participant #4

The discovery as mentioned is a phenomenological one, therefore what was mapped looks different on each of the women's bodies. Once this was mapped out, I located the points where experiences, both embodied and visceral, intersected and became one. I then looked at these points to try and reconstruct a different way of perceiving one's own body as a woman through performance to see how these 'maps' can be redrawn and looked at outside of the societal expectations and perceptions. As mentioned by Dwight Conquergood on performance studies research, de Certeau says,

> "'what the map cuts up, the story cuts across'", also points to transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge: one official, objective, and abstract – "The map": the other one practical, embodied, and popular – "the story"" (Conquergood, 2002: 145).

This research saw the map also, as the existing expectations of women as gendered bodies, and the story, which is the phenomenological embodied, practical experience by the gendered lived body in society. The research hopes to find exactly how, in performance, this can be achieved, and how it can be achieved with other women.

Much work around feminism deals with the myths around beauty and societal expectations of what a woman should be like, look like and act like, however, this research considers these expectations first from an embodied experience, holding the body at the forefront of producing the knowledge it seeks answers for. Secondly, it departs from a phenomenological standpoint, that is the lived bodily experiences of women through use of repetition as an activation of conscious awareness. Women are still experiencing the oppression of societal expectations as noted by Naomi Wolf. She says that,

> "Many are ashamed to admit that such trivial concerns – to do with physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes – matter so much. But in spite of shame, guilt, and denial, more and more women are wondering if it isn't that they are entirely neurotic and alone but rather that something important is indeed at stake that has to do with the relationship between female liberation and female beauty" (Wolf: 2002: 9).

This research is important because feminism is still important. It is important because women are still attempting to find their voices in society. It is important because there is something deeper than the surface actions of women wanting to fit in, to be accepted and seen as a woman. Therefore, it aims to find ways of rewriting the map of performativity, to first experience it through an embodied process, consciously observing and questioning it and then finding the ways to deviate from it so as to find a point of efficacy, as women who are in complete ownership of their bodies and being, outside of gender performativity.

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

This research aims to navigate ways of freeing women's bodies from the presence of discomfort with themselves and the way they are expected to exist in the world; starting with the notion that "[we] women are not as free as we ought to be" (Young: 2005:2).

While the research is focusing attention on the *ways* in which women have to perform their gender to fit in, it also highlights ways in which it has stripped from women their autonomy of being. Performed acts which are predominantly noted as more feminine are mentioned by Iris Marion Young,

> "Normative femininity detaches persons who fall under its disciplines of the feminine, finally, aim to mask or subordinate the raw facts of embodiment, to make the body 'pretty' by constraining fluid flesh, masking its organic smells with perfumes, painting skin, lips, eyes, and hair that have lost their nubile luster" (Young, 2005: 5-6).

The performative act of being 'feminine' serves as a 'mask'. As Young puts it: by performing the acts of wearing perfume and make-up, we conceal the 'raw facts of embodiment'. This research, using the objects defined as feminine, went back to those 'raw facts of embodiment' and uncovered them in order to find a place where the body itself, regardless of the fact of it being a woman, can be whichever version of itself it finds most comfortable, without having to perform a gendered act or fulfil a gendered role for society.

Departing from my own self-exploration practice[6] as research using gendered objects, I then worked with the initial five women who are trained performers in an embodied workshop[7] process that is detailed in the following sections. The workshops look at the embodied experience of women, as performativity is a continuation of embodied acts, a repetition of acts[8] that should physically portray our gender as women. The aim of this is to uncover the ways in which repetition of gendered performative acts, as mentioned by Butler, shift and challenge perceptions of women through a sensorial, visceral, and psychological process of embodiment. de Jager refers to the body-mapping process as revealing certain ways of seeing, saying that,

> "It provides a means of representing social relationships and processes through body-maps and first narratives *testimonios*[9]. In cases where the phenomenon in question is associated with stigma in the community, body-mapping facilitates participants reclaiming or creating a preferred view of the body, thus bringing into question negative assumptions inherent in dominant narratives or ways of seeing" (de Jager, et al., 2016: 5).

I then use the findings gathered from the embodied workshops to create a performance that focuses on how the performance is perceived and experienced and how the repetition of acts informs perceptions through a collective embodied performance workshop[10].
The collective embodied performance workshop looks at performativity as a woman through repetition of gendered acts, using gendered objects. It also looks at how this plays a role in the way we perceive ourselves and constantly create an oppressive state of discomfort in order to satisfy societies perception of women.

Merleau-Ponty mentions in his writings on the phenomenology of perception, that "an existential phenomenological approach aims to speak from the point of view of the constituted subject's experience" (Young, 2005: 8). It is that subjective embodied experience

[6] The initial self-embodied process (March – September 2020) I went through to establish the gendered acts and performativity, mapping the lived bodily experience on my own body first. This established a base to work with other women in the embodied workshops to draw parallels on their and my experience as a woman.
[7] The workshop process (October - November 2020) with 5 women that included series of repeated embodied gendered acts, such as putting on make-up, nail polish, putting on and walking in heels, etc.
[8] The repeated acts we perform daily as women. Putting on make-up every day, waxing every day, etc.
[9] The narratives that accompany body-maps, termed by GASTALDO et al. (2012).
[10] The final location on the map. The collective performance workshop was developed from the findings of the embodied workshop and involved 5 different women who were not trained performers. The women were collectively performing as well as witnessing a performance that highlighted performativity.

that allows for a different way of perceiving. Thus, it answers the question of 'how' performance and performativity challenges perceptions of women's bodies from a self-perception as well as an external one.

The collective performance explores this possibility further, as the audience are required to watch, perceive, perform and make judgements on what they see and feel at any given moment, but also, that the performance begins to make them aware that these perceptions pre-exist before they have even perceived and made meaning out of them.

The basis of perception that I refer to is the one that Merleau-Ponty proposes stating that "Perception is not a "mental" event, for we experience our own sensory states not merely as states of *mind*, but as states of our bodies and our bodily behaviors" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: xiv).
This reiterates informed perceptions through bodily acts or 'behaviors'. By exploring an awareness of the body in a repetition of pre-conceived acts, I want to see ***how*** one can uncover and reveal notions of performing one's gender as a woman according to what is expected. As Fleishman notes, performance as research,

> "is the desire to make conscious, to become aware from within the midst of the endless process of becoming and then to attempt to translate this for others through a variety of modalities. This requires a kind of perceptual still point, a slowing down or thickening of the ongoing, of the flow, so as to surface the differences in the spaces in-between" (Fleishman, 2012: 35).

It is this consciousness that I come to in the repetition, or slowing down of the embodied acts I perform with the putting on and taking off of the shoes. The action also makes me consider perception as an informed action, and that the way I see myself is based on an informed image of how I am 'supposed' to look as a woman. This process also made me aware of the mode of reflection in action. As mentioned by Grant,

> "the aim is to find a basis for a way of knowing, which is not the propositional knowledge of knowing-that, not the technical knowledge of knowing how, but a knowledge produced in, by and as performance and practice research, a knowledge which exists only in the performance of the action itself, a temporary, continually decomposing and recomposing response to the circumstance of the moment" (Grant, 2019: 63).

This knowing by doing, that Grant mentions, is what the research uncovers. The consciousness of the act itself opened up space for questions to rise through the body first.

Where many feminism and embodied theories and research deal with gender performativity and performative acts as well as the possibility of gender transformation found in those very acts, the focus in this research has been on "a different sort of repeating or a breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (Butler, 1998: 520). There has also been a theory on how one acts and uses one's body, based on the societal expectations and the fear of being punished for not performing with the body as expected in those spaces. Other theories show

how these conventions continue to situate women's bodies as gendered and therefore continue to be perceived within those very same boundaries (Butler, 1998: 520).

This research however, looks at phenomenology and gender through an embodied experience of repeated acts in order for the experience itself to inform the change in self-perception that takes place. Then, we see how that self-perception expands outwards to the way we witness other women's bodies and the way they choose to be, based on the way they dress or choose to appear physically. It is a continuous flow between the external and internal processes of conscious awareness. This becomes important to the comfort of women and the way they exist in the world. It is not based on the way they hope others can make them feel, but it begins with what makes them feel comfortable, first and foremost, and not that they are obligated to 'live their bodies' according to the expectations of women set by society.

CONTENT & CONTRIBUTION

This research is based on the theory and research on performance studies, gender performativity and phenomenology. The reason for using this as a point of departure is to look at how gender performativity constructs certain perceptions that women have of themselves and of their bodies and at the possibilities of *how* performance as a phenomenological experience can act as an agent for challenging and shifting those perceptions.

This research argues that performance and embodied practices can change or alter perceptions by revealing performativity through repetition of an embodied experience, witnessing and foregrounding conscious awareness in the moment of a 'happening' and in the details of how that takes place.

Richard Schechner looks at performance studies, in his book, as "a practice, a theory and an academic discipline" (Schechner, 2013: ix). Schechner defines performance as something that can "mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories" (Schechner, 2013:28) He points to the possibilities that performance creates and how it re-creates moments and identities using the body. If performance can reshape and adorn bodies, then this means performance is fictitious and can abandon what truly is in and of the body. He goes on to say that:

> "everyday life also involves years of training and practice, of learning appropriate culturally specific bits of behavior, of adjusting and performing one's life roles in relation to social and personal circumstances" (Schechner, 2013 :29).

Schechner then describes everyday life as a performance, that we all perform a certain way in order to please certain standards, to fit in or to adapt to the mold of social expectations. In other words, we are constantly performing even when we are unaware of it because it is deemed the 'natural' order or way for us to live in the world. This also means that there are preexisting structures that we are required to follow or to 'perform' in order to function or be recognized in society. This is crucial to my research as I argue that our everyday performing becomes performative in that the performance of self is repeated and dependent on a social audience, which by itself is the definition of performativity. In this way, women are expected

to perform in a very specific way according to their gender.

I then consider what it means to trace that performativity, to distill it, to map it out through the body in order to see how it can challenge the way the body is viewed as gendered. When the acts with objects are repeated and then disrupted through a conscious questioning, how are the expectations of self, shifted or changed?

Judith Butler also writes extensively on gender and performativity and expands on this notion of performativity in her essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution', where she writes on how gender did not simply exist, but that it was created by means of repeated acts. She states that,

> "…to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of women, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (Butler, 1988: 522).

This affirms that being a woman in the world has come about by 'becoming' a woman. I also look at the word 'becoming' as being suitable or appropriate, which is what is expected of women in the way they act, dress or look. de Bevouire affirms this when she states that

> "woman is not a fixed reality, but a becoming; she must be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her possibilities have to be defined" (de Beauvoire, 2011: 68).

This points to the woman in comparison to men, having to define herself through a process of 'becoming' in order to be seen as opposed to just 'being' as she pleases. She must 'put on' the make up to 'become' a woman, or 'put on' the heels to 'become' a woman. She is not 'fixed' just by *being*, she must perform the reality of '*becoming*' a woman.
The word 'induce' also suggests that this is a forced action that 'becomes' with time and the repetition thereof creates footpath on the map in the way of perceiving the body. There seems to be a 'map' that has been created over time that has to be followed in order to 'become' a woman. She also says that,

> "gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1988: 519).

Here, she posits that gender only exists as far as the physical acts that preceded it are fulfilled. It is through the acts of the body that one is recognized as a woman and through the same acts the body constantly reinstates the expectations of those acts. In the repetition, the body becomes a signifier to something that has previously been established and is therefore perceived in a certain manner.

Then, if it is through the stylization of the body that gender is constituted, it should be through the body that it is being re-mapped, re-drawn and re-structured. This is done by means of *repeating* the stylization to the extent that it is highlighted and consciously

questioned. This research returns to the very thing, the body, as the starting point in order to answer the question of 'how'.

To further uncover the experiences of the body, I refer to Merleau-Ponty who writes on the Phenomenology of Perception and focuses on how the body holds certain knowledge that can only come about through a phenomenological experience and that perception is relative to that experience. Butler also quotes Merleau-Ponty where he refers to the body as:

> "a set of possibilities to be realized…that its appearance in the world, for perception, is not predetermined by some manner of interior essence, and that its concrete expression in the world must be understood as the taking up and rendering specific of a set of historical possibilities" (Butler, 1988: 521).

In other words, the way the body is perceived is based on already existing perceptions created by various historical and social structures, similar to Butler's ideas on gender performativity. This is important to my research in relation to the pre-conceptions that exist when women's bodies are perceived. The expectations of what they should wear, look like and how they present themselves physically, is based on already existing structures in society which makes it difficult for perceptions to be unique, or as Merleau-Ponty defines it, as phenomenological.

Therefore, in this performance as research enquiry, I look at the possibility of replacing that perception with one that is not based on already existing assumptions of what women should or shouldn't look like in society, specifically with regards to how they physically appear to the world. Through repeated acts of those expectations, the bodily experience of those acts began to lead to a new way of perceiving – in a sense, the body 'maps' its' own way of *being* through movement, experience and discovery of how the body itself feels.

Also, because experience is phenomenological, women's experience of existing in the world is unique and their perceptions of themselves have the potential to change; therefore, undoing the need for performativity to please the societal expectations of how they should present themselves and be. Husserl states,

> "phenomenology calls us to return, to the things themselves…the ideal (abstract) forms and contents of experience as we live them, not as we have learned to conceive and describe them according to categories of science or opinion" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: 8).

This research then calls for a phenomenological approach in performance in that it requires a new way of experiencing and perceiving women's bodies, that have been looked at and gazed upon for decades in the same manner, and that robs them of any sort of agency. This follows Husserl who describes returning to the thing itself - the body - and experiencing it as it is, outside of expectations or preconceived notions of what it should be. Perhaps if we find a way of returning back to the thing itself, we could recreate the ways in which our bodies as women are perceived.

I explore this by first mapping the way it has been done in order to question how can the body find itself, how can it re-route, if it may, to a way of being comfortable outside of

the gendered acts we perform. If consciousness is theorized as embodied by Merleau-Ponty, then perhaps that is the key to challenging perceptions – *a consciousness that arises through a repetition of embodiment.*

Merleau-Ponty describes phenomenology in this way, saying that "the phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012: xx). This is precisely what the research aims to do through performance: the laying down of *being* through mapping it, undoing it and finding the essence of being outside of gendered expectations in order to abandon the road we so long have followed in order to find our own as individual women. This reflects back to Performance Phenomenology by Stuart Grant as he states that,

> "This is the most important factor in the phenomenology of performance. First, phenomenology aims to be a revelatory participation in the moment. Temporally, performativity distinguishes itself as the cleaving of the action or the utterance to the moment of its coming-forth. The performative moment is the utterance or the event which does what it says, the collapse of action and meaning. Phenomenology implicitly holds a promise to gain access to this performative moment, as methodological insinuation into the moment of coming-forth, speaking from the experience, opening it up and bringing it back for reflection" (Grant, 2019: 30).

The importance of this as performance as research comes to the forefront in the relationship that performativity has with phenomenology. If performativity is that 'cleaving' to the action, the deliberate repetition of action that this research is embedded in, then the phenomenological experience lies in that coming-forth. Once the pathway of performativity has been mapped, the body will experience the collapse of that action and meaning and find a new way of looking and experiencing the action outside of expectations, through a conscious awareness of those actions. He goes on to say that,

> "Moreover, this structure reveals phenomenology as a performative act in itself; a method which is implicated in the intrigue of the coming-forth, making it a potentially powerful tool for bringing force and clarity to the understanding of the much-debated and misunderstood question of the ontology of performance" (Grant, 2019: 30).

I also look at Marion Iris Young and her collection of essays that looks at different aspects of women's everyday lived bodily experiences. If anything, this body of work pieces together the strings of the aforementioned writers when it comes to the possibilities that lie in embodied research and my area of enquiry. Young writes that,

> "the image of woman has not ceased being that of the Other: the surface that reflects fantasies and fears arising from our human being as vulnerable bodies. Just because images and expectations about women make us asymmetrically associated with sex, birth, age, and flesh, we have little voice to express our own point of view on this fleeting existence or on the social relations that position us" (Young, 2005: 3).

It is that form of agency, the 'voice', that the research uncovers and explores. This also touches on Merleau-Ponty where he refers to phenomenology and the call it has on experiencing things as we 'live them' through our bodies and **not** according to how we have been taught to live them.

Young also writes on the fear that we women carry in relation to our bodies and the sense we have of needing to protect the body from getting hurt when performing any sort of act or working with our bodies so that,

> "we often experience our bodies as a fragile encumbrance, rather than the medium for the enactment of our aims. We feel as though we must have our attention directed upon our bodies to make sure they are doing what we wish them to do, rather than paying attention to what we want to do through our bodies" (Young, 2005: 34).

This speaks back to the idea of agency and choice and the lack thereof in women who are just 'being' in their bodies. The focus seems to be one of expectation on what needs to be done in order to protect oneself from the 'judgement' that Butler also acknowledges in gender performativity.

The consciousness of what our bodies want to do and achieve takes the back burner and we do not allow that to be our first encounter of experience for our lived bodies in the world. We simply follow the 'map' that has been written out for us rather than identifying our own bodily map.

So then, in order to solve the issue of the perception of women's bodies, we must return to the body itself, as the answers to uncovering lie in the body itself as it re-figures the way it exists through a conscious questioning of repetition. The body speaks once you allow it to.

II. METHODOLOGY

Grounded in performance as research as a method, and taking on an embodied approach, the outcome is discovered in practice throughout the research process itself. I use this research method to explore this topic because of the interplay between performance and performativity as mentioned in the introduction.

It is also the very idea of repetition in performativity that this research maps out in order to achieve a consciousness in the moment of it happening, to challenge perceptions. As mentioned by Stuart Grant, the link between the performative and the phenomenological "lies in an understanding of a type of knowledge which is processual and practical, that is to say, ever unfolding in practice" (Grant, 2019: 7).

The research is transformative and phenomenological in its outcome and approach and starts with a self-narrative exploration, using performance phenomenology of my own embodied experience as a woman first, and as a trained performer second. I reflect on my own experience and understanding of my gender as a woman and knowledge of performance. It then explores this further through the embodied workshops and a collective performance workshop with ten women.

I entered this process with the acknowledgement that my experience of 'being' a woman is not every women's experience of that being, but that on some level, there is a shared experience with certain gendered 'acts' that exist and that are attributed to 'living the body out' as a woman.

As Sonia Kruks recommends,

> "phenomenological descriptions of lived body experience as an important resource for feminist projects of social criticism and transformation…Descriptions of lived female and feminine experience can reveal reasons that differently situated women may have to sympathize with one another's embodied situation, while at the same time remaining sufficiently vague to allow for concrete variation" (Young, 2005: 9).

The intention is to draw on these very similarities and the differences that may arise, and to note parallels where the experience of gender performativity is apparent, thus creating a map that could be departed from for further enquiry into gender performativity as a whole and finally, to deconstruct perceptions of women's bodies.

The embodied workshops focus on the phenomenological experience that arises through a repetition of gendered performative acts with the objects. These performative acts included putting on high-heeled shoes, putting on make-up, removing make-up, brushing/fixing hair, wearing a wig, putting on nail polish, removing nail polish, using wax strips, putting on stockings, wearing a dress, and various other actions with objects that are considered 'feminine' and relate to performing a role in society as a woman. These objects were chosen by the women themselves, prompted by the request to bring objects they considered as 'feminine'.

The aim is to bring them to a conscious awareness of performativity in the workshops and with the feedback on their experience, they come into that consciousness and how this may have affected the way they perceive these acts before and after embodying them repeatedly in a short space of time. The workshop functioned as a way to see *how* performance as an embodied experience yielded a change in conscious awareness and perception of themselves as women.

The play on embodied repetition was used as a tool to generate awareness in the form of embodied cognition and this was the focus of the workshops. By exploring repetition of performative acts with the body and gendered objects using questioning and remembering, the method enquires how one is able to become aware of expectations through a consciousness of performativity and then shift perceptions of performing one's gender outside of those expectations. The repetitive acts tapped into the memory of the participants, as the repetition of the action heightened the senses and caused a memory to arise either from the senses or the physical act itself. This outcome was one that I did not expect but noted that across all five women in the embodied workshop spoke of a moment that brought back a memory because of the task or action they were doing – to a time where they first encountered the object they were interacting with or a time when they first learnt about its' relation to women. John Sutton writes on embodied remembering and mentions that "the

body can also be a cue or trigger for personal memory experiences, where this can occur either deliberately or unintentionally" (Sutton, 2014: 4). This bodily map then also holds pathways to memories that can be traced back to where these expectations began.

The data and feedback received from the workshops then informed the final collective performance workshop that took place. This performance workshop was an hour and fifteen minutes long and watched by five women. These were not the women from the embodied workshops and they were not formally trained, they were also not within a fixed age group. This was to expand the existing knowledge that came from the workshops and to see whether the lived bodily experience is the same between women regardless of their performance knowledge and whether the possibilities of perceptions being challenged exist in and through embodied phenomenological experiences.

I fully acknowledged the fact that age, experience and sexual orientation, among other factors, could play a part in the differences in perception of how these women perceive and carry themselves in spaces and I address this in the following section when describing the actual events that took place. However, as highlighted by phenomenological and embodied performance practices, the body's experience is one that cannot lie, when responding to the sensory and visceral experience of the body so that, on some level, there is a similar map that we as women depart from.

RESEARCH PROCESS DESCRIPTION

1. ***Self-exploration – the beginning of the map***

As mentioned previously, this began with a self-narrative embodied positioning. It began with stylised[11] gendered acts, for example, how women are taught to sit, how to walk and talk and listening to the body when these acts are repeated over a set amount of time. The process used objects and/or clothes that affects these gendered acts. For instance, how I sit when I wear a skirt as opposed to when I wear pants or how I walk when I wear heels as opposed to when I wear sneakers.

During the process of practice as research with these various objects, the heels became a prominent factor for me as I noted it affects not only my physical stance but that, over time, with repetition, it affects my internal processing of questioning once I had discovered the discomfort felt in my body. I realized that I was contorting my body in an unnatural way in order to conform to the status quo of 'appearing' as a woman, as feminine. The process was carried out in front of a mirror which, I later realized, had an effect on my conscious processing of what I saw. Seeing myself 'become' a woman repeatedly in the doing, seeing the ways in which my body shifts and changes along with the discomfort of the shoes caused me to want to disrupt or stop the action. At times the make-up made me pay particular attention to things I normally wouldn't, like how the lipstick looks on the lips when I stroke it sideways or upwards. Seeing myself interact with the objects allowed the objects to be distilled as they interacted with my body. It also added the layer of an external gaze; what

[11] As by definition, something that is given a distinctive design or appearance. Referring to a specific way that things must be done.

I see in the mirror is what others will see and that is how I judge myself with regards to how I 'should' appear to the world.

With this, I developed questions that would probe deeper into uncovering why certain acts are done as women, how it makes us feel, when these shifts seem to happen and how then do we begin from the body, comfort and personal want and not from the expectation of how society wants us to appear. This process of self-questions and answers forms the basis of the questions and process that I took into the embodied workshops in order to trace on the map the paths of the women which were similar to my own journey. These questions are provided in the appendix of this report.

2. ***Embodied workshops – location points on the map***

"My feet look lovely in it, but it's not comfortable." – Workshop Participant #5

The workshop consisted of a single one-on-one 2-hour session with each participant. The participants were a group of five women between the ages of 26-30 who all have a background as trained performers and identify as women but who do not all necessarily identify as having a heteronormative sexual orientation. I was not focused on their sexual orientation but, in the process note how the body may perform as a woman within certain aspects and expectations when utilizing gendered objects. These enabled them to begin to unpack their lived experience through performance, and led to the mapping of gender performativity and the societal expectations regardless of their sexual orientation.

The participants were asked to bring 3 objects[12] that ***they*** considered feminine as well as a pair of high heels. The participants also carried out the entire process in front of a mirror to see whether the same thoughts and consciousness arose in them as in my self-exploration.

"I wear eyeliner so when people see me, they can say, 'Okay, this is a girl, there's still some parts of her that she keeps being a girl." – Workshop Participant #4

The approach of the workshops was the fact that they are women ***first*** before they are performers. I specifically chose women who are trained performers within that age group to have a basis in relation to my own experience as a woman and as a trained performer who understands the complexities of performance within a similar time frame of experience, over lived years.

"The objects make you feminine, not the fact that you're a woman." – Workshop Participant #1

The embodied workshops focused on the phenomenological experience that arises through a repetition of gendered performative acts with objects relating to performing a role in society as a woman, as mentioned: make-up, high heels, skirts, wigs, lipstick and dresses. The acts were informed by what each participant brought on the day according to what they consider feminine, so there was no pre-empting of the acts, and the questions were general enough to

[12] Objects included: nail polish, dresses, skirts, wax strips, make-up, sandals, wigs, lipstick, stockings, jumpsuits and high heels.

be applied to any object, with the exception of some questions prompting other questions that had not been prepared.

"This was my favorite pair of heels because they were the most comfortable for me, but this just made me realize how impractical they are. I was constantly adjusting me feet. I never noticed I did that before now. Why do I do this? What is it about these heels makes me feel more feminine?" – Workshop Participant #3

The heels were the last object that the participants interacted with, four out of the five women considered heels as feminine and as an object that can be used to identify or describe a 'woman'. The heels present the participants with the immediate realization, both physically and consciously, of physical shifts, discomfort and questioning. It was also through the repetition of putting on and taking off the shoes that all the participants felt a need to abandon the act and bring into question why wearing heels is something they put themselves through if it is so uncomfortable.

"It hurts, but I look cute though." – Workshop Participant #1

A conscious awareness of performativity is brought to the forefront during these workshops and their feedback on their experience as they come into that consciousness. This information was highlighted and gathered. How this consciousness affects the way they perceive these acts, before and after embodying them repeatedly in a short space of time, was voice recorded and transcribed through written notes for data that was used in the final collective performance. The workshops function as a way to see how performance, as an embodied experience for them, yields a change in conscious awareness and the perception of themselves as women.

3. Collective embodied performance – a continued destination on the map[13]

The performance was titled "*Becoming and Un-Becoming*", which is a play on Butler's idea on 'being a woman, is to become one'. The performance highlights the process of becoming and what it potentially means to un-become – is it truly an 'un-becoming'? This is framed as a collective embodied performance workshop that takes place in a 2-hour session with a different group of five women who are not trained performers and not within any set age group, however, identify as women.

The data collected from the embodied workshops was transcribed, analysed and explored in and through the embodied collective performance workshop that intended to highlight the explored findings and perceptions of these five women in order to provoke a new way of experiencing and perceiving gender performativity. The performance was not rehearsed, in order to continue the phenomena and discovery of the journey itself. The experience must be in the moment, the body must not be prepared for the journey, it must only begin and find its

[13] The destination may change along the way as this experience in practice *continues* to yield more possibilities of sameness and differences beyond this research itself.

way in the doing, in order to find a new way. It was simply set up in a way that enabled these gendered acts to be performed out in the context of 'becoming' a woman.

Heels lined up, women's clothing items hanging on a rack, a mirror and a table with make-up, wax strips, nail polish, lipstick and a wig on it. All these objects used in the performance were objects that the initial five women had brought to the embodied workshops. Working with those objects allowed me to frame an overall perception of what a woman has to go through in order to become a woman, based on the five women's performativity of 'becoming'. Again, a mapping out of the objects allowed me to follow the journey in and through the objects.

The collective performance took place in 3 parts:

1. The women were required to bring a pair of heels to the collective performance as this became a prominent object in the self-narrative exploration as well as the workshops. This group was not told to bring the most 'feminine' object, they were just asked to bring high heels so there is no correlation between heels and femininity for them when they entered the space. The questions were to be asked after the experience and process itself. They were asked to put on the heels, stand up, and then remove them and this action was repeated a few times. Each time between the act, they were asked questions about the heels on 3 levels, what they saw, what they felt and in turn what that made them consciously think with regards to the act they were performing. This was to ground the women's bodily experience first and to establish a relationship between the heels and their understanding, both physically and internally. It also was to bring awareness to the sensations that come with this activity and to heighten their consciousness to the moment they are experiencing.
2. The women then witnessed a solo performance in the form of hyper-realism[14] that I performed centred around the gendered performative acts done in order to 'become' a woman.
3. A question and answer discussion took place after the collective performance on the audience's experience in the moment of the performative acts and any additional phenomenological findings that arose during the witnessing in relation to their repeated acts at the beginning of the session.

The intention of the collective performance experience was to get feedback from the participants not just on the witnessing but on having had an embodied experience too. The performance was deliberate in its' set up of having the women witness a 'becoming' in an action that was familiar, a performance because it was on stage but also a performance because *I* am having to 'become'.

The intention of having it set in a theatre was to link for the participants the connection between performance and performativity and to ground the understanding of gender as a performance. Not acknowledging the women in the audience throughout the

[14] Bringing the actor and the story out from the illusion of the stage and performance space and connect them with every-thing in the real world as if it's not a work of fiction any more, as if what is happening is happening in real time and life. (Gelderman, C. 1983)

process allowed them to cross, for themselves, the boundary between witnessing and also to help them realize that the performer is also the audience. The double crossing that happens is linked to Prentki as he speaks on border crossing in Applied Theatre saying, "But before the crossing can occur the border has to be recognized" (Prentki, 2009: 251). The metaphor of crossing the border is beautifully described by Prentki and is an important thing to acknowledge when we enter into spaces where differences and similarities may exist. There are certain borders that first need to be seen and acknowledged before attempting to cross them to get to the other side. This performance acts as that border on the map and is being made visible in performance in order for the participants to first see in it order to cross to the other side of the map.

The familiarity of what is happening on stage is so close to home that the questioning isn't "Why is *she* putting herself through all that" but rather, "Why do *I* also put myself through this?". There is also a layer of voice overs that began to play halfway through the performance which was gathered data from the embodied workshops. The voice overs are responses by the initial women on how they felt in certain moments of becoming and un-becoming. This adds another layer of consciousness; in that what is being said is familiar, and while the 'becoming' is taking place, what is heard prompts space for more questioning of why I am continuing if this is how I feel internally? The quotes that are in this report are like a pit-stop on the map to some of those un-coverings, to convey the idea of taking a moment to reflect on what was being discovered.

My back was towards the audience to create a double witnessing. They see me seeing myself, but they also see me as I see myself in the mirror. They see the reflection in the mirror. They have a moment to choose to witness the physical being and the one being perceived and the corrections that are being made - fixing my lipstick, eyeliner, etc., this can only be seen in the mirror by the woman. It created a 'falseness', the need to so desperately fix the *image* which I see as opposed to trusting the body in its' comfort in the moments before I had to 'become'.

We don't only pay attention to our bodies from an internal awareness but through the perception of others, and therefore we are constantly adjusting ourselves to their expectations of being in the world. It points to the idea that "being seen is a perception of myself through the eyes of others" (Fraleigh, 2019: 87).

The performance had a sense of irony about it in that it is 'not a performance' but a process of the everyday woman becoming a woman and the series of acts that must be done in order to become - however, there is the other side of this, the 'un-becoming' and having the women witness this in order to also trigger a consciousness through seeing. They witness me become but they also see me *un-become*, undress and strip myself from the very objects I placed on my body. This however, does not take away from them the knowledge that I am a woman due to me introducing myself as one on arrival. Does that then change when the objects are removed from my body? Just because I am 'un-becoming', I am not stripped from my 'womanness'. As mentioned by Grant that,

> "being seen is an experience consciously initiated in performance, and that there is intention and agency in being seen … [] … being seen is ultimately about seeing as well" (Grant, 2019: 89-91).

Them seeing me perform is in a sense of self-perception as well; I give the participants permission to see me as a performer, to witness what is unfolding, to witness me 'becoming' and 'un-becoming', but in the same sense, they are witnessing 'real life', a relation between what they are seeing and what they have experienced and embodied as well.

The desire to be seen is about seeing - "seeing as sensing, and also seeing as feeling and experiencing" (Grant, 2019: 98). Because it is a phenomenological experience through the senses, it brings awareness through the witnessing of repetition, and of having a relationship with the activities that are happening.

The documentation of the embodied workshops and performance took various forms, including video recordings, voice recordings and hand-written information.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS & INSIGHTS

Having grounded the research in phenomenology and performance, the experiences and feedback from both the participants and myself were transcribed and mapped out. Each journey was compared and observed as individual experiences but also as a collective to see where the similarities and differences can be connected and questioned with regards to how these perceptions shift in performance.

Many questions[15] arose along the way that were answered throughout the process. In asking what happens when gendered objects are mapped with embodied acts and how this influences consciousness, the answer lay in the awareness and questioning thereof and in the moment of its' happening.

It is through the conscious awareness of each repeated act, the listening to the visceral and sensorial moments of interaction with the body that these women could step back and question why they had a perceived relationship with the objects in their 'becoming' a woman. They came to understand a sense of freedom outside of performing a role with the objects they use almost every day. Below, I map out the findings and insights from each location of the research respectively: the self-exploration, embodied workshops and the collective embodied performance.

1. Self-exploration

The research asks *how* is it possible to change those perceptions when there is a conscious awareness of these performed repeated acts? It is through a questioning thereof before and after the act; a moment of pause to reflect and feel what the body's response to the act is. I

[15] Questions include:
1. "Do women feel less feminine in sneakers than in heels? Why is this?"
2."Do women up-keep their appearance so they feel uncomfortable with themselves or because they don't want to be made to feel uncomfortable by someone else?"
3. "Do women regard femininity and 'womanness' as equally relative?" Why or why not?"
4. "How does the body express femininity versus womanness?" Is there a difference?
5. "Do we pay attention to things we generally wouldn't of when repetition is slowed down?"
6. "How does the repetition of gendered acts heighten physical senses and consciousness in a way that influences perceptions of self? Is it informed by the body or through the object used with/on the body?"

find that there is a way to understand the pathway that leads us to believe what we 'have to' do in order to be seen as a woman. How then does the shift and change in perception happen? When the gendered acts are slowed down and intentional repetition of the acts are highlighted and then questioned in the moment of it's happening, the conscious awareness begins to notice the 'landscape' of what is. The conscious is able to trace what the body is feeling through that slowing down and repetition. It uncovers the locations where our perceptions first became imprinted in our 'being', in order for us to step back and challenge those very same perceptions we have been living with all along. It takes place through the process, within the process - it is the process itself, the journey through the bodily map, that allows for the possibility of the shift in perception to take place. These acts became a prominent point to take note of when I began unintentionally going against them in my own embodied research practice.

The specific activity that is distilled in my embodied practice was one of repeatedly putting on high heeled shoes in three different paces and each time it allowed me to notice a different aspect of awareness. This informed the process for the embodied workshops and collective performance.

On the first level: What is seen - seeing the shoe immediately makes me mentally prepare to be walking in it, as if I already subconsciously expect the discomfort ahead and adjust myself to dealing with it.

On the second level: What is felt - slowing down the activity in repetition, I begin to pay attention to the actual sensations in my feet. How the shoes feel on my feet, how my feet feel on the floor, or when I take the shoes off and allow that to inform my level of comfort or discomfort.

Then finally, **on the third level:** My thought process - This becomes apparent when the activity is sped up and I begin to feel frustrated because the action starts feeling forced. It feels forced because I establish my discomfort in the shoes and cannot see the reason to then continue putting them on.

The repeated actions allow me to consider these three levels of awareness and to understand the knowledge that comes to the forefront: being a woman that is perceived, and perceiving other women in a specific way. This awareness allows me to locate the point on the map at which I believe I need to put on certain things in order to become a woman, question it and return back to the body and how the body is comfortable within its being - without having a tangible physical gendered object to define me as a woman.

2. *Embodied workshops*

The embodied workshops as a whole, were drawn up alongside each other in the sense of each woman's experience. There was a clear journey not just throughout each act of putting on and taking off of the objects they brought, but a journey that happened ***'in-between'***. The *in-between* of putting on and taking off, the moment of preparation, of taking a breath,

reflecting, of choosing to look in the mirror when they have 'become' and 'un-become', or before they begin to become.

Questions were asked after each act of putting on and taking off that prompted deeper awareness of what they were feeling or thinking in each moment. The participants all shared that the awareness of the task itself made them pay more attention to the process. Questions such as the sensations felt on the skin, physical shifts they noted when wearing certain objects, what they enjoyed about the process and whether they felt different each time they had to repeat the act. These questions were asked to find the 'in the moment' experience of each individual in order to then map the similarities of each.

All the participants felt an immediate heightened physical shift when wearing heels, they also felt the most physical sensation against or on the feet with heels, and they all were brought to the question of comfort/practicality versus appearance. The repetition of acts allowed the participants to distill each moment, so that, in each moment as mentioned above in my self-exploration of the process, a different level of awareness comes to play. The participants were told each time what to pay more attention to in order to awaken that focus point; as participant #4 noted: "we are always performing, but we've done this so much that we feel like it's us". Therefore, when the performing is highlighted, there is a realization that this has never been us. That it has been the actions - the act - that offers the illusion of us as women, just like witnessing ourselves 'become' in the mirror. If the becoming is in the action, when we are not performing our gendered expectations through these objects, we are simply being. So then, isn't being a woman just that, to ***be*** one?

3. *Collective embodied performance*

I deliberately framed this collective performance in a theatre space because of the interplay between performance and performativity, as previously mentioned. Focused on the practice or act of performance,

> "it is a series of embodied repetitions in time, on both micro (bodies, movements, sounds, improvisations, moments) and macro (events, productions, projects, installations) levels in search of a series of differences" (Fleishman, 2012: 28).

The importance of this framing was important for the audience as it affected the way they experience what was seen, in the moment of it happening. These participants are not trained performers and they were also quite different in their outlook and initial expression of what a woman 'looks' like with regards to external appearance versus internal qualities and characteristics. In this instance, the understanding of what 'performative' is, is not as strong as it would be with a trained performer, but these participants speak directly from their lived experience as they know it to be.

I found that age also influences the way they view themselves as women, as the older participants cared less about how people viewed them when they are not wearing make-up or not 'acting feminine'. Is this possibly due to having lived and experienced things

differently[16]? I questioned if experience has an effect on the way women see themselves and others? One of the participants responded to this by saying that perhaps being a mother influences the way she sees herself in relation to how others may see her appearance in the world. So, what is it then that makes *me* care less about having short hair at my age? This research would have to proceed on a more focused aspect on these factors in order to answer these questions.

However, the physical and visceral feelings which were shared by the participants during the activity of putting on and taking off the heels, confirms the concept that the body speaks when performing these gendered acts. A shift is noticed through embodied awareness in a moment of performativity which calls to the senses, body memory plus the thoughts that come from the movement/task itself rather than the motivation for that movement.

The moment of discomfort and awareness brings them to the realization that being a woman and being feminine is an *internal* reality. The objects do not define a woman, but rather, a woman can be defined by certain qualities, such as strength, confidence and surety, which did not come up at all with the first group of workshop participants. These differences are ones that must be noted and can be mapped further in order to uncover the possible influence this has on the perception of women.

This collective performance became a tool to both discover and create a space of uncovering these similarities and differences through the phenomenology of the performance itself and the possibilities that exist when repetition is experienced and observed over a short period of time. As mentioned by Grant, "Phenomenology holds that perception, including self-perception, is a receptive activity that portends agency" (Grant: 2019: 89).

By looking at my embodied experience of being a woman and finding it mirrored in the participants experience, by repeating it in an active performance that is aware of itself as a performance that involves a level of performativity, allowed me to realize why I feel the need to be doing this action in order to show I am indeed a woman - even at the expense of my own comfort. These are the discoveries which were made and which continue to be made, through the practice of embodied acts that inform what is seen - perception, what is felt – senses, and thinking - conscious awareness.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the possibilities of *how* perceptions can be challenged lies in the body itself, not just in the way we physically see, but also in the way we experience and 'live' within our bodies. Perception as a phenomenological experience is simultaneously physical, visceral and psychological. It leads to a conscious awareness of what is taking place in that very moment through and with the body. Embodied repetition of gendered acts with objects mediate a space for conscious awareness and questioning to take place in order to start with the body

[16] The issue around age and experience came up in the collective embodied performance, as women who were older and were mothers were less concerned with societal expectations of their appearance as women. This posits that perhaps over time of lived experiences, once could possibly 'un-become' as one cares more about other responsibilities and prioritizing 'self' over others' opinions and thoughts.

itself and how it feels when interacting with these objects. The body, in protest[17], is an indicator that one does not need to 'perform' in order to *be* a woman.

Ultimately, performance holds the power to alter perceptions of self and how we perceive women's bodies. The research reveals that the objects we embody do not make us less or more of a woman in any way; in fact, these may simply be choices which may enhance our femininity, when we feel like it - but it does not define us as women.

This research leads to an understanding of phenomenology as the human experience from the first-person point of view, and the knowing of the possibility that lies in this for society to return to a perception that is not influenced by pre-existing socio-historical structures. Notably, Grant says,

> "this is a most important factor in the phenomenology of performance. First, phenomenology aims to be a revelatory participation in the moment. Temporally, performativity distinguishes itself as the cleaving of the action or the utterance to the moment of its coming-forth" (Grant, 2019: 19).

Phenomenological practices, as embodied experiences, reveal an individual experience that can be depicted, laid down and observed in order to change the way we have come to perceive. One must also note that the "embodied technique remains a vital area of ongoing exploration, in which the potential for valuable new discoveries has in no way been exhausted" (Spatz, 2015: 5). The body is an ongoing map that must be explored in order to find new pathways for ourselves as women.

Performance as a phenomenology offers a different way of looking, of perceiving, of ***being*** as a woman. The 'in the moment happenings' of performativity reveal the maps we tread on unconsciously as it has been disguised as our 'being' through repetition with gendered objects over time. It is in the moment of cutting my hair that I discovered a different way of being - myself. It is in listening to the body, the visceral and internal shifts, and questioning that brings me to discovering myself apart from being defined by gendered objects. How else can we discover and uncover a different path on the map if we do not first acknowledge the one that exists? And if we do not deviate from this map, how will we as women know that our lived bodily experience is truly phenomenological? I reflect on Sara Ahmed who elaborates on queer phenomenology saying that,

> "It is in the mode of disorientation that one might begin to wonder: What does it mean to be orientated? How do we begin to know or to feel where we are, or even where we are going, by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the sky that surrounds us, or the imaginary lines that cut through maps? How do we know which way to turn to reach our destinations?" (Ahmed, 2006: 6).

The map we have come to live by in and through performativity is not final, we must trace

[17] Speaking back to how the body, when performing gender, is in a state of 'discomfort', for e.g., the strain on the feet when wearing heels during the self-exploration and workshops - this is the body 'protesting', so to speak, against become and rather wanting to find its' own comfort in just 'being'.

the paths, physically and viscerally and question them in order to evaluate our lived experience as to whether they are 'ours' or whether we are simply following the map presented to us. This research starts to uncover the paths and the maps in order to find a new way.

Limitations & Future Research

Butler reminds us that by highlighting these performative acts, performance holds the possibility of breaking those conventions and expectations in order for a new way of perceiving, of looking, to come to the forefront. By mapping what is and re-mapping what could be, women are being offered a chance to experience and accept themselves outside of gendered acts and expectations.

This performance as research enquiry offers possible answers and knowledge around the consciousness of performativity in order to challenge the perceptions of gendered expectations of women on their appearance and being.

This research must be viewed within the boundaries it is held with regards to the research process. Having worked with women who are trained performers from a similar background to mine, as well as un-trained women within a various age group, I assert starting with the notion of them identifying themselves as women. Depart from this point on the map and then the phenomenological experiences will come out of this.

There is still much to be discovered. Participant #4, for example, does not identify as heterosexual and holds a different view on femininity from the other 4 participants as her sexuality has played a part in being perceived as less feminine. There is also the factor of hormonal shifts. Participant #2 found that she felt like dressing less feminine during her first days of her cycle. I note that femininity also is not a scale for defining whether you are more or less of a woman, but that you are just as woman as you are on any day despite the way you dress or feel. The issue around femininity in the context of being a woman in particular, can be explored further and should be held in account on the process of mapping performativity in future research.

Finally, we must note that the answers we seek about the body lie in the body itself. We must not abandon the essence – the thing itself - because therein lies the pathways hidden. The map we have come to know is not *the* map but *a* map. So then, we need to journey, uncover, get lost, re-trace our steps and re-route in order to find the map that allows our bodies to *be* women without having to *become* one.

"When I see a woman who isn't dressed up all nice, without make-up and heels, I usually think, "You've basically put no effort into this, you didn't even try to look like a 'lady'". But now, I'm wondering how is it [how she looks] my problem if she's comfortable?" – Participant #3 after embodied workshop process.

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APPENDIX A.

Post Workshop & Performance Questions

A. QUESTIONS PERTAINING WHAT IS SEEN WITH THE OBJECTS.

1. What was the first thing you thought of when you saw the shoes?
2. When you looked at the objects, what did you relate them to?
3. What thought crossed your mind when you had to walk in the shoes?
4. What do you think of when you see the red lipstick? A dress? Eye shadow?

B. QUESTIONS PERTAINING WHAT IS FELT WITH THE OBJECTS.

5. What is the first sensation you felt when putting on the shoes?
6. Did you feel any internal shift with your mood/feelings when putting on the shoes/lipstick/eye shadow?
7. Did you feel any physical shifts in the body when putting on the shoes/lipstick/eye shadow?
8. What kinds of sensations did you feel at the points where the objects touched/met/interacted with your body?
9. Do you think these objects make you feel more feminine? Less feminine? Neither? Why?

C. QUESTIONS PERTAINING THOUGHT PROCESS/CONSCIOUS AWARENESS.

10. At the last stage of repetition, do you feel any different than you did when you first put on the shoes/lipstick/eye shadow?
11. How did you feel when repeating the same actions with the objects? Why?
12. What stood out the most when repeating the embodied acts with the objects?

13. What did you enjoy about the repetition of acts? Why do you think so?

14. What did you not enjoy about it? Why do you think so?

15. How do you feel now when looking at the objects in contrast/or not to how you felt at the beginning of the workshop?