

TRANSVESTITES IN BUENOS AIRES: PROSTITUTION, POVERTY & POLICY

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
and Universidad de San Martin
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Development Management and Policy.

By

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Washington, DC
February 28, 2007

Preface

What is it like to be a part of a marginalized group? Most of us will never know. Most of us will never understand, because we were simply born into other circumstances, communities, countries or cultures that do not expose us to the harsh experiences of members of abused and vulnerable minorities.

But take a moment to imagine you were a member of such a group. Your membership could be attributed to your ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or political affiliation.

Imagine that you were born in a town hundreds of miles from the capital of your country where unemployment is rampant and the culture is conservative and hence unwilling to accept those who stray from the cultural norm. Imagine that, indeed, you do stray from the norm (be it for religious, political or sexual orientation reasons). Your choice is simply not acceptable to your community, to your family or to those in your school. When your minority status is discovered, or when you finally share this, your family disowns you. You are suddenly homeless. And you face so much taunting, abuse, and discrimination by community members, peers and teachers, that attending school is unbearable. You cannot concentrate, and the exclusion is too painful. You are alone, without family or friends, without shelter or food, without money and with nothing more than an elementary education.

Your country is economically in turmoil and already has a high percentage of unemployment, so there is no work for a child who has only completed the 8th grade. You are also very hungry, and you are afraid of the nights when you will have to find a place to sleep.

You've heard that the capital of your country is like another world, where jobs are bountiful and pay well and where there all sorts of interesting people and foreigners coexist. It is supposed to be much more diverse and open to all sorts of beliefs and lifestyles. With nothing to lose, you take a bus there in hopes of finding work and creating a better life for yourself.

When you arrive, however, things are very confusing and overwhelming. The city is huge and you don't know a soul. You are still lost, penniless, friendless, hungry and homeless. When you finally meet a person that identifies with you and offers you friendship, guidance and most importantly work, you are beyond grateful to be taken under someone's wing. You literally feel saved. As for the work offered, you find yourself without other options, and you desperately need to put food into your belly.

The capital, you learn quickly, also has high unemployment, feels the struggling economy, and is filled with the homeless and cartoneros (people who go through the garbage daily in search of recyclables). Like your hometown, there are no jobs for youth with little education, you have no address, and you belong to an abused minority group.

Prostitution is your means of survival. If you don't prostitute yourself, you don't eat. If you do prostitute, you do eat, and you also nuzzle your way into a circle of peers who will rent a room to you and teach you the rules of the trade until you can make enough money to get out of it. You plan to leave as soon as possible.

Soon enough, however, you realize that prostitution does not offer a step up or a way out. Every trick you turn pays just enough for you to eat, pay the bills and rent, cloth yourself and perhaps pay medical expenses. It does not give you work experience and

you cannot get a recommendation. Plus, even if you could get a job (which is very unlikely), people would still stare at you in that demeaning and disgusted sort of way that caused you to run from your hometown in the first place. Some would taunt you and make you feel less than human. At least with prostitution your clients actually desire you, find you attractive, and make you feel important, at least some of the time.

You've learned the basics about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, not in school but from local NGOs that have sought out members of your group. You understand that the only protection is to use condoms 100% of the time. However, you've also learned that when it is cold, when it is raining, during these times in which you have not gotten business and are nearly starving, if a client offers you more money to forgo protection, you will do it. Your focus is immediate; it is survival. You do not have the luxury of thinking of the future. Likewise, if a client offers to pay more to drink alcohol or take drugs with him, you will. You even learn that these take the edge off your work. They allow you to momentarily escape your horrid reality.

And your reality extends beyond prostitution and clients, to other abuses such as that of the police. The same people that vow to protect its country's citizens from harm and injustice are some of the most abusive. They bribe you when they catch you with a client. Sometimes they bribe or harass you when you are simply by yourself, buying groceries. It doesn't matter that prostitution is not illegal; the police will create a reason to haul you into jail. Or they will demand money, physically beat you or demand sexual favors, in exchange for leaving you alone for a while.

Eventually the long-term catches up and becomes short-term. You are sick. You don't know what you have, but you know you are very ill. You need medical attention but cannot bear to go to a hospital because there the doctors will also treat you as if you are less than human. They might make you unnecessarily undress for them and their colleagues. They likely will make harsh verbal judgments on you, both privately and publicly. You cannot bear to return to such treatment, even if it means jeopardizing your health. However, as time passes, you get progressively sicker. You cannot eat, you cannot make it to the bathroom, and eventually, you cannot rise from bed. You are knocking on death's door. Finally, you allow yourself to be taken to the hospital, when it is too late.

Even then, in your dying days, the doctors and nurses still look at you with disgust. They still judge you. You die alone, judged, feared, even hated.

This is a common reality for one of Argentina's most abused and vulnerable groups, travestis. Most come from low socio-economic backgrounds, have very basic education, cannot read, and have been kicked out of their homes. Each of these elements is a cause and effect of the others, and a vicious cycle is perpetuated keeping the majority of travestis in extreme poverty, at high risk for HIV/AIDS, socially ostracized, and often abused. Because they cannot get work (because of their sexual orientation and often low levels of education), eighty-nine percent currently remain in the throes of prostitution.

What is a Travesti?

In some Latin American countries, such as Argentina and Brazil, the term transvestite or "travesti" does not refer to the act of cross-dressing alone as it does in much of the western world. Lohana Berkins, one of the most prominent travesti activists in Argentina and in Latin America, explains, "A travesti is a person identified as a man at

birth, who later chooses to identify as a woman.”¹ Another activist explains that travestis are “men that identify with a female gender,” rather than a “woman that arrived in a man’s body.”² The travesti keeps her penis, and adopts a female gender identity. To be a travesti in this culture implies a much deeper connection with the female gender. “The word travesti derives from the verb transvestir, or cross-dress.”³ But travestis also adopt other feminine features such as effeminate voices and language, and wearing make-up, and they often alter their bodies using hormones and injections of industrial silicone to enhance breasts, hips, buttocks, thighs, and cheekbones. In most other countries, this type of formative identity is referred to as “transgender.”

Martin Engelman, a representative of Argentina’s oldest gay organization, explains, “There have always been travestis. Before they only wanted to dress in the opposite sex’s clothing. Now they also intervene with their bodies to seem more like the opposite sex, but with out a sex change.”⁴ Here, it is important to note that the travesti does not completely adopt a female identity or desire to be 100% female. Travestis, in recent years, have come to embrace the theory that they are a third gender, a gender falling between that of the male and female.

¹ Berkins, Lohanna.

² Alba. Employee of a German International Aid organization, GTZ, working with the transvestite population of Buenos Aires. Personal Interviews 2006.

³ Kulick, 1998, 5.

⁴ Engelman, Martin. Comunidad Homosexual Argentina, Personal Interviews 2006.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks are in order for the tremendous amount of help and support I received during the research and drafting process of this thesis. I would first and foremost like to acknowledge the professors of Georgetown and la Universidad de San Martin, most especially Drs. Andrew Bennett, Alma Idiart, Matilde Ollier and Mark Rom. These men and women shared their knowledge, their experience and perspective, their intellectual curiosity and their time and energy with me. I feel enriched to have been able to learn and search for better answers to some very important social science questions with these scholars.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my peers Meghan Bolden, Laura Coward, Nancy Rydberg and Martha Stewart for their intellectual and emotional support and encouragement. Sharing ideas, frustrations and accomplishments has been a memorable and ultimately valuable life experience for me, very much because of each of you.

I would like to thank each and every subject that I interviewed. I am sure it took great patience to sit through an interview (in some cases many interviews) with a "Yanqui" often attempting to speak about much larger topics than her Spanish-language skills might allow. All of my subjects deserve accolades for their efforts to protect and defend the civil rights of vulnerable groups. Many subjects have experienced the deep hardship of poverty and abuse firsthand, but they continue to struggle for equality and justice. The energy, effort and heart that these individuals put into their work will likely go unrecognized by most in this life, but they will have accomplished more and lived better lives because of their determination.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank my finance, J. Drew Giblin. Drew has been my number one supporter, encourager, confidant and editor throughout this process. Drew has supported my ideas, has helped me brainstorm, and has patiently listened as I have drifted from states of frustration, confusion, exasperation and excitement. Words cannot express the gratitude that I feel every day for Drew and all of the gifts he has given me.

Many Thanks,
Kristen E. Loehr

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KEY

- ALITT: Asociación Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual
Association for the Struggle for Transvestite and Transsexual Identity
(Formerly ALIT: Association for the Struggle for Transvestite Identity)
- AMAR Capital: Asociación de Mujeres Argentinas por los Derechos Humanos
Association for Argentinean Women's Human Rights
- AMMAR: Asociación de Mujeres Meretrices de la Argentina
Association of Argentinean Meretrices Women
- ATA: Asociación Travestis Argentinas
Association of Argentine Transvestites
- ATTTA: Asociación de Travestis Transexuales y Transgeneros Argentinas
Association of Argentine Transvestites, Transsexuals and Transgender
- CCT: Construcción Ciudadanía Travesti (Defensoria del Pueblo)
Construction of the Transvestite Citizen (Ombudsmans Office)
- CCU: Código de Convivencia Urbana
Code of Urban Co-Habitation/Code of Contraventions
- CELS: Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales
Center for Legal and Social Studies
- CHA: Comunidad Homosexual Argentina
Homosexual Community of Argentina
- FBAS: Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA
Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation
- GLBTTTI: Gays, Lesbianas, Bisexuales, Transexuales, Transgeneros, Travestis, Intersexuales
Gays, Lesbians, Bisexuals, Transsexuals, Transgender, Transvestites, Intersexuals
- GTZ: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
Agencia de Cooperación Alemana al Desarrollo
German Development Cooperation Agency
- MSM: Men who have Sex with Men
- OTTRA: Organización de Travestis y Transexuales de la Republica Argentina
Organization of Transvestites and Transsexuals of the Republic of Argentina
(Formerly OTRA: Organization of Transvestites of the Republic of Argentina)
- SIDA: Síndrome de Inmuno Deficiencia Adquirida
AIDS: Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome
- VIH: Virus de la Inmuno Deficiencia Humana
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency

Experts & Subjects

Alba (2 Interviews)

- GTZ employee. University Student. Travesti.

Dora Barrancos

- University of Buenos Aires Professor. Former Legislature.

Vicky Barreda

- Grupo Tacones (High Heels Group), Director. AIDS Coordination for the Ministry of Health, Former Director.

Martin Engelman (2 Interviews)

- Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (Argentina's Homosexual Community). PhD student.

Dolores Fenoy

- Ministry of Health, Employee.

Josefina Fernandez

- Author of "Cuerpos Desobedientes: Travestismo e Identidad de Genero/Disobedient Bodies: Transvestism and Gender Identity" (2004). Co-compiler of "La Gesta del Nombre Propio" (2006). University of Buenos Aires' Queer Studies Area, Member. Aji de Pollo (feminist group), Member. Degrees in Anthropology and Cultural Sociology.

Alejandro Freyre (2 Interviews)

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation), President.

Anita (2 Interviews)

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA, Volunteer. Travesti.

Luis

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA, Workshop Teacher for Travestis in FBAS' Hair Salon Program.

Beatriz Giri

- Feminist doing an investigation on sex workers in Buenos Aires for the Ministry of Health and AMMAR.

Ana Gonzalez

- Secretary of Human Rights, Employee.

Carolina Grosse

- GTZ, Employee & Primary Liaison to Grupo Tacones (Victoria Barreda), which GTZ sponsored.

Monica Leon (*Written Interviews. Currently Resides in Paris.*)

- Asociación Civil Gondolin (Gondolin Civil Association), President.

Diana Maffia (*3 Interviews*)

- Defensoria del Pueblo (Buenos Aires Ombudsman)- Director of Human Rights and Gender Equality (1998-2003). “Sexualidades Migrantes: Genero y Transgenero / Migrant Sexualities: Gender and Transgender,” Compiler (2003). University of Buenos Aires, Philosophy Professor. Investigator for the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies in the University of Buenos Aires. *Feminist Magazine*, Editorial staff. Hannah Arendt Institute, Current Director. PhD in Philosophy.

Malu Moreno

- Buenos Aires Ombudsman Office, Assistant to Diana Maffia. PhD Student.

Flavio Rapisardi

- University of Buenos Aires, Professor & Queer Studies Area Coordinator.

Marcela Romero

- Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgeneros Argentinas (ATTTA), Director.

Samantha

- ATTTA, Member. Colombian Travesti.

Julio Talavera

- Coordinación SIDA (AIDS Coordination) with the Ministry of Health, Director.

Angela Vanni (*Met at the Trans Conference. Corresponded via email.*)

- Lawyer who has worked with ATTTA since its inception.

Paula (*Name changed to protect identity.*)

- Travesti in the situation of prostitution in Recoleta.

Rita Strauss

- Fundación Huesped, Employee.

Mario Pecheny

- Universidad de Buenos Aires, Professor.

Workshops

Trans Conference

- Full day conference for trans people in Tigre. Organized by ATTTA. Activities included educational workshops on health, discrimination, civil and legal rights, as well as music and food.
- I spoke with representatives of different groups here: Valeria, a travesti working with FBAS. Alba, a GTZ employee. Alejandro Freyre, FBAS President.

“La Gesta del Nombre Propio” Book Opening

- I went to an event held in honor of the publication of Josefina Fernandez & Lohana Berkin’s book. Speakers included several of Lohana Berkins and Diana Maffia, amongst others. Anita, with FBAS, accompanied me.

Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA: Travesti Workshop

- I observed an open workshop led by President of FBAS, Alejandro Freyre. Notices are posted around the neighborhood, promoting these informative meetings and any travesti can drop in. There they discuss a range of topics ranging from health to discrimination. Travestis can also pay one pesos (or \$0.30 USD) in exchange for 20 condoms and lubricant, often an incentive to get them to workshops.

FBAS Meeting with Government Officials

- President of FBAS, Alejandro Freyre, invited me to join him when he met with 3 government employees to discuss the travesti population. Freyre discussed health and discrimination challenges the population faces, made a complaint against a representative with the Ministry of Health, requested updated promotional sex education materials that incorporate a wider spectrum of sexual identities and genders, and discussed future plans and aspirations of FBAS. Upon leaving the meeting he mentioned that he’s met with the same men many times, and while they are always interested and say they will follow up with Freyre’s requests, they rarely do. They did, however, help Freyre finally accomplish his project of dropping a condom down the city’s obliesk during World AIDS Day.

Introduction

In 1983, after decades of authoritarian rule and military dictatorships, democracy returned to Argentina. In 1994 President Carlos Menem's term was coming to a close, however he was not ready to relinquish his presidential powers. Hence, he ambitiously sought to modify the national constitution to allow the president to run for a second term. In order to gain the needed support for such a reform from the opposition party leader, Raul Alfonsín, President Menem also had to make additional constitutional concessions pleasing to Alfonsín. One key concession demanded by Alfonsín was official autonomy for the capital city of Buenos Aires. Both men agreed to each other's proposed reforms, and history was made. This agreement is known as the "Pacto de Olivos." These constitutional reforms were approved by constitutional conventions on August 22, 1994.⁵

Menem was reelected in 1995. Likewise, in 1996, the city of Buenos Aires gained autonomous status⁶ and had written its own constitution. Buenos Aires' new constitution included rejection of the infamous Police Edicts and replacement with a more reasonable

⁵ Jones 1996.

⁶ 1994 reform of Argentina's Constitution: Section 129:

(1) The City of Buenos Aires shall have an autonomous system of government with power of legislation and jurisdiction, and the head of its government shall be directly elected by the people of the City.

(2) While the City of Buenos Aires is the Capital City of the Nation, a law shall guarantee the interests of the National State.

(3) According to the aforementioned provisions of this section, the National Congress shall convoke the inhabitants of the City of Buenos Aires so that the representatives that are to be elected for that purpose issue the Organizing Statute of their institutions.

and just Misdemeanor's Code. The edicts were five decades old by that time and frequently used as a tool by police to discriminate against minority and marginal groups.⁷

This action opened doors for policies to fight social and economic exclusion of vulnerable minority groups. The goal of this research is to examine public policy and civil society initiatives aimed at ameliorating the situation of one of Buenos Aires' most vulnerable groups, travestis.⁸ I will investigate the obstacles this group confronts on a daily basis, obstacles that should be overcome, enabling travestis to fully integrate with society and be accepted as equal citizens.

Travestis tend to be under-educated, under-employed and under-represented in Argentina's health care system. They face housing discrimination and they are routinely discriminated against. They bear the brunt of police corruption and brutality. Although Buenos Aires' sexual minorities have advanced greatly in the past several decades in terms of overcoming discrimination, travestis have largely been left with limited public support and essentially no representation in government. Survival through prostitution is routine and incurs additional discrimination. Nearly ninety percent of travestis' main source of income comes through prostitution, while eighty percent of those travestis working in prostitution would prefer alternative employment if they could obtain it.⁹ Considering these obstacles and other impediments in regards to education, health and social justice, understanding how Buenos Aires travestis came to be in such a predicament is paramount in learning how to improve their current situation.

⁷ Police Edicts will be further defined in Chapter 1.

⁸ "Travesti" is the term used in Argentina to refer to biological males who identify with a female gender. Travestis are not "cross-dressers", but identify themselves as a third gender. Most countries use the term "Transgender" to refer to this group.

⁹ ALITT Survey (2002). Presented at the UN Commission of Human Rights.

My objective with this study is to investigate travestis in Buenos Aires as a vulnerable group of citizens. This paper describes how the living standards that Argentinean travestis face prove both unacceptable from a human rights perspective and extremely dangerous from a public health standpoint. This study further traces the history of prostitution and regulation of sexuality in Buenos Aires, as it pertains to the city's travesti population, and analyzes the evolving responses of government and civil society to the travesti minority. I conclude with public policy and non-governmental options for improving travesti living standards and diminishing travesti dependence on prostitution.

Hypothesis

The travesti population of Buenos Aires is a largely neglected group of Argentinean citizens that confronts life-threatening poverty, widespread abuse, and dependency on prostitution. I assert that past and existing government and civil society efforts to address this problem have been minimal and shown very limited success. Finally, I further assert that effective policies and initiatives to mitigate Argentinean travestis' particularly poor living standards are both possible and necessary for the future.

Literature Review

The negligible amount of literature on transvestism in Buenos Aires reveals a detrimental lack of data on the travesti population. A more politically inclusive perspective on this population is certainly required, along with a serious investigation of their status in general, particularly in terms of health. There are not sufficient examples of policy methods used by government or society to remedy the problems this marginalized group faces. My thesis seeks to fit into the gap between the existing literature on travesti identity and public policy literature concerning the greater inclusion of neglected minorities in society. Travestis need to be treated not simply as a psychology project or modern history, as is the case in much of the literature. They should be approached as an

independent minority worthy of inclusion in the general policy literature on the impoverishment and discrimination faced by disenfranchised minorities throughout society.

There has been very little research published on transvestism in Buenos Aires. The first book published on the topic was *Cuerpos Desobedientes*, written in 2004 by anthropologist Josefina Fernandez. She and Lohana Berkins, a leading travesti activist, just recently published a second book in December of 2005, entitled *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. The former investigates the historical concept of transvestism, suggesting several hypotheses on transvestism, including issues of the family, prostitution, travesti use of public space and the travesti body. Fernandez's investigation has opened up doors for society and scholars to understand this marginalized group's history and development as well as the great challenges and discrimination travestis face. The latter book is a series of essays on the topic of transvestism in Buenos Aires by key figures in the travesti/transsexual identity movement. It also contains new statistics on the travesti population, an important stride considering the desperate lack of any decent quantitative analysis on the subject.

Donna Guy, an American author and university professor, has written several books and articles offering a historical perspective on sexuality and gender in Argentina. Her book, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina*, provides a sound understanding of social and political constructions of prostitution, sex and gender. Understanding the character and role of prostitution in Buenos Aires proves essential to understanding today's travesti population, their

relationship with the traditional institution of prostitution and how gender discrimination affects them in Argentina's enduring *machismo* culture.

Several other books offer case studies investigating transvestitism in particular countries. These include Don Kulick's *Travesti: Sex, Gender and Culture among Brazilian Transgendered Prostitutes*, Viviane Namaste's *Invisible Lives*, which takes a look at the transvestite population in Canada, and Annick Prieur's *Mema's House: Mexico City*. These books, in addition to other papers, have laid the foundation for setting up a cultural comparison of the transvestite's life-situation in different cultural and political contexts.

Moreover, U.S Court of Appeals judge, Richard Posner's *Sex and Reason* offers a historical but also contemporary investigation into different sex and gender areas in the context of the law, both within the United States and abroad. The development of liberal gender identities from the legal perspective remains a central requirement for protecting the travesti minority in Buenos Aires and indeed any country.

Methodology

These diverse authors from different fields offer cultural, historical, and social analyses of modern transvestitism and its role in society. However, what is hardly touched upon in any of the literature is what policy programs have been attempted to support and protect this struggling and regularly abused minority. There is no substantial literature investigating current and past policies, or the lack thereof, which are designed to fight the onslaught of health problems (particularly HIV/AIDS), negligible education standards, unemployment and impossible housing complications affecting the travesti

population in Buenos Aires and elsewhere. The extreme gender discrimination and marginalization faced by this group requires public action and government attention if conditions are to improve.

I examine this particular area of travesti/transgender studies in Buenos Aires through interviews with key leaders in Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transsexual Transgender (GLBTT) related organizations and with travestis themselves. I will use Eugene Bardach's *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* to analyze the few weak policies that have been launched in Buenos Aires, in the hopes of eventually molding my own policy proposal to significantly improve the lives and life-chances of the city's travestis.

Below, I briefly touch upon the data sources and techniques that I use in this investigation:

Observation: Non-participatory observation for this investigation includes visiting one red-light area, Rosedal Parks, where travestis in the situation of prostitution line the roads soliciting sex while cars pass them. I visited this park several times between 10pm to midnight and recorded my observations of both travesti and client/prospective client behavior. Non-participatory observation also includes watching the activities of the travestis in the situation of prostitution from the rooftop of my apartment, where I could not be seen, in the evening hours on Godoy Cruz (the red-light area before the travestis in the situation of prostitution were moved to the Rosedal Parks). I lived in an apartment on Godoy Cruz, which essentially enabled me to conduct daily observation of travestis in the situation of prostitution both while they were at work and during off hours.

Participatory Observation: Participatory observation includes attending meetings and workshops, such as an off-site conference in Tigre offered by FBAS and ATTTA on travesti health and problems with discrimination. Participatory observation also includes actual interaction with travestis in the situation of prostitution on Godoy Cruz.

Semi-Structured Interviews: I interviewed more than 20 subjects and experts one-on-one, some of them multiple times. Subjects include travestis, representatives of organizations supporting travestis, and government employees with the ability to help this population. I first sent these professional subjects an E-mail invitation for an interview along with a written explanation of my thesis. A professional translator wrote this explanation to ensure that there was no miscommunication. I then emailed the interview questions prior to our meeting and asked permission to use a tape recorder during the interview. A recorder was used in almost every interview. During the interviews, I gave subjects a hardcopy of the questions so that they could answer the questions they felt comfortable answering, while ignoring questions they did not want to answer. Therefore, while the questions served as a structure and guidance for each interview, the interviews were informal and resulted mostly from the professional prerogatives and personal perspectives of individual subjects.

Interview Instrument: Questionnaires. Each questionnaire followed a general format, but I did tailor the format somewhat to accommodate each professional subject. Examples of questionnaires can be found in Appendix 7.

Acknowledgment: It is important to note that interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish. As I am not a native speaker, I did record almost every interview with a tape recorder so that I could review each interview thoroughly. Every interview was

transcribed. I transcribed several of the interviews myself, while a professional translator transcribed the others. Therefore, the information, quotes and paraphrasing pulled from these interviews for this investigation come from recorded material and prove reliable.

This investigation is composed of research based on previously existing and vital literature as well as personal interviews with travestis and other actors intimately involved in the community. It is important to point out that this project is also an *exploratory*¹⁰ study and in many ways a prelude to needed social research in the future. As an exploratory study, this project has the stated purpose of chronicling the recent history of the travesti population in Buenos Aires and its detrimental situation, and of devising immediate possibilities for ameliorating travestis' specific and severe problems through policy applications. In this sense, the methodology of this paper seeks to answer more of a “*how*” question than any specific set of “*why*” questions. I ask with this thesis: how do we improve the living conditions of travestis in Buenos Aires and most importantly move them out of the unwanted work of prostitution.¹¹ The thesis is divided into the following five chapters:

Chapter One, “Historical Context and Emerging Visibility” explores Buenos Aires’ history of prostitution, laws pertaining to prostitution and sexual minorities, and the emergence of sexual minorities, most specifically travestis.

Chapter Two, “Current Social, Political, and Economic Exclusion: Challenges to Inclusion and Integration” explores the challenges that Buenos Aires travestis face in regard to social and political inclusion.

Chapter Three, “Public Policy Initiatives: Building Public-Private Partnerships” seeks to uncover what efforts have been made by the government to improve the travesti population’s situation.

¹⁰ Yin 1994.

¹¹ Tellis 1997.

Chapter Four, “Civil Society’s Response to the State’s Unsatisfactory Efforts” explores civil society organizations’ efforts to aid travestis in fighting social, economic, and political discrimination and abuse.

Chapter Five, “A Transitional Road to Social Integration” seeks to create a policy proposal based on the information obtained in this study that will ultimately serve to include this population in society and ensure them the same rights as anyone else.

Chapter I

Historical Context and Emerging Visibility

The plight of travestis today is in many ways the product of a long history in Buenos Aires of social and moral ambiguity regarding sexuality and sexual minorities. This history has been affected by a multitude of factors, not the least of which are national and provincial laws. How these laws have come to affect the travesti population is best explained by understanding first the historical context of such laws. It is then important to look at how these historical laws have transcended into today's current laws. In grasping a historical understanding of laws pertaining to sexuality and prostitution in Buenos Aires and taking into consideration the role and influence of these laws, we can better analyze the current situation of the Buenos Aires travesti population. Thus, in the following chapter I attempt to understand the history of the travesti population and its development as one of the most marginalized groups in Latin America. This history runs parallel with the history of prostitution and Argentina's regulation of sexuality.

The first three sections of this chapter investigate historical and social elements that have some bearing on this population. The focus is largely on the history of prostitution. The sections are divided into the late 1800s to mid 1900s, the 1940s to 1990s, and the 1990s to the present. This part of the chapter relies heavily on the work of American anthropologist and university professor, Donna Guy. The rest of the chapter focuses on the modern cultural emergence of this sexual minority group.

The chapter serves as a framework and timeline for the social and economic barriers that this population has encountered. Government policies have alternatively

protected and denied protection for prostitution and sexual minorities. Society has used travestis as sex workers while at the same time socially condemning their trade. The police have been used as political pawns by governments ill prepared to cope with cultural issues that have occurred as a result of sexual minorities in their communities.

This chapter concludes with present day Buenos Aires. With the abolishment of the Police Edicts in 1996, sexual minorities in Buenos Aires today are protected by the law. Article 19 of the constitution is once again recognized as a liberalizing article in regard to prostitution. The article recognizes that prostitution is an act judged by God, rather than by society or the law. Unfortunately the federal constitution is today still contradicted by provincial police edicts in nearly every province in Argentina outside of the capital. Most of these existing Police Edicts still deem prostitution, homosexuality, and cross-dressing illegal.

1850s – 1930s: A Schizophrenic Society

“Private activities that do not affect public order and morality and do not harm other people are reserved to the judgment of God and off-limits to the authority of magistrates.”
-Article 19, National Constitution
(Original & 1996 Versions)

The history of laws regarding prostitution and sexuality in Buenos Aires proves as enigmatic as the country’s haphazard political and economic development. In creating a timeline for the period covering the 1850’s to the present, I argue that a schizophrenic pattern of alternately conservative and cosmopolitan values have defined the complex sex and gender roles in Buenos Aires society. The effects of this complexity are still prevalent today. This struggle between the culturally conservative, patriarchal, and occasionally nationalist community of Buenos Aires and the more liberal, cosmopolitan

and modern scientific aspirations of the city has defined controversies concerning sex and sexuality.

Doctors, politicians, police, and society women and men have been key actors in this complex web. Their influences have been strong in politics, and volatile as well. It was not uncommon for actors to support what they had before opposed. Views as to what extent prostitution and sexuality should be controlled, limited, and regulated amongst these groups have constantly changed, often reverting back to past precedents. Specifically, government actions were largely taken on the basis of medical persuasion. This section shows the significant role of physicians in politics. With inconsistent and wavering political actors and social change, laws also remained inconsistent. Rarely was a law or decree made that was not changed or annulled shortly thereafter. An unstable society was thus fostered, in which prostitutes could rarely foresee and prepare for the changes ahead of them. This instability also revealed the weak backbone of both government and Argentinean society. With neither adhering for a significant amount of time to specific norms and laws, an air of ambiguity and uncertainty enveloped the city. This section intends to demonstrate the history of the law in Buenos Aires regarding prostitution and sexuality, the inconsistency of the law, and how gender has been perceived in society.

The trends of prostitution in Buenos Aires were largely reflective of European trends. Typical of developing nations, that adopt the habits, traditions and customs of more developed countries, Argentina adopted legalized prostitution and later abolished it, in conjunction with Western European nations. However from the mid 1800s through the mid 1900s, such a multitude of laws and codes were instituted, changed and revoked, that

the Argentinean perception and regulation of prostitution were anything but stable. This tumultuous history resulted in the inconsistent treatment of prostitution and gender identities, and the residual effects are still evident today. One consistency always existed in regard to prostitution, and this was the refusal to acknowledge the role of economic strife in most individuals' decision to work in prostitution. Society did not (and often still does not) want to probe into the deeper issues underlying the causes of prostitution and what brought people to such a place, but rather arbitrarily made judgments on the activity and the participants, particularly women, in the situation of prostitution.

It did not take long for sexually transmitted diseases, such as syphilis and gonorrhea, to awaken the medical world to the consequences of promiscuous sex. By 1864 the first of a series of Contagious Disease Acts was passed. The Contagious Disease Act was the first attempt to legally regulate female prostitution. This act gave police permission to suspect and accuse unescorted women at specific ports areas, and unemployed women, as guilty of soliciting sex. The police could force these women to have gynecological exams for venereal diseases, and afterwards place them in bordellos. This behavior of suspecting unescorted, unemployed, single, poor women of working clandestinely as prostitutes and arresting, fining or jailing them was a reflection of Argentinean national character, one suspicious and cynical of women, that did not diminish for many decades. These Acts opened the doors for the legal abuse, unequal treatment and even harsher social stigmatizing of women. The medical world had begun to exercise its power and control over prostitution.¹²

In 1875 prostitution was legalized in Buenos Aires. This was largely in response to advances in medicine recognizing the causes of specific illnesses. The medical

¹² Guy 1991.

argument became that sexually transmitted diseases could be better controlled with the regulation of prostitution. Although intentions certainly existed to serve the greater health of the community, others existed as well that served only a select few. Guy notes, “The surveillance and enclosure of prostitutes served many purposes: defining the parameters of power among urban officials, protecting public health, ensuring public order, separating sexual commerce from leisure activities, reinforcing appropriate patriarchal and class values, and determining the gender structure of urban labor.”¹³

Under the city’s new prostitution law, specific guidelines were created to control the activity of prostitution. A prostitute was required to have bi-weekly medical exams and could only live alone or in a bordello. Prostitutes had to stay away from public buildings, churches and thoroughfares and they had to return to their bordellos within 2 hours of sunset. They were required to carry identity cards on them and were forbidden to linger in bordello windows and doorways. The madams of the bordellos were not to leave for more than 24 hours, were required to pay all of the prostitutes’ medical expenses, and had to pay a first-class operations license fee of 10,000 pesos regardless of the size and quality of the bordello they ran. Should a prostitute want to quit and reform, she had to volunteer her labor for one month to charitable work. The restrictions tied women in the situation of prostitution to their jobs, making it more difficult for them to leave, invading women’s privacy, and enhancing social stigmatism of women fitting certain molds. Thus although the legalization of prostitution represented more freedom for women in some respects, it also served to limit and regulate them medically, politically, socially and economically.¹⁴

¹³ Guy 1991, 38.

¹⁴ Guy 1991.

Ten years after the legalization of prostitution, the Contagious Disease Act was repealed. Three years after this, in 1888, the physicians of Buenos Aires had provided persuasive enough arguments to have the Prostitutes' Registry, Dispensario de Salubridad, established, as well as a venereal disease hospital, Sifilicomio. The Dispensario de Salubridad legally registered prostitutes. The hospital served to examine and treat prostitutes living in bordellos. It is important to note that only women at this time were perceived to be transmitters of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Male prostitutes were not considered a risk-group possible of transmitting STDs.

These institutions were intended to better protect both the health of customers and prostitutes. However, the results were more detrimental than helpful, as conflicts in response to many new and changing laws and regulations were inevitable. The laws often ended up locking poor woman into their jobs by categorizing them and placing rules and regulations on their daily lives. For example, women who were diagnosed with any STD were locked up in the Sifilicomio and not allowed to leave until cured. As they were not able to work, this resulted in a loss of their income, sinking many into deeper poverty. Escaping a life of prostitution was made even more difficult because of the unstable economy, which strongly favored male labor.

In 1889, the 1875 prostitution ordinance was modified for the first time in response to a growingly conservative society. From this point on, most modifications and additions to laws regarding sex were in sync with this increasing conservatism. Prostitutes were expelled from the downtown area in order to push this progressively marginalized and ostracized group out of public view. Medical clinics for prostitutes were authorized as well, in order to keep tabs on the prostitutes and venereal disease.

In 1894 the 1875 prostitution ordinance was revised once again. Women could legally work as prostitutes at 18 years of age, the revision removed most restrictions to the behavior of prostitutes in public, and it removed the charitable work requirement for prostitutes who wanted to reform. However reforming was not something easily available to prostitutes, as the workforce did not give women much opportunity to change careers.

Between 1895 and 1914, the percentage females in the workforce dropped from 21% to 11%. The decline of female employment was very much due to the harsh judgment society placed on women. Women were increasingly deemed both too innocent and incapable of avoiding evil influences that might present themselves in the workplace, if they had not already succumbed to the evils of prostitution. For this reason, employers were not hiring women as often as they had earlier.

In 1904, one year after waitresses were forced to undergo medical exams equal to those female prostitutes were forced to undergo, the municipality responded to the public dismay of bordellos and went on record for the first time against large houses of prostitution. The 1875 law was adapted for the third time. This time, the legal age was increased to 22 years and prostitutes again had to carry special identity cards. Prostitutes were required to refrain from working while ill, although this time they were not forced to remain in the hospital.

In 1908 more revisions were made to the law. A more extensive exclusionary zone was created, and five prostitutes were allowed to work in a bordello rather than two. Should a prostitute want to leave her work, she would have to obtain the testimonies of two honest persons and a police certificate in order to have her name erased from the Dispensario de Salubridad. Women successful in reforming and leaving prostitution

would continue, however, to be subjected to medical exams by physicians, thus never truly escaping their pasts.¹⁵

Sofia Kamenetzky, M.D., author of *The International Encyclopedia of Sexuality: Argentina*, remarks, “The Argentinean empire of whoredom was born and grew up sheltered by the regulated status of the brothels under laws and decrees whose declared purpose was to protect both suppliers and consumers of sexual services. In fact it protected neither and only served to replace risky capitalistic forms of exploitation of sexual services with a capitalism of political patronage that benefited bureaucrats and scoundrels.”¹⁶ Kamenetzky reinforces the view that regulated prostitution was not so much regulated for the benefit of society’s health, but more so for the benefit of those monetarily and politically invested in brothels and rings of prostitution. Indeed, prostitution was a very lucrative business for many.

The perception of women can be understood during this time by the legal treatment of waitresses. In 1903, society was so suspicious of the motives and character of women that waitresses were forced to have the same gynecological exams that prostitutes had. In 1910, waitresses could no longer serve in eating and drinking establishments. To this day the influence of such treatment is evident in the predominantly male waiter position.

In 1913, Ley Palacios, an anti-pimping law was passed. This law would prosecute pimps and family members making money off of women in the situation of prostitution, but not madams. In 1930 municipally licensed prostitution was abolished, largely in response to European and International criticism. In 1934 bordellos were banned as well.

¹⁵ Guy 1991.

¹⁶ Kamenetzky 2001.

In 1936 nationally licensed prostitution was also abolished and the Law of Social Prophylaxis was instituted. The Law of Social Prophylaxis was a piece of legislation passed to close down all bordellos and create a national program of mandatory prenuptial exams for men. The ambiguous nature of these laws (abolishing licensed prostitution and bordellos, but not criminalizing prostitution) left the legality of sex work up for debate.¹⁷

Female prostitutes' male counterparts, on the other hand, were not viewed as health risks. Both male prostitution and homosexuality were considered a result of temporary mental illness, sexual desire and/or the need for money rather than deviant behavior. In fact, there were even several cited cases of travestis, some of whom prostituted in Buenos Aires in the early 1900s. The several prominent doctors that studied the three travestis; Aurora, Rosita de la Plata, and La Bella Otero, did not consider the men evil or immoral, as they did female prostitutes. The men that were prostituting themselves were not even referred to as prostitutes as their female counterparts, but rather as "professionals." They were not arrested for homosexual acts or male prostitution, but were arrested only for dressing as women in public. These clear examples of historically unequal treatment for women, traditionally negative perceptions of women in Argentina, and misunderstandings about homosexuality in general continue to play a role in the lack of official regulation and societal engagement with sex workers and sexual minorities in Buenos Aires today.¹⁸

Recognition of sexual minorities and the perception of them as "bad" or "dangerous" exploded in the mid 1900's, a consequence of the abolition of legalized bordellos and prostitution in 1936. Consequently, men's traditional gathering places

¹⁷ Guy 1991.

¹⁸ Guy 1988 & 1991.

shifted from houses of prostitution to all-male gathering areas such as bars and the sports arena. With this came a noticeable increase in sexually explicit language, particularly referring to acts of sodomy when intending to offend another person, or an opposing sports team. Doctors and government officials, and shortly thereafter society, became concerned that this implied an epidemic of homosexuality. Hence, old fears of promiscuity and the negative connotation it attained with the discovery of STD's shifted from female prostitution to homosexual males.

Military authorities also reacted to homophobic fears. They reopened bordellos near army bases and decriminalized prostitution in 1944. President Farrell and President Peron both signed this military-inspired decree, amending 2 clauses of the 1936 Social Prophylaxis Law. Thus some houses of prostitution were allowed to operate (away from major metropolitan areas to avoid international and domestic criticism), provided the women once again submitted to medical supervision. Article 17 was also amended to assume that women in bordellos were not committing any crime and that other women selling sex while living alone would not be prosecuted.

By 1955 Peron's government reopened all bordellos, largely in reaction to continued fears of homosexuality. The government, however, never used the words "prostitution" or "bordello" in the new decree. It was simply implied. Meanwhile, in 1949 Peron was also busy enacting a new Constitution and elevating the Public Health department from a minor department to a ministry that placed high priority on venereal disease. Shortly after Peron's reinstatement of bordellos, he was overthrown by a military dictatorship in 1955. The new ruling party supported the Law of Social Prophylaxis, thus ending legalized prostitution but not closing military bordellos or re-criminalizing

prostitution. Ten years after, in 1965, Law 16.666 annulled the 1944 decree, and since 1965 female prostitutes and bordellos have been subject to the 1936 Law of Social Prophylaxis.¹⁹

1940s – 1990s: The Police Edicts

For the thirty-five years following Peron's 1955 overthrow, no president was followed by an elected successor after completing his term in office. The country was ruled by interchanging military and civilian regimes, but many of Peron's economic and social reforms were left in place. The Police Edicts were one such reform. Established in 1946, the Police Edicts left the interpretation of the law in the hands of police officers until very recently, when in 1996 the Police Edicts were finally revoked in Buenos Aires. They nevertheless continue to exist in most of the country.

The Police Edicts were dispositions drafted by the Federal Police of Buenos Aires and gave unprecedented judicial autonomy to the police. People that were arrested under these dispositions could be taken to the police station to be judged and sentenced by the officer in charge. There was no opportunity for legal advice, a court hearing, or even contact with the outside world until sentences had been set.²⁰ In theory, a detained person did have the right to make an appeal to a judge within twenty-four hours of the police sanction being made. However, during these years, only 0.029 percent of sanctions had been appealed. This number was so low because of the narrow time slot given to make an appeal and the fact that most people detained did not know that they had this right. Additionally, a large percentage of those detained came from marginal sectors of society,

¹⁹ Guy 1991.

²⁰ World Policy Reports 2003.

further limiting their knowledge of these rights and economic ability to take advantage of them.

Following is an example of how limited the appeals were and yet, when made, how beneficial they were to the accused. In 1996, out of 153,473 people detained, only 46 appealed their sanctions. In a majority of these cases, the courts rejected dropped charges brought by the police. This brings into question the methodology, reasoning, and justification that police used in detaining and charging people, what percentage of people were detained because of outright discrimination, and what percentage of those detained were justifiably charged and sentenced. Prior to 1991, a suspicious person could be detained for twenty-four hours. After 1991 the Federal Police could only detain someone for ten hours. Those both detained and sentenced by the police, without appealing, could face as many as thirty days in jail.²¹

Crimes based on these edicts ranged from public drunkenness to dressing in the opposite sex's clothing. The Police Edicts were dangerous in that police officers were able to interpret the law through their own eyes and apply these edicts to citizens as they saw fit. Many police applied the laws differently to different sectors of society, as they were not accountable to the judicial branch of government. Officers could use the edicts to target vulnerable groups, such as homosexuals, travestis, and prostitutes and unfairly prosecute them without a fair trial by judge or jury. For example, travestis, homosexuals and cross dressers were often punished under the "Edict Against Public Scandals" and the "Edict Against Public Dancing" for harmless acts such as cross-dressing, inappropriate clothing, and same-sex couple dancing.²² In Buenos Aires, the number of detentions

²¹ Abregu 1998.

²² World Policy Reports 2003.

made under the edicts increased greatly annually. 35,350 people were detained in 1992, 135,038 in 1994, 150,830 in 1995, and 156,473 in 1996. In four years, the number of people detained more than quadrupled. These numbers suggest that police power was rapidly getting out of control.²³

During the years in which Police Edicts largely ruled the streets, sexual minorities became more visible to the public eye. This was because the Police Edicts elevated tensions between the police and marginal groups of society, sexual minorities and prostitutes in particular. The police were able to justify their actions, their harassment and punishment of people making up these marginal groups, through the edicts. The Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) in Buenos Aires and Human Rights Watch in New York summed up the challenges facing sexual minorities and prostitutes, “Among the vulnerable sectors who have historically been victims of the preventative procedures ... are sexual minorities and sex workers. In recent years, these sectors of the population are among those who have suffered most from illegal deprivation of liberty by the police, which has aggravated further the permanent discrimination suffered by members of sexual minorities.”²⁴

There were other social and economic implications of the Police Edicts as well. Police often took advantage of the edicts to blackmail and mistreat edict offenders and marginal groups. In doing so, they supplemented their salaries significantly. They were also able to control social behaviors and atmospheres through blackmailing, threats of arrest and violence.²⁵ The CELS and Human Rights Watch report note the effects of power-hungry police behavior, “The large number of arbitrary detentions suffered on a

²³ Abregu 1998.

²⁴ Abregu 1998.

²⁵ ILGA.org

monthly basis by these sectors and the discretionary exercise of power by the police forces against sexual minorities and prostitutes have generated a series of other violations including extortion, violence, torture and inhuman and degrading conditions of detention, the failure to return personal effects, compulsory HIV testing, sexual harassment and rape, false charges of crimes, death threats, the lack of defense against detentions, and the habitual use of razzias against the homosexual community.”²⁶ The edicts had elevated police power to unprecedented levels. Simply put, without being held accountable to the judicial branch of the government, many police took advantage of the law to feed their wallets, hunger for power, and prejudices. By 1996, the end to the edicts was long overdue. Unfortunately the discriminatory legacy left from the edicts has not died away completely.²⁷

In the more recent decades in which the Police Edicts were in effect, such treatment was increasingly perceived as unjust, especially in the worldview. Such treatment was also common, however, in other Latin American countries. In response, human rights groups and sexual orientation rights groups began to emerge in Argentina and fight back. By 1967 the first homosexual organization in Argentina and in Latin America, Nuevo Mundo, was born, and in 1984 the first GLBT organization, Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA), was established in Buenos Aires. It was not until 1992 that CHA was legally recognized as a not-for-profit organization. In 1990 a decree was lifted banning homosexuals in the provinces from voting. Most likely, this ban was rarely enforced as one did not stipulate their sexual orientation when registering to vote. It was, however, nevertheless a definite strike against GLBT people up until this point, and a

²⁶ Abregu 1998.

²⁷ Abregu 1998.

victory for them since. Since the 1990s organizations promoting gay, lesbian and travesti rights have grown and multiplied dramatically. Most serve to educate society and create greater awareness about gender and sexual orientation issues, as well as sexually transmitted diseases.²⁸

1990s – Today: Recent Political Climate and Laws Pertaining to Sex and Sexuality

Buenos Aires became politically autonomous in 1996, and repealed the Police Edicts the same year. It constructed its own constitution affirming the “right to be different” and forbidding discrimination on the basis of gender, age, race, religion, political ideology or sexual orientation. Buenos Aires was the first Spanish-speaking city in Latin America to do so. Finally, sexual minorities were legally protected, rather than persecuted, by the law.²⁹

Prostitution, on the other hand, remained regulated to some degree. In 1998, the city unanimously approved and passed the Misdemeanors Code, or Code of Urban Co-Existence (Codigo de Convivencia Urbana) now referred to as the Codigo Contravencional (Code of Contraventions), in which the act of prostitution in public was lessened to a misdemeanor. The extent to which one could be detained also became limited, unless the accused proved guilty of disorderly conduct or other potentially dangers behavior. Should one be accused of the later, s/he must be brought to a judge immediately to determine if s/he should remain in custody.³⁰ Shortly thereafter in 1998, Article 71 “Alteration of Public Tranquility,” was changed to the “Offer and Demand of Sex in Public Spaces,” under “Chapter VIII: Use of Public Space,” stating that negative

²⁸ World Policy Reports 2003.

²⁹ [IGLHRC](#) ERN 11/96.

³⁰ World Report 1999.

behavior altering the peace and tranquility within the city limits, specifically near schools, communities, and churches would no longer be allowed. This was in direct reference to marginal groups such as sex workers, drunks and street vendors.³¹

These recent changes in law reflect the significant and complex changes in society as a whole. On one hand the law was attempting to end discrimination towards minority and marginal groups, largely as a response to public and international outcry against police abuses and discrimination. Yet on the other hand, important figures such as then-President Carlos Menem continued to support the police in the midst of police brutality scandals with public statements such as the following found in Clarin Newspaper, "...some human rights defense organizations can object, but I think that here criminals have more protection than the police or the people," and "When I talk about the hard line and zero tolerance, immediately some people say that would mean a return to the 'easy trigger,' but we can't leave the easy trigger to the criminals."³² This same year, Menem reinstated the police edicts and Buenos Aires' Mayor Fernando de la Rúa won the enactment of legislation criminalizing sex work in public places. Police were given authorization to arrest "marauders," those the police may presume are about to commit a crime.³³ Thus without reinforcement, accountability and strict dedication to the written law, real social and political change has been retarded. Evidence towards this points to the forty-three Argentinean journalists that were harassed, physically assaulted, and even murdered during the 1995-1998 period. Most had criticized the police or government in some manner. In most cases the Buenos Aires Provincial (not Capital) Police were accused of the crimes.

³¹ Raffo 2004.

³² Human Rights Watch: World Report 1999.

³³ GenderNews 1999.

Rapid progress has been made especially in the past five years in the acceptance of homosexuality, although not as much for sex workers and other sexual minorities. As of 2001, Domestic Violence laws can now be applied to same-sex partners. In 2002, Buenos Aires became the first Latin American city to legalize homosexual civil unions.³⁴ One year later, in 2003, the Chamber of Representatives came close to passing a change in the National Anti-Discrimination Law to incorporate sexual orientation, gender identity and its expression. However, it did not. In 2004 President Kirchner announced Argentina's support of sexual orientation non-discrimination.³⁵ Several months later in 2004 the Cohabitation Law/ Misdemeanor's Code passed stiffening penalties for public acts of sex. Article 89 was established to ban "the offering and demand of sex in public spaces," and the age to be tried as an adult was changed from 18 to 16 years.³⁶

The most recent change in the law has been the reinforcement of January 2005 Codigo Contravencional. It reinforces the ban of sex work near houses, schools or churches, sets a maximum sentence of thirty days for the first-time offenders, and sixty for second time offenders. Regardless of the constraints placed by government on prostitution and sexual identity, nowhere in the National Constitution, revised as recently as 1994, can one find the words "prostitute", "prostitution", or "sex." Only Article 19 of the National Constitution refers to prostitution stating, "Private activities that do not affect public order and morality and do not harm other people are reserved to the judgment of God and off-limits to the authority of magistrates." Hence an adult person spontaneously engaging in sex with other consenting adults, for money or otherwise,

³⁴ World Policy Report 2003.

³⁵ Sottile 2004.

³⁶ AMERICAS.ORG 2004. Raffo 2004.

cannot be penalized unless the practice takes place in such a way that it offends or harms third parties.³⁷

Thus the ambiguous tone with which the government addresses prostitution in Buenos Aires continues, and its many decrees and codes have not aided attempts to reduce prostitution. In fact, the World Health Organization has found that prostitution has grown by 40% in Buenos Aires since the nineties, and travestis represent a significant portion of the recent increase in commercial sex.³⁸ The Guardian Newspaper cited that gay tourism has increased 80% in the past year, perhaps an indicator of the increase and demand for travesti sex workers (2004).

Challenges the Police Face in Upholding New Laws

Regardless of changes towards greater acceptance of minority groups based on sexual orientation, both socially and legally, police harassment has continued. It has continued both out of habit and because police have not been trained well enough for the transition of increasing minority group acceptance. Also, police have not been held politically and socially accountable when they have violated Article 19. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the Center for Legal and Social Studies (CELS) in Argentina, conducted a study on police brutality and corruption in Argentina post-1996. They found, “The complex web of police brutality in Argentina...is intrinsically linked to the inefficiency of the security forces in guaranteeing security. With insufficient training, and accustomed to acting outside the law, police officers are unprepared to ensure respect for

³⁷ World Policy Reports 2003.

³⁸ The Herald, 9/7/04.

human rights.”³⁹ Changes in police hierarchy, the creation of investigative police and new regional departments, and putting judicial decisions and investigations into the hands of judges and lawyers rather than in the hands of the police have been attempts to improve the police force. Their effectiveness, however, is another matter.

Multiple factors have influenced how effective, or ineffective such changes have been. Ineffective oversight by judicial bodies of police forces is one such factor. Without higher authority actively holding police accountable for their actions, police have tended to abuse their powers. Additionally, the HRW & CELS study points out that structural deficiencies of the organization, poor training and preparation, poor recruitment of agents, poor pay, and a negative image in the community are also factors that have favored police brutality. Additionally police officers are always required to carry a gun, even when off duty. This adds to the perception that officers are police first and always on duty, which reinforces the tendency of overzealous police to make generous use of lethal weapons.

The infamous corruption of police from the Province of Buenos Aires has, on the other hand, earned the negative attention that it has received. Destruction of evidence implicating police is common and manufacturing evidence to set-up others is frequent. Evidence, and even case fabrication is widespread. Cover-ups of agents involved in cases of police brutality are also common, and public knowledge of such action dissuades many citizens from serving as eyewitnesses to crimes by the police. This study explains that, “Among the most vulnerable groups are sexual minorities and prostitutes, who have historically been victims of preventative procedures, largely on the basis of massive and discretionary detentions carried out by the various police forces in Argentina. In recent

³⁹ Tiscornia 1998.

years, this sector is one of those which disproportionately has suffered deprivation of liberty at the hands of the police, a situation which has further aggravated the permanent discrimination suffered by this sector of the population.⁴⁰”

In viewing this area of research, it is necessary to also take into consideration the more recent role of the police in relation to social norms, considering their enormous impact in Buenos Aires’ history in regards to sex and sexuality. Many questions arise as to where the responsibility lies in keeping peace and a level of contentedness within communities. As the police represent the citizens, they also represent and protect the rights of prostitutes and travestis (or should) as citizens of the city. Thus the difficult question surfaces, if prostitution is legal in Buenos Aires and non-discrimination clauses exist protecting sexual minorities, and yet it upsets and disturbs a community, what is the police role in ameliorating the situation? What is evident in the past decade is that although equal protection should exist under the law, social norms and values discriminating against different sexual orientations have been reflected in police behavior, and vice-versa.

Ruth Stanley, in her work “How Deviant is Deviance?” takes a look at police power and culture in Buenos Aires. What she uncovers is that police have less control over situations than one typically assumes. More often than not, their behavior is dictated by the will of the elite class and not as much by the ordinary people. People do not tend to look upon the police as officials preserving the peace, maintaining order and protecting civil liberties and human rights. Instead, Stanley notes, “Police from all ranks were

⁴⁰ Tiscornia 1998, 18.

remarkably clear-sighted about the essentially political functions they were required to fulfill, as scapegoats for the problems of society in a state of disintegration.”⁴¹

She also explains that the police sub-culture often defined by society and researchers is not so much specific to the police, but is a reflection of the values, norms, and “more widely tolerated practices in society as a whole.”⁴² This analysis brings to question the practices that society tolerates, how they vary in different communities, and why. For example, perhaps the community members of Palermo do not like travestis in the situation of prostitution working on their doorsteps, however if they do not exert energy to change the situation, then they have chosen to tolerate the activity of prostitution in the neighborhood. In choosing to tolerate the problem, Stanley’s analysis states that the police in Palermo will not be incited to initiate change or exert further control either (unless it benefits them, in regards to blackmail or some other type of profitable abuse). On the other hand, should the community do the opposite, should they fight to rid their streets of prostitutes, discriminate against sexual minorities verbally, and deny employment, housing, and proper medical attention, then police behavior towards prostitutes will become increasingly discriminatory and certainly abusive as well.

Unfortunately, she also recognizes that the police tend to be under-trained and ill equipped to confront many of the social issues they are pressured to handle. Stanley quotes a street policeman who claims, “I wish the police had the education necessary for the work and that the citizens have the confidence in the police.”⁴³ She makes a point of stating that the law in Buenos Aires is a very fragile thing. As this is a widely recognized problem, it would be beneficial to understand to what extent the people and the police

⁴¹ Stanley 2002, 436.

⁴² Stanley 2002, 442.

⁴³ Stanley 2002, 438.

desire a change in the way the police practice law. Specifically understanding where excesses and deficits lie in the police force's response to prostitution and sexual minorities (particularly in response to community social norms) is beneficial. For example, if a community does not oppose known police abuse towards sexual minorities, the police will not feel as accountable for their actions to the public and therefore will not feel pressured to put a stop to such behavior. On the other hand, if the community knows their complaints will go unheard because the police act on behalf of an elite class, they may become apathetic.

The relationship between the police, society and social norms and the elite class are complex. Stanley concludes, "In the case of Argentina, a tolerance of rule-breaking, indeed a downright contempt for the rule of law, cannot be viewed as a sub-cultural phenomenon reflecting the daily pressures to which street cops are subjected, but rather forms part of the discourse of the ruling elite."⁴⁴

Hence, laws and regulations regarding sex and sexuality are depictive of the complexity of understanding how sex and gender have been perceived in Buenos Aires. Legal inconsistencies and instability mirror the uncertainties society has felt about the act of prostitution, the morality of it and the necessity of it. They are also exemplary of the confusion and misconceptions society has had in regards to the causes of prostitution, the women who work as prostitutes, gender equality and sexual minorities. In more recent years, with the aid of more advanced medical, sociological, psychological and economical research, society and government are better able to grasp sex and sexuality in these contexts and are increasingly better equipped to handle such moral and social

⁴⁴ Stanley 2002, 434.

dilemmas. Nevertheless, sex and sexuality are still touchy and debatable topics for many, and there still exist grave inequalities and misunderstandings.

Forming a “Travesti” Identity

“Travestis hubo siempre. Antes solo queria vestirse con la ropa del otro sexo. Ahora tambien es intervenir el en cuerpo para que sea del otro sexo sin la operaci3n de los genitals.”
-Martin Engelman, CHA

Prior to Buenos Aires’ autonomy in 1996 and subsequent liberation from the suffocating Police Edicts, transvestitism was not widely practiced, at least not in public view. Fear of police repercussions and brutality was too great. However, with the end of the edicts and the materialization of homosexual and lesbian organizations, people of other sexual orientations also have begun to emerge in public view and in search of their place in society. Ana Gonzalez, with the Secretary of Human Rights, reminds us however that some twenty years ago they began a movement to counter violence against women. They fought to change laws and make a once private matter a public concern and responsibility. Today it is a common area for concern, with laws protecting women against violence, but she reminds us “it took twenty years to install the theme.”⁴⁵

Likewise, Josefina Fernandez⁴⁶ explains the difficulty in the travesti population getting such recognition and attention due to the fact that their visibility is still very recent. With most marginal groups, or groups deserving of better treatment, there is often a mountain of literature on their social history; they have a story. However, she states, “In

⁴⁵ Ana Gonzalez. Secretary of Human Rights. Personal Interview 2006

⁴⁶ Josefina Fernandez. Anthropologist and author of first and only two books directly investigating the travesti population of Argentina (2004, 2006). Works closely with ALITT. Personal Interview 2006.

the case of the travestis, it is a collective that really has no social story. For them, giving themselves a name, defining objectives to fight for, doing something so concrete as writing a letter and bringing it to an organization, defining oneself/this group is a much more complex process. Up until recently they have called themselves gays or maricas. The term travesti is relatively new.”

As previously mentioned, the travestis of Buenos Aires have only recently accepted their own gender identity, which is neither male nor female. Before this, they identified with the term transgender, a term most of the western world uses to refer to those who dress in the opposite sex’s clothing. However, Martin Engelman explains, “Travestis have always existed. Before they only wanted to dress in the opposite sex’s clothing. Now they also alter their bodies to be more like the other sex, without operating on the genitals.”⁴⁷

I have derived from interviews and literature that most travestis are effeminate boys in their youth. Many explain childhood interests in more feminine toys and clothing, long hair and female friends over male friends. Most identify early on with their feminine side, however, do not necessarily think they were born the wrong sex. By twelve to thirteen, many begin to identify with a travesti identity.⁴⁸ Some of the travestis interviewed claim that their true identity is “travesti”, while others accept another theory that some travestis could simply be effeminate gay men if born in an environment more accepting of sexual minorities. Alejandro Freyre suggests, “Gays in one place may be travestis elsewhere to cause less noise.” He proposes that social class is an important

⁴⁷ Martin Engelman. Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA). Personal Interviews 2006.

⁴⁸ I have no intention of investigating whether transvestism is a result of nature or nurture, nor do I intend to investigate any such theories in depth. I do, however, touch upon ideas and suggestions based upon literature I have read and the interviews I have conducted.

factor in this, for example it is okay to be gay in the middle class, but not in lower classes. “Transvestism is not always an option.”⁴⁹

Most travestis recognize that they would be punished and discriminated against by family, society, peers, and school faculty for cross dressing or simply being effeminate boys. Whether they were discriminated against and ostracized by one of these groups or all, the stigmatism is strong enough so that the majority of them leave home in search of acceptance and identity. Many from the provinces head to the capital, Buenos Aires, where treatment and tolerance of sexual minorities is much better. Unfortunately most still end up falling into prostitution for survival.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the travesti population’s visibility in Buenos Aires increased in response to its participation in prostitution and subsequent abuse by police. Travestis found basic representation with some homosexual organizations, such as the Homosexual Community of Argentina (CHA). However, Flavio Rapisardi⁵⁰ explains that this representation was not complete and many gays and lesbians shunned this population until the mid to late 1990s. In 1991, he explains, police pressure on red light districts grew as property values increased. This was the catalyst that drove some travestis to organize themselves and create the first travesti organization in Argentina, the Association of Argentinean Travestis (ATA). This organization served to teach travestis about their civil liberties and how to protect themselves against police abuse. By 1995 the organization had split due to philosophical differences into the Organization of Argentinean Travestis (OTRA) and the Association for the Fight for a Travesti Identity

⁴⁹ Alejandro Freyre. Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (FBAS). Personal Interviews 2006.

⁵⁰ Flavio Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Council for Congresswoman Vilma Ripoll and for the Human Rights, Garanties and Anti-Discrimination Commission for the Communist Party. Personal Interview 2006.

(ALITT). The former was an advocate of treating prostitution as a job and not as a criminal activity. Their focus was more immediate. They supported prostitution as work and sought to defend travestis in the situation of prostitution from abusive police and unjust legal actions taken against them. The later organization wanted to get away from the topic of prostitution and worked towards creating a travesti identity, among other goals. During this year debates were held about including sexual orientation in the Constitution of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires's non-discrimination article. However, it was passed over. In 1996, the city's Code of Contraventions⁵¹ was reformed, increasing tensions between the public and those negatively affected by the reforms, thus again creating greater visibility for this minority group. In this same year the terminology "Queer" was introduced for gays, lesbians and trans people.

During the past decade more organizations supporting and/or representing travestis have emerged. Today, while OTRA has fizzled away, ALITT still exists with its original founder and one of the forefront travesti activists, Lohana Berkins still running it. ATA has been reborn into ATTTA, the Travesti, Transsexual and Transgender Association of Argentina. Other groups such as Transgender Future, Next Group and the Gondolin Civil Association have cropped up. Nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations have also loaned their support to this population, although largely only in the area of health. For example, the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation (FBAS), the Ombudsmans Office of Buenos Aires and GTZ, a German organization supporting sustainable development, have played more significant roles in building travesti social networks.

⁵¹ A small penal code that the city and each province has in addition to the Federal Penal Code.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the travesti predicament today in Buenos Aires is reflective of the struggle of both women and sexual minorities through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The legal limbo in which travestis find themselves stems largely from the historic question of how to regulate prostitution and indeed sexuality itself in Argentina. Deep social conflicts over what is proper sexuality and the place of prostitution in Argentina remain, and travestis today in Buenos Aires are still struggling to define their identity and gain recognition as a third gender against the backdrop of these conflicts.

While the travesti population has surmounted some important challenges, like that of public visibility, travestis still prove far from equal to other citizens in Argentinean society. The population faces many obstacles and prejudices today that contribute to their marginal status. In the following chapter we will see how Buenos Aires' travesti population lives and what these challenges are.

Chapter II

Current Social, Political, and Economic Exclusion: Challenges to Inclusion and Integration

Before moving forward, it must be made clear that the economic climate of Argentina over the past decade is essential to take into consideration when discussing the country's marginalized groups. Over the past decade Argentina has faced high public debt, high inflation, and external economic shocks. The Argentinean economy faced increasing hardships until it finally collapsed in 2001. Over the next few years unemployment rose dramatically, peaking at 22 percent in 2002, with 58 percent of the population living under the poverty line, and 28 percent living in extreme poverty.⁵² Today those numbers have dropped to 11.1 percent unemployment and 38.5 percent living below the poverty line.⁵³ Despite the fact that the economy has recovered well since the crisis of 2001, the high numbers of people begging on the streets, living in slums (villas miserias), and facing daily challenges for survival cannot be ignored. Today, it is estimated that "every day 55 children, 35 adults and 15 elderly die in the country from illnesses related to hunger."⁵⁴ In such situations, the most marginal and vulnerable groups are the ones that suffer the most. They are at higher risk of losing their jobs and face the greatest difficulty finding new jobs and providing basic necessities for themselves and their families. Of course, the travesti population falls into this category, with generally fewer years of schooling and greater need to obtain employment if they have left their homes. Ultimately, many are driven to desperate means to survive, usually obtaining employment as prostitutes.

⁵² World Bank 2003.

⁵³ CIA World Factbook

⁵⁴ Alberto Lapolla, Institute of State and Participation Studies (IDEP), a think tank.

Julio Talavera⁵⁵, with the Ministry of Health's AIDS Coordination, provides excellent imagery:

“The circuit works like so: They come from their province with an androgynous profile (here they inject silicone, in the best of cases), they enter prostitution and they fall into the judicial system. The Gondolin Hotel¹ has a space called the Bird Cage (on the highest floor in a very small room). The girls coming from the provinces pass the first night here. If they are lucky, one of the travestis living there offers to be a “godmother” to her (the godmother gets a percentage of the “goddaughter’s” earnings until she can support herself in her own housing). The godmother helps her to come into her own, she gives her condoms, takes her to the work zone and then leaves her to work. After this night, she can begin to work to pay for a night in this hotel or another. The Gondolin Hotel is the first place travestis arrive at. It is a very organized system, we know which girls apply the silicon injections, we know who transports the girls from the provinces to the hotel. In general minors usually end up in an institution that is not prepared to receive travestis, they escape and return to the circuit.”

I separate travesti challenges into eleven categories: laws, employment, family, education, housing, health care, alcohol and drug abuse, police abuse, identity cards, money, and public perception and discrimination. It also touches upon how the situation of travestis living in Buenos Aires is not universal and differs from the experiences of those living in the provinces.

Laws: the Code of Contraventions (Code of Urban Co-Habitation)

Code of Contraventions:

Book II, Title I: Integral Protection of the People

Chapter IV: Personal Rights

Article 65: Discrimination. One who discriminates against another person based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ideologies, opinion, nationality, physical characteristics, psychophysical, social, economic conditions or whatever circumstances implying exclusion, restriction or impairment, is sanctioned with two (2) to ten (10) days of public service work or to a four hundred (\$400) to two thousand (\$2000) peso fine.

Book II, Title III: Protection of the Use of Public or Private Space

Chapter II: Use of Public and Private Space

Article 81: Offer and demand of sex in public spaces. One who offers or demands, in an ostensible form, services of a sexual character in public spaces not authorized or outside of the conditions that the activity were authorized, is sanctioned to one (1) to five (5) days of public service work or fined two hundred (\$200) to four hundred (\$400) pesos. In no case is the

⁵⁵ Julio Talavera. Ministry of Health- AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

contravention relevant based on appearance, dress, or behaviors. In the contraventions referred to in the previous paragraphs, proceedings may only be conducted under the decision of a representative of the Fiscal Public Ministry.

Book II, Title V: Temporary Provisions

Temporary Clause: “Does not permit the offer and demand of ostensible services of a sexual character in public localities, before housing, educational establishments or places of worship or in their adjacency. In no case is the contravention relevant based on appearance, clothing or behaviors. ‘Adjacency’ is understood as a distance less than two hundred (200) meters from localities previously described. The contraventions referred to in the preceding paragraph. In the contraventions referred to in the previous paragraphs, proceedings may only be conducted under the decision of a representative of the Fiscal Public Ministry.”

The Code of Cohabitation or Code of Contraventions was instated upon the termination of Buenos Aires Capital Federal’s police edicts on March 15, 1998.⁵⁶ This was a monumental change in the legal system, a triumph for vulnerable groups and a loss for police. It stripped the police of unconstitutional powers they had been accustomed to for nearly half a century. The vague edicts had enabled police to interpret the law as they saw fit. Discriminatory and unconstitutional arrests that frequently targeted vulnerable groups, like prostitutes, sexual minorities, street children and street vendors, were common. Under these edicts, police not only arrested but also sentenced individuals for up to 30 days, without the intervention of a judge. When put into custody, the accused had 24 hours to petition the arrest. Very few, however, knew this option existed. Regardless, most did not have the money to make a phone call, much less pay a lawyer. Therefore the overwhelming majority did not see a judge or have a trial prior to being sentenced. The few travestis that were aware of the petition option and took advantage of it almost always won their cases, proof that a majority of arrests were without warrant. Police also frequently took advantage of this power to demand bribes, both monetary and sexual.

⁵⁶ Law No. 10 (BOCBA No. 405).

The change in police behavior after the implementing of the Code was clear. More than 3,000 monthly arrests were standard under the edicts, compared to 367 arrests made for the first month under the Code of Cohabitation. What is more, half of the arrests made under the Cohabitation Code were thrown out of court because judges did not find the arrest in violation of any contravention.⁵⁷ Therefore, the end to the Edicts was a great victory for all citizens, but most especially marginal groups like the travestis and those in the situation of prostitution.

The Code was designed to ensure three main policies: putting adjudication back in the hands of the judges, diminishing police discrimination, and applying the law solely against illegal actions rather than against particular (minority) groups. No longer could people be arrested for dressing in the opposite sex's clothing or for being in the situation of prostitution under edicts that criminalized "public scandal."

Since 1998, the Code of Cohabitation/Contraventions has undergone revisions that have been cause for much dissention between entrenched conservatives and increasingly vocal liberal groups in society. The former consist of the national government, most of the media, right-wing partisans, and the police with its supporting organizations.⁵⁸ Human rights organizations, feminist groups, marginalized communities, and minority factions make up much of the later group. The former group, concerned about prostitution taking place in public spaces, protested the new Code of Cohabitation immediately until a modification was made only several months after the Code was instated. In July of the same year, the capital's legislature modified the code, changing

⁵⁷ Josefina Fernandez. *Cuerpos Desobedientes*. 2004, 144.

⁵⁸ Josefina Fernandez. *Cuerpos Desobedientes*. 2004, 14.

the name from Code of Cohabitation to the Code of Contraventions⁵⁹ and introducing Article 71: “Alteration of Public Tranquility” under “Chapter VIII: Use of Public Space.”

This article condemned those:

“Disturbing public tranquility before housing, educational or religious buildings, or in the proximity, with a motive or occasion of exercising prostitution and as a result of a concentration of noises and disturbances/disorder of the traffic of people or vehicles, or with harassing or exposing interior clothing or nudity. The Public Fiscal Ministry will intervene when it corresponds and apply article 19 of Law 12.”

Under the new code, police could no longer detain violators but had to advise the responsible public prosecutor of the case. Rather than go to such trouble, many police found it easier and more lucrative to demand bribes from the travestis.⁶⁰

On March 8, 1999, the code was modified yet again by President Menem, who desired the reinstatement of the edicts. The legislature of the city, under presidential decree 150/99, reinstated the edicts. They prohibited “those that provoke or molest neighbors or passersby with verbal or otherwise morally offensive gestures,” and “those of either sex, in public places and exposed areas, that instigate or offer a sexual act, when they provoke a disturbance of order or public tranquility, or offend the public with shameful language, acts or obscene gestures.”⁶¹ Essentially, the state criminalized the exercise of prostitution in the streets of Buenos Aires.⁶² The text of Article 71, Alteration of Public Tranquility, changed to include “the offer or demand of sexual services for oneself or others in public places.” Penalty fines ranged from twenty to 500 pesos per

⁵⁹ Law no. 42 (BOCBA No. 488).

⁶⁰ Berkins & Fernandez. “Transvestitism and Violence,” *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. 2006, 46.

⁶¹ Jose Ingenieros.

⁶² Law No. 162 (BOCBA No. 647).

day. Travestis in the situation of prostitution would therefore again prefer to pay police bribes than face such large fines.⁶³

Then Ombudswoman, Alicia Oliveira, solicited the Superior Justice Tribunal, and declared this article prohibiting the offer and demand of sexual services null. She exclaimed that it was a “vast network of corruption composed of the police and other state representatives” and added that those in the situation of prostitution are victims of double exploitation, general socio-economic neglect and political abuse. Oliveira claims that this article violates the system of rights and guarantees designated by the National Constitution, international treaties and declarations that have been incorporated in Article 75, and the City of Buenos Aires’ constitution. It violates established legal principles of reserve and discretion, liberty, privacy, freedom of movement, dignity, equality, and nondiscrimination, principles reinforced when the first legislature of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires sanctioned the Code of Contraventions on March 9, 1998. Upon application, it was stated that the code would “observe all principles, rights and guarantees consecrated by the National Constitution, in the Constitution of the City of Buenos Aires, and in the Human Rights Treaties that form part of the National Constitution.”⁶⁴

On October 28, 2004 more modifications were made to the Code, this time as a ratification of Law No. 1472 (BOCBA No. 2055). In Chapter V a Temporary Clause states that since ratifying Article 81, the state “Does not permit the offer and demand of ostensible services of a sexual character in public localities, before housing, educational establishments or places of worship or in their adjacency. In no case is the contravention

⁶³ Berkins & Fernandez. “Transvestitism and Violence,” *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. 2006, 48.

⁶⁴ Horacio Verbitsky, Pagina 12 Newspaper. 8/23/99.

relevant based on appearance, clothing or behaviors. ‘Adjacency’ is understood as a distance less than two hundred meters from localities previously described. The contraventions referred to in the preceding paragraph.” It goes on to say that proceedings may only be conducted only with the approval of the Fiscal Public Ministry.

Some of the most vulnerable populations that were protected under Buenos Aires’ constitution were losing protection with this modification. “This is the reason many transsexual and travesti organizations and many socially diverse organizations do not recognize the code’s reform.” They feel that it “violates principles of equality and nondiscrimination.”⁶⁵

The 2004 modifications were put into effect in one zone, Palermo, in the early months of 2005. Over the course of several weeks the travestis in the situation of prostitution moved from Palermo’s streets to a designated park, Rosedal, in Palermo. There were positive changes that followed for the neighborhood. When the travestis worked in Palermo, they often defecated in the streets and left used condoms on the sidewalks. The traffic was much heavier and the streets were much louder. Neighborhood complaints ranged from those that did not want to see prostitution at all to those that felt the sanitary was most pressing to those that wanted to protect their children from nudity and vulgarity. Ironically, when travestis did work Palermo, the neighborhood streets were more frequently patrolled and arguably more secure, because of the increased police presence. The streets today are quieter and cleaner, but at night, security has perhaps diminished, most profoundly for travestis. One travesti prostitute, Andrea (birth name, Andres), explained to me that since the travesti prostitutes of Palermo were forced to move their work from the streets to the parks of Palermo, violence by customers has

⁶⁵ Berkins & Fernandez. “Transvestitism and Violence,” *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. 2006, 51-52.

gotten particularly bad. She explained that it is common for customers, when they walk back into the park with a travesti prostitute, to physically assault and even rob the travestis with knives and guns. She knows several travestis who have been cut by such customers. Even with the violence, Andrea still remains more fearful of police bribery and abuse.

The lower class red light districts of Flores and Constitución have not felt the same pressures from the Code's modifications. The travestis there still work in residents' doorways and near schools and religious institutions. Without elite influence in government, poorer neighborhoods have little leverage on police to instigate the kind of mass relocation that occurred in Palermo.

While many travesti, feminist, and human rights groups vehemently oppose the Code's regulation of prostitution, some believe it is not the Code that is the problem but rather those expected to apply it. ALITT is one such organization. "Travestis are not opponents of the Code of Contraventions. They believe the code is efficacious, that is until the police begin irregularly applying the code like the previous police edicts. Police detain [travestis] under this code, threaten, torture and force testimonies."⁶⁶ Other subjects have mixed feelings regarding the Code of Contraventions. The overall feeling seems to be a respect for non-discrimination clauses that attempt to protect minority groups, but a greater desire to see the code terminated and the city constitution become the main law of Buenos Aires. Beatriz Giri feels that the Code of Contraventions was a step backwards for Buenos Aires after it introduced its much more advanced and progressive new Constitution. She felt it was an intermediary action to appease the population at large, but one that has negatively affected groups like travestis and street

⁶⁶ Norma Gilardi, Secretary of ALITT, Public Audience 3/22-23/04, 16-17.

vendors. Martin Engelman finds the codes downright unconstitutional and believes they ought to be annulled. In addition he'd like to see the national anti-discrimination clause include gender identity and the expression of gender in addition to sexual orientation. Regarding the changes made to the code over the recent years, Alba believes the changes are in favor of the travesti population, as they have supported respecting identity and non-discrimination. Fernandez seems to sum up what most of the subjects felt best. While she would agree with Alba that recent changes to the Code of Contraventions are an improvement, she believes that the Code is not regulated and she is "against all state intervention regarding prostitution." On another note, from the travesti population's perspective, Anita probably speaks for most of the population. "I never understood the Code. I am not really in agreement with it." Anita is learning to read and over the years has learned more about her rights through FBAS, but the Code and its revisions still confuse her. It is no small task for someone with only an elementary education to read the Code, stay updated with revisions, and understand how it applies to her lifestyle.

Employment and Prostitution

No travesti says "I am a travesti because I want to be a prostitute." They end up in prostitution because it is the only job they can choose. No middle-upper class travesti that doesn't need to work is going to prostitute herself. -Martin Engelman

The terms "travesti" and "prostitute" are almost interchangeable in Buenos Aires. The common perception is that all travestis are prostitutes. This association is very troublesome for travestis and subjects interviewed in this study. Yet one of the reasons society at large does make this association is because prostitution is the most common means for survival within this population. Over three quarters of this population are in the situation of prostitution. The greater part of the travesti population is most visible to the

public at night on the streets scantily clad and selling sexual services. Those in the situation of prostitution sleep during the day and so are not seen by the public in more normal circumstances.

In a 2001 survey done by the Buenos Aires Ombudsman's Office and the Association for the Struggle for Travesti and Transsexual Identity (ALITT) for the UN Commission on Human Rights, it was found that within the travesti population of Buenos Aires 89% of travestis' main source of income comes from prostitution.⁶⁷ A more recent 2006 investigation has found that number has dropped to 79 percent.⁶⁸ *La Nación* reported an additional study by Berkins finding that 80 percent of travestis in the situation of prostitution would prefer to do something else if given the opportunity.⁶⁹ However, most do not have the opportunity to change professions. Additionally, a current study is being put together on prostitution in Buenos Aires for the Ministry of Health and the Association for Argentinean Women's Human Rights (AMMAR). Interviews were conducted with 500 people in the situation of prostitution in Buenos Aires, and 21 percent of these interviewees turned out to be travestis. What this shows is that the ratio of travestis in the situation of prostitution is significantly higher than the ratio of travestis in the general population. Although there is no definite number or solid statistical research, all sources estimate Buenos Aires travestis to represent much less than one percent of the greater population.⁷⁰

Those travestis that have found formal sector work are indeed a rarity. Alba with GTZ notes knowing hardly any travestis who have not at one time or another been in the

⁶⁷ ALITT additionally found that of the remaining 11%, 3% are supported by family or a partner, 1% work as hairdressers, 3% sell products door-to-door, and 3% responded to "other."

⁶⁸ Berkins 2006.

⁶⁹ *La Nación*. 12/9/04.

⁷⁰ Beatriz Giri. Ministry of Health and AMMAR. Personal Interview 2006.

situation of prostitution. Those that have found formal sector work have found it only in a few stereotypical spaces where society has allowed, such as work as hairstylists and promoters for bars.⁷¹ Diana Maffia, former Ombudswoman of the Buenos Aires Ombudsman Office, explained that those travestis that do not work in prostitution usually work in industries serving other travestis, for example making clothing, catering, doing deliveries etc.⁷²

Challenges to formal sector employment can be attributed to lack of skill or education as well as discrimination. When travestis leave or are forced from home, they often cannot continue their education due to discrimination and also due to the fact that they suddenly must find a means to survive. Prostitution becomes a quick and easy alternative for most. Rapisardi exclaims, “You speak with them and no one wants to be a prostitute. They all say that prostitution is a last resort to being able to prevent themselves from dying of hunger. If you ask, ‘What job would you like?’ They tell you everything, from a being a secretary to being an engineer.”⁷³ Beatriz Giri seconds this opinion, explaining that the feminist movement believes that sex work is “an extreme form of exploitation” and that “prostitution is associated with poverty and a very low level of education.”⁷⁴

Subjects interviewed agreed that travestis might earn far more working in prostitution than they would in a minimum wage formal sector job (assuming most could even get one). Earnings also depend on the class of travesti. If she works in the Palermo zone, her clients are typically from the upper and middle classes. If she works in

⁷¹ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁷² Diana Maffia. Ombudsman Office. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁷³ Rapisardi. Buenos Aires University Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

⁷⁴ Beatriz Giri. Ministry of Health & AMMAR. Personal Interview 2006.

Constitución or Flores, her clients are most likely from lower and lower-middle classes. Talavera explains, travestis' earnings vary "depending on the place where they work, their age, and aesthetics. In Palermo, they earn a lot of money, they are VIP travestis; they are precious. In Constitución, no."⁷⁵ Therefore, travestis working in Palermo might make four times the minimum wage of an Argentine citizen, whereas a travesti working in Constitución or Flores will likely make significantly less. In order for travestis to maintain their feminine characteristics by means of silicone injections and hormone treatment, minimum wage earnings in a formal sector job will hardly provide for this.

Discrimination is also a mammoth obstacle in obtaining alternative employment to prostitution. Many employers are not interested in hiring an effeminate or homosexual man for fear that it would negatively affect the public impression of their businesses.⁷⁶ Fernandez points out, "There are no specific policies that allow for travestis to be inserted into the labor market. Employment opportunities do not have to do with just their level of education, which surely affects many people, not only this community in question. It's a lack of acceptance that affects travestis more than their low levels of education. This is also a problem other groups of people have, not just travestis. This unified rejection by society often pushes travestis to the only area where they can find acceptance, prostitution."⁷⁷ Working in prostitution is one of the few areas of employment in which travestis actually feel accepted and valued for who they are. Clients appreciate them and find them desirable and attractive, a sentiment very different from the rejection and repulsion travestis typically receive from the rest of society. Thus, a conflicting relationship has developed in which sex work becomes a vital but dangerous source of

⁷⁵ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires' Ministry of Health's AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

⁷⁶ World Policy Report 2004.

⁷⁷ Josefina Fernandez. Author & Anthropologist. Personal Interview 2006.

income as well as an environment in which travestis feel human and appreciated. The profession also is difficult to leave, keeps practitioners in poverty, threatens health and safety, and perpetuates discrimination by the rest of society, which openly disdains both transvestitism and prostitution.

If discrimination did not exist and travestis could obtain formal sector employment based on their educational qualifications and skills, most would be in minimum wage jobs. They might find work in kiosks, shops, salons, as secretaries etc. Angela Vanni suggests, however, that while a formal sector job might pay the minimum wage salary of \$400 or \$500, work in prostitution may earn a travesti the same amount in one or two nights, and they don't have to know anything or learn new skills.⁷⁸ Dora Barrancos raises the question, would travestis be content working for minimum wage in a more legitimate labor market? She assumes they would most likely be unsatisfied, as materialism and poor spending habits are a large part of the travesti culture.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, she believes the option should still exist and that the travesti population should try work in the formal sector. Some would be more content with less money in a formal sector job, and the opportunity itself would begin to modify the travesti identity away from prostitution.⁸⁰

Employment and Prostitution: Case Studies

Below are examples of two different generations of travestis in Argentina. The first is typical of the older generation, now between the ages of 30 and 50. Marcela

⁷⁸ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁷⁹ Multiple subjects interviewed have brought up the typically poor money management of this population. Many spend a significant portion, if not all, of their earnings on brand name clothing, alcohol and drugs. They have a poor concept of savings typically.

⁸⁰ Dora Barrancos. University of Buenos Aires. Personal Interview 2006.

Romero's and Monica Leon's experiences represent those of the older generation. The following examples come from the experiences of the increasingly fortunate and modern generation of travestis in their teens and 20s, but from two different socio-economic classes. Paula is from an upper class Buenos Aires family, while Anita is from the poorer more conservative northwest city of Salta.

Marcela Romero, now president of ATTTA, and Monica Leon, now president of Asociación Civil Gondolin, were students in the provinces of Argentina during a military dictatorship. They were arrested on the charges of being sexual minorities and cross-dressing so often that Romero was not able to finish her basic studies. Unlike gays and lesbians, they could not hide their identity and thus fell into prostitution in order to survive. Leon was sexually abused at the age of four. She fell into prostitution by the age of fifteen. She recalls severe physical abuse by both police in Salta and in the capital of Buenos Aires, but does not see herself as an exception. She has been HIV positive since 1993 and has often questioned if she contracted the virus from one of the officers who sexually abused her. She is unique, in that she was one of the first trans people to denounce the police for such abuses, has taken active roles in many of the organizations working with trans people and is actively fighting the use of pasta base, a highly addictive derivative of cocaine and crack, within the trans population. Romero sees today's travestis in a much better situation and with many more possibilities. "They have rights that we never had. The community has other possibilities." Yet at the same time she recognizes that it is still extremely difficult to find formal sector work.⁸¹

⁸¹ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006. Monica Leon. Personal Interview 2006.

On the other hand Paula, young and modern, has had a very different experience. Paula⁸² is unique in that her family has supported and accepted her and she has completed high school. Upon graduating high school she worked at a kiosk. However, Paula quit shortly after because she felt she was not earning enough money, did not like waking up early and often felt uncomfortable with the way customers would look at her. That was one year ago, and since she has been working as a prostitute. She is 18 years old. At first Paula sublet an apartment from another travesti and worked for a Madame. Clients would come, the travestis would line up, and the client would tell the receptionist which one he chose. This is how she met her current boyfriend. He was her client first. Thereafter, Paula's sibling helped her rent an apartment under her sibling's name in one of Buenos Aires' most popular neighborhoods, Recoleta. Paula allows two travestis in the situation of prostitution to live in it with her, in exchange for 50% of all of their earnings. They have a specific room in the apartment where they perform services with clients. She hopes to one day be a Madame and run a business of travesti prostitutes in this neighborhood and in another. While Paula used to seek out clients on the streets in Palermo and occasionally Constitución, most of her business is now performed on the Internet. Websites exist in which travestis can post their profiles for \$100 pesos a month and customers can contact them via email, instant messenger, phone and webcam. She also has many friends who are young boys in the situation of prostitution. One is currently trying to decide if he will become a travesti. She said that while most would prefer alternative employment for the same money, they would find great difficulty in accepting a large cut in income if they left prostitution to work in the formal sector. The travestis she knows make around \$1000 pesos a week, which is more than the minimum

⁸² This is not her real name, but a fictitious one used to protect her identity.

wage monthly salary in Argentina.⁸³ Could Paula be in such a stable situation without the support of her family? Probably not. Most travestis do not have the luxury of familial support, a completed high school education and their own apartment. Therefore Paula's situation is about as good as it gets for a travesti in the situation of prostitution. She is representative of a new generation of travestis. Additionally, she is young. As travestis in the situation of prostitution age they find it increasingly difficult to earn enough money to live. Although there are not many travestis that reach an old age, those that do need to find a new source of income.

Anita offers a different story from Paula. Anita is also young, in her 20s, but she comes from a northern province of Argentina, Salta, and from a lower socio-economic background. She worked with lower class, lower paying clients in Constitución. Her following testimonial offers some insight into travestis coming from the provinces to Buenos Aires. "Most travestis that come from the provinces to Buenos Aires know they are coming to work in prostitution. The younger, the better. But we come deceived because we believe that here we will make a fortune, and with this money we can help our families. But it is impossible, if we cannot help ourselves, we will never be able to help our families. We are constantly trying to buy our happiness. We have to offer our families money so that they will want us back again."

With respect to the situation of prostitution, travestis are rather accepting of a tragic fate. "We believe that we are like a flower that will open for a brief time in life and then will wilt. The time of plentitude is in our youth, it is the moment to earn money to enjoy later. But only some live to see an older age, most die from infirmities, and other consequences of the streets. Many of the friends that I had when I arrived, today are dead

⁸³ Personal Interview with travesti in the situation of prostitution. 2006.

or are at death's door in a hospital (with HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and other infirmities). Travestis don't seek medical attention because we are afraid of the doctors. And when we do finally go, it is often too late."

Anita explains that the best ages to work are between 14 and 18 years old. By the age of 30 or even their late twenties, travesti prostitutes are considered "old." There are almost no travestis in their 40s. The few that do survive sell cosmetics or receive food stamps from the government and live in extreme poverty. "Entering prostitution is like contracting an illness, it does not go away, it has no cure. Those that leave are scarce, you can count them on the fingers of one hand. It is difficult when you have no money. But in my case, I no longer want to do it. I limit myself, I do not travel by taxi, and I have other privations. I know that if I return to prostitution I will be denigrating myself most. I will not denigrate myself."⁸⁴

Many Argentinean travestis go to countries like Italy and France to work and earn fast money before returning home to Argentina. Some stay for years. Several subjects spoke of Madame Perika, the oldest and richest of all Argentinean travestis, who now resides in Italy and runs a prostitution ring. She is a legend amongst the population. Madame Perika left Argentina in the last coup d'état and now returns annually to recruit travestis in the situation of prostitution to work in Italy. When Madame Perika makes her visit to Buenos Aires, Paula describes how all of the travestis are on their best behavior, in their best clothing and working very hard. Madame Perika apparently only invites very hard workers to come to Italy. She arranges for everything for the girls she brings back with her. She gets them passports, buys their flights, and sometimes even has someone escort them. She will also pay for their surgeries, provides housing, rents them spots in a

⁸⁴ Anita. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

park to work, and she has lawyers to defend them should they need it. In Italy, subjects explain, one cannot prostitute without being part of a larger group, a Mafia of sorts. If they try to work on their own they will not make it, other groups will abuse them until they leave. In return for all this and the protection offered by working under Madame Perika, the travestis are expected to work extremely hard and will pay Madame Perika back double or triple what they owe her. If they work well, they earn a lot of money and return to Argentina with enough to buy an apartment or small business.⁸⁵

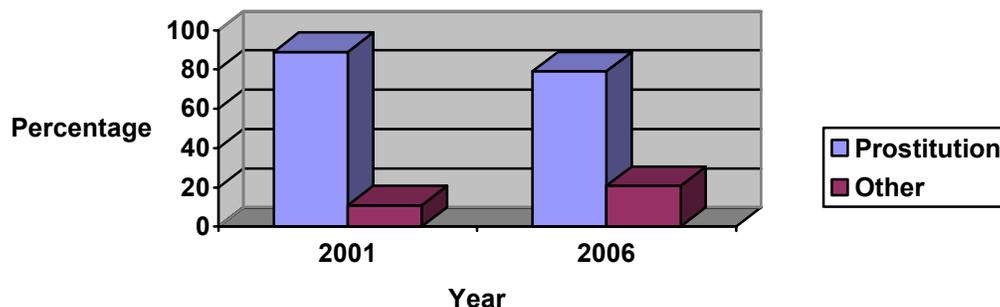
And finally, it is important to reflect on the fact that travestis in the situation of prostitution are not the only party involved in their work. They respond to a very real demand for sex. Talavera reminds us, “We can create policy designs addressing prevention, but do not forget that we are working with desire. There are aspects of desire that are insatiable. There is a telephone line on which you can call and in five minutes make a date with someone to have sex. You call and you find out who is offering all possible practices. This is real, it is part of an investigation that we are doing. There are people that call to get drugs. For example: ‘I am looking for people to have sex and take cocaine with’. There is something about desire that is stronger than prevention. In the case of travestis and gays, they question why they should listen to a state if the only intervention they have experienced thus far is violence.”⁸⁶

This chart shows the abnormally high percentage of travestis working as prostitutes in 2001 & 2002. The X-axis depicts the year they were surveyed and the Y-axis depicts the percentage in the situation of prostitution versus the percentage in another form of employment. The numbers used for this graph, and the numbers for consequent graphs in this chapter, are taken from Berkins & Fernandez’s “La Gesta de Nombre Propio.”

⁸⁵ Paula. Travesti in Situation of Prostitution. Valeria. FBAS Travesti in Situation of Prostitution. Spoke with at ATTTA’s Trans Conference. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁸⁶ Julio Talavera, Personal Interview 2006.

Employment



Money

“The money a trans in prostitution earns is not a monthly salary that can be counted on. One day you work for \$80 pesos, the other \$150 pesos, and the rest \$10 pesos, \$20 pesos, it is unpredictable the money that a trans in prostitution can earn. The day that the police bribe you, that you are robbed, that it rains, that it is cold etc. are the principal factors in sex work.”
-Monica Leon

Another defining element of travestis’ work in prostitution is the money they earn. Some travesti prostitutes are capable of earning significantly more money than the average employee in Buenos Aires. The Buenos Aires Herald reported travesti prostitutes working in Palermo earn between \$100-300 pesos a night from three to five clients (Buenos Aires Herald 3/13/05). Doing the math, if they worked a five-day workweek, they could make between \$500-1500 pesos a week, or \$26,000-78,000 pesos a year (approximately \$8,470 - \$24,407 US dollars). In talking with a travesti in the situation of prostitution in Palermo, I was informed that travestis might even earn double, triple and even quadruple the amounts quoted in the paper in a night. According to a 2004 World Bank Report, the average national income per capita of an Argentine in 2002 was \$4220 USD and was \$3650 USD in 2003. The value of the peso is nearly three to the dollar. However, Margin Engelman reminds us that earnings are very unstable, “The earnings depend on the day. There are days, like Fridays, when they work more. On these days

they can earn \$200 pesos in a night. But it also all depends on the travesti. The prettier ones will earn more.” He explains that they charge between \$20-50 pesos for their work usually. Engelman works with travestis largely in Constitución. Paula, a travesti in Recoleta, explains that she charges \$100 pesos an hour. So once again, location and class have a big affect on earnings. Engelman also emphasizes that travestis in the situation of prostitution do not always get what they charge. Sometimes they get much less. It depends on the client and on the travesti. If a travesti has gotten very little work one week, she will lower her prices to get more business. Engelman estimates that they earn from \$1500 to \$2000 pesos per month. While this income is higher than a minimum wage worker’s income, Engelman points out that they must spend much more on housing, often four times what the average citizen would spend, because of discrimination. Many also spend earnings on drugs and altering their bodies with hormones and silicone. He singles out spending on drugs and alcohol as an area where many travestis in the situation of prostitution lose control of their spending habits. Thus he points out, “Although their salaries surpass that of a large portion of the population, they continue to live in conditions similar to those who live in poverty.”⁸⁷

Family and Origin: Buenos Aires, Provinces, or Abroad

Most travestis begin to accept their different gender identity in their early teens. As this happens their families often cannot cope. Fathers are typically the most discriminatory towards travesti children, whereas mothers tend to be more accepting. Angela Vanni, a lawyer who works closely with ATTTA, explains “In general, the mothers help the transformation, buying them hormones. The fathers, on the other hand,

⁸⁷ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

reject them and can create great conflict. Do not forget that we have a very macho society. Most do not speak of their fathers and have a great love for their mothers.”⁸⁸ Marcela reiterates this, explaining how many of the travestis she knows “were abused by their fathers physically, verbally and psychologically.”⁸⁹ Regardless, most travestis leave the home very young, either because they are forced out, or because they feel so guilty for the shame they cause their families. Consequently they drop out of school and flee their communities in search of acceptance and self-discovery. Unfortunately most simply end up in the situation of prostitution.

It is quite common for travestis from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be disowned from their families until they begin sending them money. Once they begin supporting their families, they regain acceptance and keep it as long as the cash flow continues. If they can no longer monetarily support their families, they are often again cut off. Hence many travestis knowingly initiate an exchange of money and material goods in exchange for familial love and acceptance. Anita offers her experience, “The family is never there when their travesti child is hospitalized, in her worst moments. The family shows up later, when legalities, such as inheritance, become relevant.” She explains that families often use the money sent home by travestis to survive and even feel deserving of payment in return for their acceptance of the travestis’ lifestyle.⁹⁰ Berkins found that 49 to 51 percent of travestis in her study send money to their families. Many (20-21%) never connect with their families again.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁸⁹ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁹⁰ Anita. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁹¹ Berkins 2006.

Additionally, there exists the probability that many travestis were once sexually abused as children. Beatriz Giri notes that many of her interviewees were sexually abused by a family member or acquaintance around four and five years of age, and consequently found themselves in the situation of prostitution by an average fourteen years of age. Alejandro Freyre, President of Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation, also suggests that many travestis experience sexual abuse as minors.⁹² My subject, Anita, disagrees with these “generalizations.”

It is very rare for travestis to have families of their own. It has been suggested that the lack of families results from travestis’ tendency not to make long-term plans, because of the fact that most die so young. In all of the interviews and workshops attended for this investigation, there was only one travesti with a child.

Education

A 2001 report stated that 76 percent of travestis have not completed high school. A more recent study by the same investigators found that of those who realized they were travestis by 13 years of age, 64 percent did not even finish primary school and only 20 percent completed secondary school.⁹³ A more recent 2006 study investigated the highest levels of education the travesti population has reached.⁹⁴ Engelman explains that completing school is no small feat for travestis, “Those that finish their high school and university studies do so thanks to their ability to repress their sexual identity or go to

⁹² Beatriz Giri. Ministry of Health & AMMAR researcher. Personal Interview 2006. Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁹³ ALITT report for UN 2001.

⁹⁴ Berkins 2006, 118.

schools dressed as men.”⁹⁵ The study has also found that while 12 percent of the current travesti population is studying, of the 87 percent that are not studying 70 percent wish they could complete their studies. Unfortunately fear of discrimination and lack of money and time prevent three-quarters of travestis from pursuing a better education.⁹⁶ Alba, a travesti with a university degree and formal sector job, explains that when families expel their children from the home, the children often drop out of school and resort to prostitution. “The girls leave their studies when they are very young, 12 to 14 years old. This results in a very negative situation because afterwards they cannot see alternative opportunities, and it is very difficult to reverse this concept in their heads. We must remember that transvestitism is very often related to a lack of education.”⁹⁷ Discrimination in schools can be particularly daunting for a young person already conflicted and ashamed of her gender identity and, in many cases, unbearable.

Another challenge for travestis is to re-enroll in school. Although the government offers free education to all citizens, and although many travestis do want to go back to school, the prospect of discrimination and rejection can stop them. Alba is a travesti who has accomplished what most travestis have not been able to. She is currently pursuing higher education. Out of all of the subjects interviewed, Alba and Lohana Berkins are the only travestis known by the subjects to have college educations. Alba also has a part-time job with an international aid organization, GTZ. However, she acknowledges that she is one of the more fortunate ones, whose family has stood by her emotionally and provided her with babysitting jobs and housing. She also is fortunate to be very feminine and petite. Unlike many travestis, the common person would not identify her as a travesti

⁹⁵ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

⁹⁶ Berkins 2006.

⁹⁷ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interviews 2006.

unless at first sight. She describes going back to school as “breaking the boundaries/limits of places of belonging and not belonging” and having to take on “a process in which one must feel very secure and confident with themselves.” If one doesn’t have sufficient self-confidence, she explains, it will be very difficult to sit in a classroom daily, bearing curious or judgmental stares and even comments. Many within this population do not have such confidence. In her own experience of attending a university in Buenos Aires, it was the faculty more than the students whom she felt stigmatized by. And she feels as though she must fight against the common links society makes with travestis and “dark situations” they commonly confront, such as drugs and prostitution.⁹⁸

Anita tells the more common story of the travestis of Buenos Aires. She has been in the situation of prostitution out of necessity and survival, but unlike most travestis has left prostitution. She has a very basic education from a primary school in provincial northern Argentina. When she enrolled in secondary school in Buenos Aires recently, she became discouraged. She realized that her level was much lower than the other students. She explains that her participation with FBAS’ hairstyling program, “Made me realize that I had abilities and I decided to try again.” With that, she enrolled in a distance course, and explains, “I am tired of prostitution. I think to myself, I am still young and I want to be more, to have an education. I know that there are easier roads, but I want to take the more difficult road. It is difficult, but not impossible.” Travestis in Buenos Aires have opportunities today that travestis only a decade ago only dreamed of. Yet faced with discrimination and sentiments of hopelessness and no future, many do not find the motivation and confidence Anita found through her connections with FBAS and its

⁹⁸ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interviews 2006.

president, Alejandro Freyre. Nevertheless, she is an example of the path travestis have available to them today.

This situation could certainly be improved by implementing staff training programs on discrimination (not just towards sexual minorities, but towards all minority and vulnerable groups). It would also be improved with sex and gender education courses taught in schools. Dolores Fenoy, of the Ministry of Health, points out that while there are laws requiring sex education, currently the most sex education students receive might be a few hours on female and male anatomy in a biology class. In more liberal schools, a speaker from an NGO or civil society organization may come in for a day to discuss prevention, protection and gender.⁹⁹ But Talavera, explains, “This is one day, one talk, one workshop. It is nothing.” He goes on to explain, “Professors also have the responsibility to give students this information. A degree does not protect you from HIV.”¹⁰⁰ Unfortunately, more profound courses reflecting sex and sexuality are not offered in the Argentinean education system, largely due to a small but politically powerful sector of society and the Catholic Church’s influence.¹⁰¹ Interestingly, however, a 2005 poll taken by *La Nación* found that a majority of Buenos Aires citizens would indeed prefer that sex education be taught in school, including gender identity discourse.¹⁰²

There has been one great stride made in the education system of Buenos Aires through the initiatives of Construcción de Ciudadanía Travesti (Ombudsman’s Office and ALITT). They pushed through a law allowing students to be called by their name of

⁹⁹ Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁰⁰ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires’ Ministry of Health’s AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁰¹ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interview 2006. Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁰² La Nación. 2004.

choice in school. Therefore, a student identifying with a gender other than his/her sex may be called by a name the student feels more comfortable with. A student born Juan, that identifies more as a female, maybe choose to be called Julia, and no one at the school can contest such a choice.¹⁰³

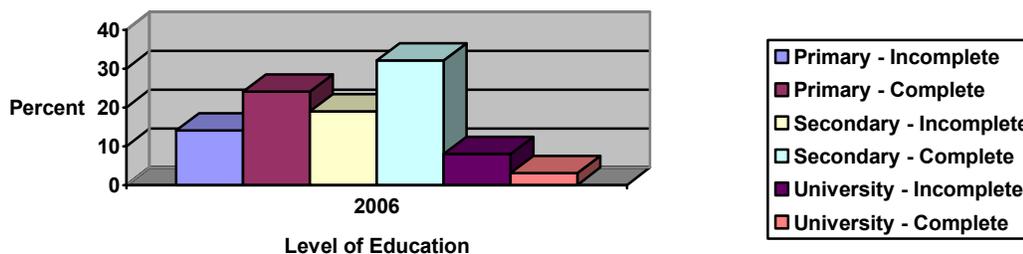
Thus, as largely uneducated social outcasts, travestis in Buenos Aires face many grave challenges. In response to strong discrimination and social ostracism, many travestis are forced out of their homes, schools and communities. They most often turn to prostitution as a method of survival and young travestis get caught in this vicious cycle. They cannot complete school because of discrimination and needing to work for survival. And because they do not have an education and are part of a marginal group, formal sector employment becomes almost impossibly difficult to obtain. Because they cannot obtain formal sector work, they end up in the situation of prostitution, which in turn leads to greater stigmatization and this ultimately leads to greater difficulty returning to school to continue studies. Ana Gonzalez, of the Ministry of Human Rights explains, “The police, schools, the medical field are NOT prepared to work with travestis. We especially worry about schools because people’s sexual orientation manifests itself when they are very young. In general, schools are not trained for this. And one of the resulting problems is that most travestis end up in prostitution as a consequence.”¹⁰⁴

The following chart depicts the highest levels of education completed by travestis surveyed in Berkins & Fernandez’s study. They found that 57% of travestis have not completed high school. 14% have begun their primary studies but not finished, 24% have gotten as high as completing their primary school studies, 19% have begun high school but not finished, 32% have completed high school, 8% have taken some college courses and 3% have actually attained a university degree.

¹⁰³ Diana Maffia. Ombudsman Office. Personal Interviews 2005 & 2006.

¹⁰⁴ Ana Gonzalez. Secretary of Human Rights. Personal Interview 2006.

Highest Level Of Education Completed



Housing

Additionally, without formal documentation of income from formal market employment, most cannot rent an apartment and thus pay exorbitant rates to live in hotels. For example, Hotel Guemes has been transformed into a hotel servicing mostly travestis. In 2001 they were charging each travesti around \$300US per month for a room without a private bath.¹⁰⁵ Martin Engelman speaks of a typical room travestis rent in a hotel that he recently visited. It was 15 by 20 feet, without a bathroom, a small kitchen that hardly worked, and it was infested with cockroaches. It was sleeping 4 people for \$800 pesos (nearly \$300US).¹⁰⁶ In Buenos Aires, furnished apartments in the nicer neighborhoods rent for the same amount of money.

Travestis are frequently taken advantage of in a renters market. Individuals and rental agencies do not want to rent to travestis. Angela Vanni suggests that renters are not comfortable renting to travestis because they cannot be sure that the travestis have a secure source of income if they are not working in the formal sector, and they also fear conflict with neighbors and the landlord.¹⁰⁷ Hence, travestis often must live in hotels that are able to charge extremely high prices because the travestis have no other place to turn.

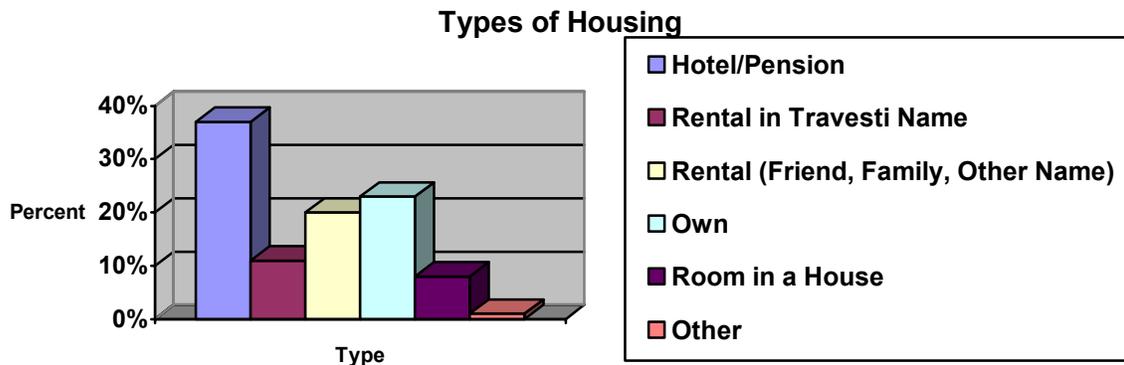
¹⁰⁵ ALITT 2001.

¹⁰⁶ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹⁰⁷ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interviews 2006.

Some also bribe real estate agents at exorbitant prices to rent them an apartment. For example, one travesti that I interviewed was having a very difficult time renting an apartment because of her gender. Eventually she had to bribe a real estate agent with \$4000 pesos to rent her an apartment (really only a small room with a bathroom) that costs \$350 pesos per month to rent. She was forced to pay nearly a year's rent in bribe money. Most travestis do not have this type of savings in the first place, and so live in run down, unsanitary and extremely expensive hotels, that do not have inspections and are often without a private bathroom or kitchen. For example, Berkins' 2006 study found that only 51 percent of travestis have access to their own kitchen and only 52 percent have their own bathroom. Thirty percent do not even live with a bathroom in their building.¹⁰⁸

This chart shows looks at the dominant types of housing for those travestis surveyed by Berkins & Fernandez. The X-axis represents the type of housing and the Y-axis measures the percentage of travestis living in each type of housing. Majority of this population shows to live in hotels/pensions. Based on information given in interviews and information found in literature, this type of housing tends to be of very poor quality and extremely over-priced. Only very marginal groups tend to get caught in such traps.



¹⁰⁸ Berkins also found that 37% of travestis live in a hotel room, 31% rent a place, 23% live in their own place, 8% live in a room of a house, and 1% lives in another manner. Of those that rent a place, only 37% actually have the contract in their name (most must have a friend, family member or partner who is not a travesti sign the contract instead). Berkins 2006.

Health Care and Discrimination

“Health professionals have underestimated the economic, social and psychological barriers that interfere with the travesti population’s adherence to medical treatment.”

-Martin Engelman

Travestis have confronted extreme difficulty and discrimination in receiving appropriate medical attention, even though the medical needs of travestis prove substantial. They have frequently been denied medical assistance in hospitals and have been treated with discrimination. This often results in travestis turning to alternative sources of care, or abandoning health care altogether. Engelmann, among other subjects, attributes travestis’ inconsistent use of Argentina’s free health care to such discrimination. Fortunately today, official and unofficial networks exist that pass on by word of mouth specific doctors and hospitals that are friendlier towards the trans population. The Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation has used the relationship forged as a result of their HIV/AIDS work with Ramos Mejia Hospital over the years to slowly introduce the trans population. Today, the Foundation can recommend that travestis go to certain doctors within this hospital to receive treatment.¹⁰⁹

However, as many have pointed out, it is necessary to establish relationships with specific medical professionals who will not discriminate against this population, for example “a nurse that has a very good relationship with the girls, which in turn opens new doors.”¹¹⁰ Malu Moreno comments on the fact that a hospital’s treatment of travestis, people in the situation of prostitution and the homeless largely depends on the authorities of the hospital. Grupo Tacones has also formed a relationship with hospital staff at Muniz Hospital’s HIV/AIDS ward, where they have introduced the travesti population. Moreno

¹⁰⁹ Alejandro Freyre. President of FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹¹⁰ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires’ Ministry of Health: AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

points out, “I don’t know if Muniz Hospital is very friendly, but it’s inevitable that they will work with travestis because this is the hospital for infectious diseases. I don’t know that they chose to work with travestis, so much as they have to.”¹¹¹ Regardless, Grupo Tacones also can recommend doctors for travestis to see within this hospital. Unfortunately, a very small percentage of the trans population is associated with these groups, and therefore, the majority of travestis may never receive such information.

What a majority of the travesti population has experienced has kept them from returning to hospitals, even in life threatening situations. Every subject interviewed for this study offered the same examples of discrimination in the medical field. Often medical staffs refuse to acknowledge travestis’ chosen identity. For example, it is very common for a receptionist to call into a waiting room of people the travesti by her male birth name even though she would have written her chosen female name on her forms. The shame travestis feel from this often results in them not responding to the call and ultimately leaving the hospital without being attended to. At other times, the patient may be made to wait for hours in hopes that they will simply leave. Or the travesti patient may be passed around to different staff members because no one wants to handle a travesti patient. The patient, often nervous or afraid because they are there for an HIV/AIDS test, may leave as a result. On the other hand, a travesti may be in the hospital for a treatment or attention unrelated to HIV/AIDS, but may be asked to get an HIV/AIDS test before the hospital treats her. This is in fact illegal, and it often scares travestis away from medical attention.¹¹² If a travesti must stay overnight in a hospital she must stay in the men’s ward. Again, she often feels great shame and sometimes fears of sexual assault by

¹¹¹ Malu Moreno. Ombudsman Office- assistant to Diana Maffia. Personal Interview 2006.

¹¹² Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

patients and staff there. She may again leave without treatment. Patients in these wards have, indeed, raped travestis.¹¹³ Numerous examples have also been given of travestis being admitted into a hospital for a treatment or exam that does not involve them undressing, but in which a medical staff requests they do so simply to see such an anomaly. Shame, again, is the dominant word travestis use to express their feelings in such situations. “Many travestis would prefer to die early, than expose themselves to such treatment,” explains Carolina Grosse.¹¹⁴

Martin Engelman began to accompany the travestis of Hotel Gondolin to the hospital when they needed to go for two reasons. First, he realized that having a companion with them was extremely comforting and made the experience less frightening. Because Martin is a representative of CHA, they also had an advocate for fair treatment at their side if they needed someone to defend them. Second, Martin found that most of them did not have the means to pay for the taxi ride to the hospital. With his help, he attempts to organize hospital trips with multiple travestis when he goes. What he realized when he began accompanying them was that doctors were not prepared to meet with them. “Doctors do not have an understanding of the conditions, quality and style of life of these people. They do not understand why they inject industrial silicone, why they work in prostitution, why they use drugs. On occasions it is a question of discrimination, other times it is an unknowingness of these topics, and still others fear the unknown. Ultimately it all ends in discrimination.”¹¹⁵ Additionally, Julio Talavera points out that

¹¹³ ALITT reported a travesti that was gang-raped by 4 patients in showers of the male hospital ward. When she complained the nurse refused to take her seriously. She left the hospital not receiving treatment for her pneumonia. ALITT 2001. Another travesti I interviewed was in the hospital being treated for burns on her upper body. Being very weak, she asked the nurse to cut her nails and trim her hair. The nurse ended up cutting off all of her hair. Anita. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹¹⁴ Carolina Grosse. GTZ. Personal Interview 2006.

¹¹⁵ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

“There is not an integral vision of health” in the medical field. He finds that if a travesti patient sees a doctor about her HIV/AIDS medication, they never ask about their hormone, silicone use or drug use, which of course can affect the treatment.¹¹⁶ Romero explains, travesti patients often do not receive instructions on how to take medication and are not warned about side effects. Many travestis feel embarrassed or reluctant to make consultations when they pick up their medication.¹¹⁷ Almost every person interviewed has reiterated this realization, and encourages the idea of giving the medical profession sexual orientation sensitivity training. Several subjects, such as Ana Gonzalez and Engelman, have also stressed the importance of training mental health, or psychological health specialists, to work with this population due to high levels of anxiety and depression related to the exclusion and often compromised health they face daily.

Additionally, as sex reassignment surgery is illegal, and because the patient and doctor who break this law can be imprisoned for up to ten years, travestis also end up risking their well being as they seek other more dangerous courses of action. Implications of these health circumstances are numerous. One is that travestis end up going to black market doctors to receive illegal backroom services. The doctors tend to overcharge them and typically do not give them post-operation check-ups. If travestis cannot afford this alternative, and cannot afford to travel to Chile to get a legal operation done there, they often resort to buying over-the-counter silicone which they self-inject into the breasts, hips and buttocks. Travestis also typically take hormones, usually without a doctor’s checkup and regulation of their health.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health- Coordinación SIDA. Personal Interview 2006.

¹¹⁷ Marcela Romero. ATTTA Trans Conference. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹¹⁸ ALITT 2001.

Industrial Silicone

Getting breast or other types of implants are extremely expensive. It is a luxury most travestis cannot afford. However, there is a form of industrial silicone common in airplane parts that can be bought over the counter at pharmacies. It is inexpensive, and so most of the travesti population in prostitution opt for this option, again risking their health for a cheaper alternative. As this silicone is not meant for the human body, there are many negative side effects, such as sores and boils, hard lumps, infections, cancer, and death. Common areas for travestis to inject silicone into are the breasts, buttocks, hips, thighs, cheeks, and brow line. Nose jobs are also one of the most common operations within this population. Berkins' study has found that 82 percent of travestis inject silicone, and 32 percent have had implants. Of those who inject silicone, nearly 98 percent self-inject or are injected by peers, while less than 2 percent see a professional. Martin Engelman is starting a "No to Industrial Silicone" campaign with CHA. Their short-term goal is to get travestis to doctors where they can be examined and see if and how their bodies have been compromised by the injections and what measures need to be taken if necessary. The long-term goal is to create an awareness of the dangers of industrial silicone and hopefully persuade travestis not to use it.

Hormone Treatment

Many take hormones in addition to silicone injections to feminize their bodies, hair growth and voices. 66 percent of travestis are estimated to take hormone treatments. 93 percent of these self-medicate and administer the hormones. Hormones, like industrial

silicone, are available over the counter in pharmacies. They may be oral or injections, and are typically a form of birth control or estrogen. Many over-consume hormones in hopes of faster and more visible transformations. Engelman suggests that one hormone injection, usually costing \$20 pesos, every fifteen days should be sufficient, however many travestis take several injections in one week. Of course, over-consuming hormones is a health risk for liver damage, impotence, and prostate cancer. Most travestis are not aware of the effects hormones can have on their bodies when mixed with alcohol or drugs, or if they have a STD or HIV/AIDS. Understanding such implications is again important considering that the majority of travestis are believed to abuse drugs and alcohol and over half are estimated to carry the HIV/AIDS virus.

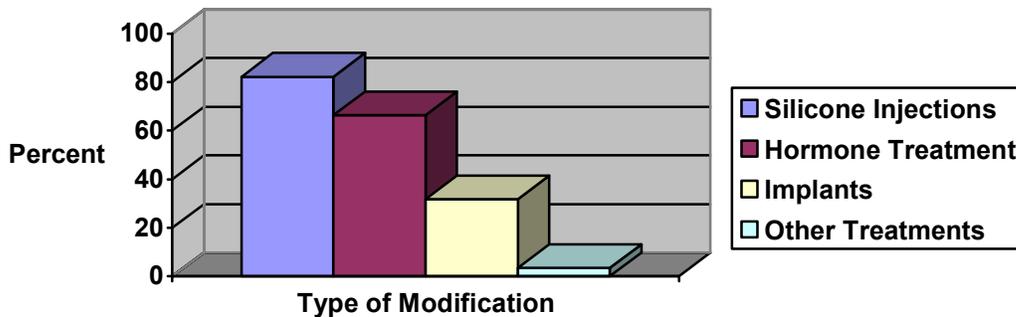
Younger travestis are today more inclined to take only hormones and use less silicone injections. This is not necessarily because they are protecting themselves more against bodily harm, but because the world's current "ideal" female body type is extremely thin. The travesti population watches closely current trends and styles and attempts to mirror them. One young travesti in the situation of prostitution that I interviewed explained that she actually has a pharmacist inject hormones for her once a week. She additionally gets tested monthly for HIV/AIDS and says that she always uses a condom. However, she explains, she is the exception in this population. Born in Buenos Aires, her family has accepted her travesti identity and has supported her. She was able to finish high school because of this and has an apartment in her sister's name. She has had the opportunity to learn the risks of prostitution and unprotected sex. Her greatest desire is to get a nose job, but first she must save \$1500 pesos for it (\$500US).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Travesti in the situation of prostitution on the street and via the Internet. Personal Interview 2006.

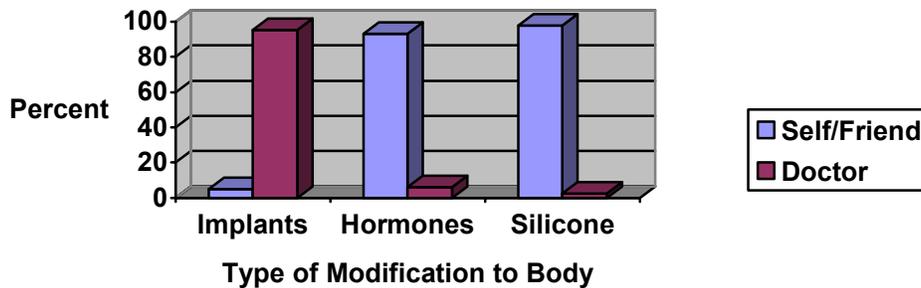
The first chart shows the different methods by which travestis modify their bodies. The X-axis represents the type of modification, for example silicone injection or hormone treatment. The Y-axis represents the percentage of the interviewed population using these methods. The chart shows that silicone injections and hormone treatment are the most popular types of modifications travestis are using today.

The second chart shows who is responsible for administering these treatments/modifications. The X-axis represents the type of modification made to the body, specifically broken down based on whether the treatment is offered by a doctor or by oneself or a friend. The Y-axis is representative of the percentage of travestis using these methods. In each of the three types of modifications, the travesti herself or a friend, was much more likely to administer the treatment than a doctor.

Means By Which Travestis Modify Their Bodies



Actors Responsible for Administering Implants, Hormones & Silicone



Protection & Prevention

Preventative health care is an enormous obstacle facing this population. With no hope or vision for the future, most travestis in the situation of prostitution do not adequately care for themselves. They abuse drugs and alcohol, have poor nutrition,

improperly use industrial silicone and hormones, do not see doctors for regular check-ups or when they are actually ill, and they rarely protect themselves with condoms 100% of the time. Freyre and several travestis in the situation of prostitution discussed in a weekly workshop the fact that the travestis community also does not like to discuss health-related issues and problems, but prefer to ignore them.¹²⁰

There are a number of organizations that regularly distribute condoms and sex education materials and lecture to sex workers in the red light zones and in hotels inhabited by travestis in the situation of prostitution. Julio Talavera works with one such organization, Coordinación SIDA. Coordinación SIDA alone distributes from 20,000 to 30,000 condoms monthly. Although he recognizes that this work is extremely important, he also acknowledges that it alone is not always enough, “We have brought condoms to places where there is no potable water. What is the sense of bringing condoms to a place where the people do not eat? We, as the state, provide free medication, but the pills must be taken with something in your stomach. In a country where hunger and discrimination are a constant for this population, the fact that they have access to condoms or vaccines does not ensure that they have a better quality of life.”¹²¹ For example, “you are on the street. It is three in the morning and the night was bad (you only had two or three clients), so your price drops. What at midnight paid you \$30 pesos, at 5am pays you only \$10 pesos. And you can make more money if you don’t use protection.”¹²² This, with possible combinations of alcohol and drugs also impairs judgment. It can be an issue of survival. Thinking of the future, of long-term survival is often not an option for this population. When travestis in the situation of prostitution are with clients, they typically do carry

¹²⁰ Alejandro Freyre and several travestis in the situation of prostitution. FBAS. Workshop 2006.

¹²¹ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health- Coordinación SIDA. Personal Interview 2006.

¹²² Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health- Coordinación SIDA. Personal Interview 2006.

protection. However, when clients offer them more money for a sexual service without a condom, and with little hope of living beyond their 30's, it is an easy choice for most travestis to take the extra money and forgo protection.

Of course this not only puts both the travestis and clients at risk, but also all people each is sexually active with afterwards. Many, if not most, clients are married men or men in heterosexual relationships. Therefore, their wives, partners, and children are also all put at risk for potentially contracting an STD.

HIV/AIDS

Because of their work and lifestyles, the travesti population in Buenos Aires remains exceptionally vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. A recent study found that 14 percent of men in Buenos Aires having sex with other men have HIV/AIDS, and only one in seven know that they have it. As a majority of travestis fall into all three of the three largest at-risk groups for HIV/AIDS, homosexual and bisexual men, sex workers and intravenous drug users, special attention needs to be given to this sexual minority group (Medicos Hoy 2004).

There are no definite statistics on the percent of this population that is HIV positive or has AIDS, however the vast majority of those interviewed for this study believe it to be well over 50 percent. In two different interviews with ATTTA President, Marcela, she suggested that 80 percent have HIV/AIDS and another time she suggested over half are infected. Martin Engelman remarks, "It would be generous to say that 50 percent of the population is HIV positive, 10 percent know they have it and 1 to 2 percent

are in treatment for it.”¹²³ This statement shows the severity of the problem. A likely estimate of over half of the population is HIV positive or has AIDS. Perhaps around 10 percent are aware they that have HIV/AIDS. And a miniscule percentage of the population might be receiving treatment even though treatment is free to all Argentines under the constitution. Many of the subjects in this study point out factors that contribute to these problems, aside from the discrimination discussed earlier.

One of the main problems is that doctors do not take into consideration the circumstances of the population with whom they are working. Populations in the situation of prostitution or living below the poverty line face very different lifestyles than the average middle class patient. Treatment for HIV/AIDS is complex and requires a person to have a routine, have a healthy and nutritious diet, and be drug free. The infected person often has to take different combinations of medications several times throughout the day that sometimes must be taken with certain kinds of meals. The travesti population, on the other hand, often lives without a routine, eats poorly and often does not eat enough,¹²⁴ while abusing drugs and alcohol. Most of the population has a lifestyle incompatible with a strict HIV/AIDS treatment regimen, and ultimately abandon the process. Engelman notes, “To know about health is a right and ought to be communicated as clearly as possible.” Unfortunately the general feeling seems to be that the medical field has not reflected on the possibility of altering treatment patterns to adapt to such lifestyles, nor has it sufficiently simplified language when explaining the treatment so that such populations have a firm understanding of the illness and treatment. One example both Freyre and Engelman offer is patients being treated for an illness such as syphilis or

¹²³ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹²⁴ Martin Engelman comments that a poor diet is due to poor education, poor spending habits, and a desire to be very thin. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

tuberculosis. Patients begin a treatment and as soon as they feel better they assume they have been cured and stop taking the medication. The illness ultimately returns. What is common knowledge to many people, is often not to marginal populations. Doctors need to explain that a medication must be taken in its entirety and run its course through the body in order to successfully treat the illness. “If you are going to offer resources to this population but do not work together with the professionals, there is no sense in it all,” explains Julio Talavera.¹²⁵

Life Expectancy

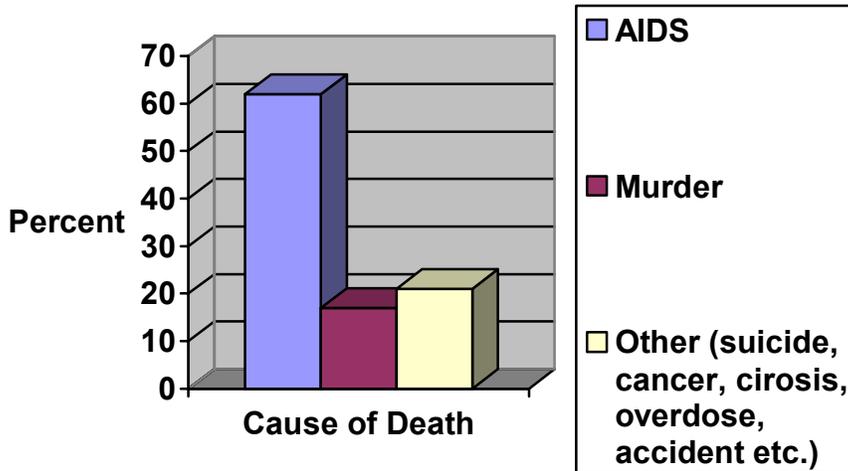
Every person interviewed for this study assumed the average life expectancy of a travesti in Buenos Aires to be in the thirties. Marcela Romero, President of ATTTA, believes that only one percent of the population reaches old age (which she defines as 60 years). Twenty percent she says are assassinated, and most of the rest die of HIV/AIDS or suicide. Carolina Grosse estimates travesti life expectancy at 35 years of age, Monica Leon between 15 and 35 years, Lohana Berkins around 30, and Talavera between 30 and 35.

The first chart shows how the travestis Berkins and Fernandez surveyed died. The travestis it represents are the 420 that passed away while they conducted this study. The X-axis represents the cause of death and the Y-axis represents the percentage of travestis to die from each cause of death. Clearly, majority of the travestis surveyed died of AIDS.

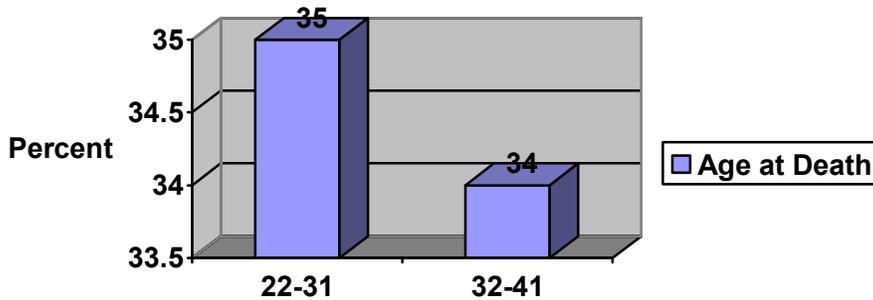
The second chart depicts the age at which these travestis died. The X-axis represents two different age groups, and the Y-axis represents the percentage of travestis to die within these two groups. Most were very young, 35% were 22-31 years old and 34% were 32-41 years old.

¹²⁵ Julio Talavera. Coordinación SIDA – Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

Cause of Death of the 420 Travestis Who Died During ALITT Investigation



Age of Death of Travestis Who Died During ALITT Investigation



Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Abuse of Alcohol and Drugs is common amongst the travesti population in the situation of prostitution. Engelman estimates that around 85%- 90% of the travestis population uses drugs. Travestis in the situation of prostitution tend to abuse alcohol and drugs on their own time, but are also frequently paid more money by clients to take drugs with them. Travestis claim that clients who want to take drugs and alcohol with them are

usually their best clients because they pay them more to do so, and then also usually end up staying with the travestis longer, yielding even more money.

While cocaine and marijuana are the most commonly used drugs with clients, travestis have also become large users of “Pasta Base” or “Paco.” This drug is literally a mixture of the paste left over from the cocaine manufacturing process and elements like kerosene, gasoline, benzoic acid, sulfuric acid, chloride, paraffin and other components like talc. It has become one of Argentina’s most lethal drugs over the past few years.¹²⁶ It is extremely dangerous and offers similar stimulation to that of crack but quickly breaks down the body’s respiratory system and can cause lung lesions. These lesions can lead to respiratory problems such as pneumonia. Pasta Base lines the cerebral cortex and thus can also cause permanent damage to the central nervous system, the consumer can damage reflexes, motor skills, intelligence and memory. The user is also at risk for heart attacks and high levels of toxicity. Talavera claims only three months of consuming pasta base can cause the respiratory system to collapse and the user to die. In Hotel Gondolin last year seven pasta base users died. Five were travestis with multi-resistant strains of tuberculosis. It was a drug once shunned, but with the economic crisis has become increasingly popular. Unfortunately, as it is a much cheaper alternative to crack, health implications are ignored and it continues to be one of the most popular drugs used by travestis in Buenos Aires.

Monica Leon, President of the Civil Association of Hotel Gondolin, explains that “drugs are the only motive for the majority of trans today in Argentina and especially in the Capital Federal. It is a way for them to confront life, and they have no idea about improving their quality of life, because they believe that a better quality of life is that

¹²⁶ Sebastian Gastelu. Sub-secretary for the Attention to Addictions. Ministry of Health.

which they are living.” Leon continued, “At this moment social discrimination does not exist when buying and consuming drugs. If one is sick, they consume more drugs to forget and so pass the days of their life. Social resentment has occupied a very important role in the life of the trans people, it is a daily reality.”¹²⁷ Leon explains how many travestis use drugs as an escape from a very difficult reality, of poverty, discrimination and poor health.

Police Abuse

“Now, I try to forget the past, to not be resentful, but this works for me because I am not in the same situation. I am rather passive. But there are other girls that react and then the police leave them half dead. This will not change. For me, this is Argentina.”
-Anita, FBAS

The police are active in discrimination and even life threatening hate crimes against travestis. 86 percent of travestis claim to have been abused by the police. It must be noted that police abuse is much worse in the provinces outside of the capital. Different forms of abuse range from physical and verbal assault and bribes, to torture. The extent to which these abuses take place can be observed in the chart below.

Police are notorious for demanding bribes from the travestis and their clients. When the police edicts were in effect in Buenos Aires the travestis lost a great portion of their earnings to such bribes.¹²⁸ Despite the fact that since this time travestis and those in the situation of prostitution give police no reason for arrest, police have still found petty or even fictitious reasons to make arrests or demand bribes. One travesti in the situation of prostitution told of how she and her friend had both just been robbed by police frequenting the zone they work in. She was frustrated, but not surprised. She mentioned

¹²⁷ Monica Leon. Gondolin Civil Association. Interview 2006.

¹²⁸ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health – AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

that clients, too, sometimes rob them by knife or gunpoint. She would like to have the zone she works in filmed to catch police treatment of travestis in the situation of prostitution. Anita explained that today she has a phobia of the police. Before she knew her rights, the police “treated me very bad, they wanted bribes, I was the object of humiliation and physical abuse and insults.” Monica Leon spoke of the frequent physical, sexual and physiological police abuse she endured in her hometown province as well as in Buenos Aires. An Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (FBAS) employee told of the horrible abuses she witnessed while being wrongfully imprisoned by the police. She witnessed a mother give birth to her child during the Dirty War. Guards immediately took the woman’s baby and ordered her to clean up the mess she made. Anita stresses, “It is important to learn about our rights, but they do not always respect these rights.”¹²⁹

Although bribery is still widely practiced, it has lessened since the police edicts were revoked and the Código Contravencional instated. While many subjects stated that it is the travestis that are typically bribed, some such as Paula, explained that in her case it is usually the clients who are bribed. Since she knows her rights, police cannot get away with bribing her, however the police will bribe clients threatening to detain them and tell their families about their rendezvous.¹³⁰ Vanni explains that such police behavior is illegal and that travestis in the situation of prostitution must be aware of this and inform their clients.¹³¹ Since the 1990s organizations have been working to teach travestis their rights and explain to them the letter of the law so that they can defend themselves against wrongful arrest. These lessons are also spread by word-of-mouth to other travestis

¹²⁹ Anita & Anonymous. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006. Monica Leon. Gondolin Civil Association. Interviews 2006.

¹³⁰ Paula*. Travesti in the situation of prostitution. Personal Interview 2006.

¹³¹ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. ATTTA Trans Conference. Personal Interview 2006.

and with time more and more are able to defend themselves. Vanni told the story of Nadia, a travesti she worked with who was complaining because she had been detained twice within fifteen days. Vanni's response reflected on how times have changed, and that not so long ago they were arrested five days out of the week and they never complained. To this Nadia replied, "See what it is not to know."¹³² Today, travestis have a greater opportunity to learn their rights and defend themselves with the law.

What most concerns Paula regarding the police and bribery is housing. She explained that police use online sites and newspaper ads where travestis in the situation of prostitution advertise to make under-cover appointments to visit them. By doing this they find travestis that rent apartments in buildings in which their situation of prostitution is unknown, such as in Paula's case. The police threaten to tell the apartment owners, if the travestis do not bribe them. Paula said that \$1000 pesos a month is a common bribe, which is about the cost of monthly rent. While sexual abuse has been reported by many travestis, she has not experienced it and feels that it is not so common because there are always other police officers around.¹³³

The most common police abuse of this population is arbitrary detaining of travestis. Police illegally arrest travestis on counts of prostitution and indecency and disturbing public morale and can hold them for a set amount of hours. The travesti can bribe her way out of the situation, or go to the station where she will be released hours later. Several subjects have commented that police often go out and re-arrest the same travesti on the same charges an hour after her release.

¹³² Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interview 2006.

¹³³ Paula*. Travesti in the situation of prostitution. Personal Interview 2006.

Angela Vanni explains one of her bigger concerns, “The gravest problem in Buenos Aires is that the police are not dependent on the city, and for this reason the city cannot issue them orders. If the police do not want to do something, and with this population this is normal, they won’t do it or they will act according to those whom they choose, not according to what the city determines.”¹³⁴ While the nation does have a national anti-discrimination law, it has chosen not to include gender or sexual minorities in any clause. And although Buenos Aires supports sexual minority non-discrimination, it does not have its own police but uses federal police. Therefore, a disconnect certainly exists between the federal police, national law and the laws of Buenos Aires and how they all relate to minority groups in the capital.

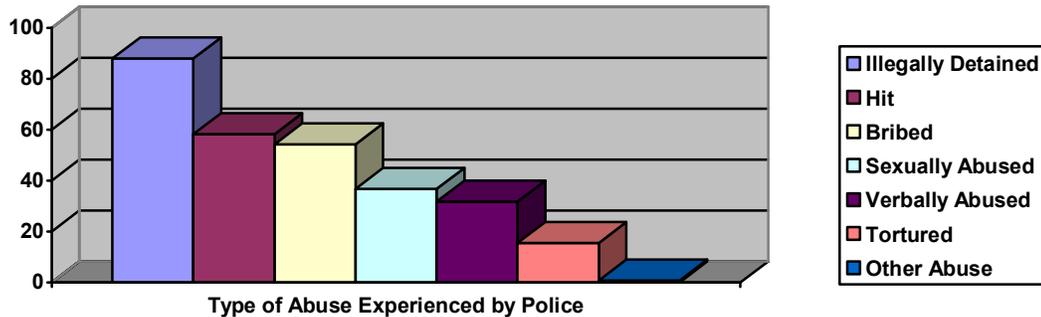
Other issues that have been raised by subjects include the police unnecessarily checking identity cards to embarrass and shame travestis. Their identity cards depict them as males since they cannot change their identity legally. Diana Maffia has accused police of using travestis to traffic drugs. On the other hand she notes that a jail cell has been created for travestis in Buenos Aires. It is about 4 years old now.

*The chart below has been broken down in order to understand the kind and quantity of different types of abuses. The X-axis represents the types of abuse travestis have suffered. The Y-axis represents the percentage of travestis surveyed who have experience each type of abuse. The results show that 88% have been illegally or arbitrarily detained, 58% have been physically hit/beaten by the police, police have demanded bribes from 54%, police have sexually abused 37%, 15% claim to have been tortured by police, 32% insulted/verbally abused and 1% claim to have been abused in other ways.*¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interview 2006.

¹³⁵ Berkins 2006.

Types & Amount of Abuse Inflicted Upon Travestis by the Police



Identity Cards

In Argentina it is illegal to change one's name. Therefore, when a person identifying as an opposite gender cannot change legally change his/her name, the consequences can be very emotionally damaging. Travestis have to show their identity cards to the police regularly, when using a credit card, when attempting to rent or buy a home or car, when going to the hospital or doctors office etc. In each of these instances, they feel embarrassed and ashamed to be labeled a gender with which they have chosen not to associate any longer. Sometimes, their physical appearance not matching their identity card appearance, will offer enough excuse for an employer or renter to reject their applications. Historically in Buenos Aires (and currently in other provinces) this mixed identity has been sufficient cause for arrest.

Some subjects suggest that legalizing name changes is a top priority issue, as it is symbolic of the state's acceptance of chosen gender identity. With acceptance from the government will come acceptance from society. Still others view identity as a rather insignificant issue, compared to more immediate health challenges. Both seem to be correct, the former in the long run, and the latter in the short run.

Public Perception

“The routine is: they get up at five in the afternoon, get ready, leave for work, work all night, return at eight in the morning, go to sleep and at five in the afternoon begin their routine once again. This pace offers very little time for contact with society. They live in hotels with other travestis, they leave to see their clients, and they return to their hotels.” –V. Barreda

“When the media depicts travestis, they emphasize their frivolousness, as if they are reduced to just silicone and bronzer, leaving out the poverty, social and familial exclusion and the terrible violence that oppress this group of people.” – Pastor Lisandro Orlov

“What society does not see clearly is that this is not a hobby, it is our life.” – Monica Leon

The public generally perceives the travesti population of Buenos Aires with disdain. Engelman points out common stigmas: travestis are crazy, they are men disguising themselves as women, they like prostitution and do not want to work, and they could be men but choose not to.¹³⁶ Travestis tend to be associated with prostitution, drugs, alcohol and general deviance. Anita points out that many drink and use drugs to make friends, as she did. She began drinking at age 11. Victoria Barreda suggests that society is more fearful of travestis’ association with prostitution than anything. When citizens see travestis “in the streets offering themselves, unclothed or having sexual relations with a client in plain sight,” this gives society a very bad perception. “Sex work is linked with transgression, marginality and delinquency”, she explains.¹³⁷

Vanni was one such person, years ago. “Being heterosexual, when I first got to know the travestis I pondered, trying to understand, why they would alter their bodies so much and expose themselves so much to a society that does not accept them. I came to the conclusion that they feel so strongly about their identity that they have no alternative.”¹³⁸ For this reason, a need exists for travestis to increase visibility in a way

¹³⁶ Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹³⁷ Victoria Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

¹³⁸ Angela Vanni. Lawyer. Personal Interview 2006.

that relates to society at large and for society to work on diminishing their preconceived notions of travestis.

Paula understands society's dislike and unease with her population. She faults the group for being competitive, envious and jealous of each other's boyfriends, money and clients. She sees the responsibility as largely that of the travesti population to change public perception in society. She believes they "must not carry themselves as they do, wear so much make-up and make themselves into sex objects in public. They must not enhance all womanly aspects to extremes, nor show themselves to only be prostitutes and drug addicts. They must not be so vulgar. This is in part due to their lack of education. They must not always call out to men as they walk by. They must be calmer, less intense, and more respectful to society." She explains that while society largely perceives them as they have for decades, there do exist today travestis that are less "vulgar", who have goals and homes and cars. Therefore, while travestis need to change for society, society also needs to open up and see and respect these changes.¹³⁹

The other end of the argument is that society must change before travestis can. Dora Barrancos points out that society must be more open, democratic and accepting of diversity and the very difficult identity of being a travesti. If they can accept that gay, lesbian and trans identities will not change the norm of relationships, this would signify the possibility that travestis, just as they were forced into prostitution, would be able to leave it.¹⁴⁰ Gonzalez, with the Secretary of Human Rights, points out that society's patriarchal character, especially regarding gender and sexual orientation, is a huge hindrance to travestis and sexual minorities alike. A patriarchal sexual norm is protected

¹³⁹ Paula* Travesti in the situation of prostitution. Again, Paula is very unique in this population due to her education, familial support and financial stability. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁴⁰ Dora Barrancos. University of Buenos Aires. Personal Interview 2006.

in which sexuality is binary: female and male, with no room for deviation. She explains, because of this “I believe the travesti population has very few elements of weight to become included and integrated.” She ultimately believes the solution lies in a cultural change that must result from the participation of travesti organizations, state institutions, in particular those of human rights and academics.¹⁴¹

Travestis also face challenges finding acceptance by other sexual minority groups. Martin Engelman, a gay member of CHA working with travestis, and Beatriz Giri, a lesbian feminist conducting an investigation for the government on sex work, both explain clearly that many gay men and lesbians will not support or identify with travestis and often altogether reject them.¹⁴² Thus, travestis face not only discrimination from heterosexuals but from homosexuals. Such discrimination is lessening with time, but is still very relevant to travestis’ current predicament.

Other influential factors or perceptions of this group are the media, the church, education and tourism. As mentioned previously, sex and gender education in schools hardly exists in Argentina, yet all interview subjects suggest this is one of the keys to improving the situation of travestis. Although a majority of the Buenos Aires population supports such courses being taught in the classroom, small powerful sectors of society along with the church have prevented such courses from being instated. Roman Catholicism is endorsed in the Constitution, and while 92 percent of the population is Catholic only 20 percent are practicing.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, the media has had both positive and negative influences on the public perception of this group. It is negative, Vanni

¹⁴¹ Ana Gonzalez. Secretary of Human Rights. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁴² Martin Engelman. CHA. Personal Interviews 2006. Beatriz Giri. Ministry of Health & AMMAR researcher. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁴³ CIA World Factbook 2006.

points out, when it shows programs such as “Cops” arresting travestis, and creating the perception that it is illegal to cross-dress and/or be in the situation of prostitution, when neither is illegal. These programs do not show the travestis getting released shortly upon their arrival at the police station, when only a pimp may actually be convicted (because they are making money off of someone else in the situation of prostitution, which is illegal). The media often portrays the population as ridiculous, shallow and without deeper social and political problems.

Yet the media has also been a somewhat positive influence, introducing the travesti identity to the public through popular sitcom characters like Florencia de la V and Cris Miro. Many subjects of this study are grateful for such attention and visibility. Fernandez points out that not only has media attention increased, but now there are also tourist circuits that take people through the red light zones. People can take bus tours to see travestis in the situation of prostitution at work on the streets as well as in their homes. On the red light tours, Fernandez adds, while “this can be criticized, it is also an indicator that a debate exists. Visibility is greater.”¹⁴⁴

Many subjects in this study have clarified the importance of making contact with the public in everyday normal routines, such as grocery shopping, going to movies and taking buses. Increased interaction and visibility helps lessen fears and preconceptions and increase understanding. The more people become accustomed to the population, the more comfortable and less threatened they will feel. Dolores Fenoy recommends creating dialogues between the travesti population and different social sectors. Without dialogue, she suggests, society reacts aggressively toward the population, and the travestis in turn

¹⁴⁴ Josefina Fernandez. Author & Anthropologist. Personal Interview 2006.

responds aggressively.¹⁴⁵ Fortunately, most of those involved with the travesti population do see an increasing, albeit slow, acceptance of sexual minorities and travestis in Buenos Aires. Fernandez explains that, “the travesti quandary has become a public debate for the first time in the country. There is a type of dialogue that today is much more fluid than it was some time ago.” Each year more travestis join the GLBTTT parade, bridging the gap between travestis and the greater gay community. Gay visitors, which make up 20 percent of tourism in Buenos Aires, help further normalize sexual minorities, while the Buenos Aires Civil Union policy continues to open more and more doors to social acceptance of sexual minorities.¹⁴⁶

Clients

Before closing this section, it is important to note that many subjects have concurred that clients of travestis are typically heterosexual, but desire homosexual relations. However they would never consider themselves homosexual. Many are in marriages or have girlfriends, and they are all different ages, from very young to older. Some travestis in the situation of prostitution have described clients with fetishes that want to role-play socially unacceptable situations, some are gay but cannot come out, some have disabilities. Many individuals with different difficulties in finding intimate partners seek out travestis in the situation of prostitution to satisfy desires. In considering the public’s perception of travestis and their participation in prostitution, we must remember that the consistently heterosexual clientele of travestis in the situation of prostitution are silent members of the public creating the very possibility for most sex

¹⁴⁵ Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁴⁶ Diana Maffia. Ombudsman Office. Personal Interviews 2005 & 2006.

work. These clients remain the most frightening threat to public health in this equation and the key to the persistence of prostitution, but we hear very little from them or about them.

Buenos Aires vs. the Provinces: Exception in the Capital Federal

Berkins and Fernandez's 2006 study has found that of the travestis currently living in Buenos Aires Capital Federal, 17% are from the capital, 62% are from other provinces and 8% are from other countries.¹⁴⁷ Most travestis from the provinces flee to Buenos Aires to experience a more open and accepting culture than those they left behind. Alba suggests that most come to earn more money, and to be with white people of the middle and upper classes. "It is their fantasy."¹⁴⁸ Talavera said of travestis in the provinces, "The only security they have is that they are going to die. The average life expectancy is 30-35 years. They die from police violence in the provinces. The capital (autonomous city) is not Argentina, it is not the reality that the others live in. The country beyond the General Paz is another country."¹⁴⁹ This disparity can be seen in the Constitution of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, compared to the remaining Edicts that run the provinces. In Buenos Aires, legislation is more advanced in this respect. It includes sexual diversity and gender in a constitutional non-discrimination clause, respects an individual's "right to be different," and permits civil unions.

Outside of the capital, in every province,¹⁵⁰ Police Edicts still exist that criminalize transvestitism indirectly. Rapisardi tells of the police edicts, "All of the

¹⁴⁷ Berkins 2006, 102.

¹⁴⁸ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹⁴⁹ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health – AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁵⁰ There are 23 Provinces in Argentina in addition to Buenos Aires Capital Federal.

provinces prohibit what they call ‘scandal’ or ‘homosexual relations’ and use this against the travesti population.”¹⁵¹ A few provinces, Entre Rios and Misiones, no longer criminalize prostitution, but the remaining 21 still have edicts against it, regardless of the fact that constitutionally prostitution is not illegal. There exists a definite disconnect between national, provincial and international laws and pacts regarding prostitution and non-discrimination laws for gender and sexual minorities.¹⁵²

ATTTA President, Marcela, explains, “Here (in the capital) we have good health, we can walk freely, the gay community can have civil unions,” in contrast to the rest of Argentina. One of her organization’s goals is to fight and change discriminatory edicts in the provinces as they did in Buenos Aires Capital in the 1990s. However, the struggle is not an easy one. When a group of travestis brought a petition against an edict punishing cross-dressing to the House of one of the provinces each travesti was fined \$50 pesos under the same edict. In seeking greater rights, travestis risk arrest and fines. It is easy to see then how travestis find it very difficult to perform simple daily tasks such as going to the grocery store, for risk of being detained.¹⁵³ Fenoy explains that in the provinces the discrimination and the violence against this population are much more potent, and indeed prevent many of the most basic of activities.¹⁵⁴

Julio Talavera experienced such discriminatory police action firsthand a few years ago when he returned to his hometown, Jose C. Paz, in the Buenos Aires province of Argentina two hours from the capital. Talavera is gay. He is also a state employee, working for the Ministry of Health. He was visiting his mother and sister. His father was

¹⁵¹ Flavio Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁵² These laws will be expanded upon in Chapter 3.

¹⁵³ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹⁵⁴ Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

killed in the Dirty War. As he gave his sister a ride to school, he was pulled over and arrested. Under the police edicts in this province, a known homosexual cannot accompany a minor alone. Talavera recognizes Buenos Aires Capital Federal's success in creating non-discrimination based on gender and sexuality. His opinion of the provincial police is another matter. He states, "the police are death squads in the province of Buenos Aires."¹⁵⁵

Lohana Berkins, ALITT founder, presents a few additional examples. In the province of Cordoba the Code of Misdemeanors charges ten days of arrest for those who "disturb others, affecting their decorum through gestures or words in public places," and if the offense takes place at night, twenty days (Title I, Chapter I, Art. 42). There is also the provision against "offenses that would provoke public scandal." This edict puts offenders in custody for ten days (Art. 51, same chapter and title). A third edict criminalizes the offer of sex in public places, and will place violators in custody for twenty days if they "disturb others or cause scandal." Finally, HIV/STD exams and treatment are compulsory for arrested sex workers (Art. 44, same chapter and title).

In the province of Santiago del Estero, Berkins notes similar edicts. The Code of Misdemeanors there criminalizes "instigation to commit carnal acts." Tamara, a travesti, was sent to prison for over five months under this edict and her lawyer's license was suspended for one month by the judge for taking the case. The judge made his feelings clear on the topic, "Travestis are dirty and they deserve death."¹⁵⁶

The examples above offer a clear rationale for why so many of Argentina's travestis flee the provinces for Buenos Aires. Although they confront discrimination and

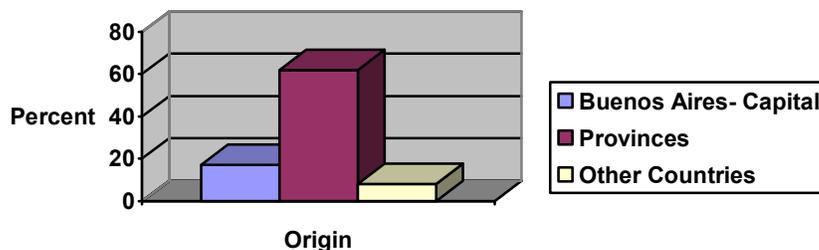
¹⁵⁵ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health – AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁵⁶ Berkins.

many challenges on a daily basis in Buenos Aires, they are the owners of their gender identity, they can seek legal counsel if they are discriminated against, they can walk the streets freely, and they can seek health care and organizational support. The majority of travestis in the situation of prostitution and the greater legal acceptance of prostitution in Buenos Aires create a stronger more vibrant market for sex work in which travestis can make much more money than is possible in the provinces. Thus, although this study focuses on the travesti population of Buenos Aires Capital Federal, it is important to take note of how the already life threatening struggles of the capital's travesti population compare with the much more difficult and dangerous provinces. Buenos Aires is unique. It has taken enormous strides towards decriminalizing this population's gender orientation, does not criminalize prostitution (but does regulate it), and has begun a fight against discrimination.

The following chart represents the origin of Buenos Aires' travestis. The X-axis represents where the travestis are from, while the Y-axis measures the percentage of travestis originating from each area. The charts shows that the majority of travestis living in Buenos Aires come from the provinces of Argentina.

Origin of Buenos Aires' Travestis



Lack of Unity and Competitiveness

All the subjects of this study have noted as a clear weakness that the travesti population is not united. There are some organizations organized and run by travestis but

overall the general perception is that individualism and competitiveness are distinctive characteristics of this population. This lack of solidarity is certainly a hindrance to the group's advancement. "Like any group, the more organized they are, the stronger their ability to petition the state and improve their situation. This goes for any marginalized group," remarks Josefina Fernandez of Buenos Aires' travesti population.¹⁵⁷ Although Fernandez avoids analyzing the unity within the travesti population, several others offer their experience and insight. Victoria Barreda offers what she understands to be some of the challenges travestis face in regard to unity and cohesiveness. Barreda sees the population as fragmented and competitive, largely as a result of working in the situation of prostitution. "They live competing because one can always take a client from another. The possibility always exists that another will end your chance of making money. In the market where they work, there is a larger supply than demand." What is more, she acknowledges that today there is more competition for travestis in the situation of prostitution than just their peers in the streets. Today there are agencies and Internet sites clients can use to order sexual services, thus protecting their identities. However, most travestis do not have the luxury of using the Internet, nor have they learned the skills to use it.¹⁵⁸ Angela Vanni feels similar to Barreda on the topic. "The travesti character is very egocentric, they do not have the constancy needed for a union, if there is not someone constantly pushing them." In ATTTA, Claudia is the driver of cooperation and cohesion, but there are not many with her abilities or prerogatives. "In 1993 we had been struggling with a group of almost 300 travestis, but it has been dissolving," explains Vanni.

¹⁵⁷ Josefina Fernandez. Author & Anthropologist. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁵⁸ Victoria Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

Both Paula and Anita describe their population as disunited, competitive, egotistical, and prejudiced. Anita explains, “the fights are for stupid things, and the friendships are for convenience.”¹⁵⁹ This paints a dismal picture of the type of support available to most travestis, especially those in the situation of prostitution. Like Barreda, Vanni attributes such independent characteristics to lifestyles. “When they are young, because they are dependent on their physical appearance it is difficult to interest them in something else. After reaching their 30s, if they are alive, they begin to worry about other issues. The majority grow tired of the streets and do not have the energy or desire to continue the fight.”¹⁶⁰

Additionally, travesti organizations that began taking shape in the 1990s have weakened due to fighting between and within organizations. In Diana Maffia’s experience over the past decade, she has found that the travesti organizations are very competitive and jealous of each other, and that they compete for prestige and power. Without solidarity, the organizations and collectives are weak.¹⁶¹ Alejandro Freyre of the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation seconds this notion of divisive individualism. He claims the population is extremely individualistic and unaccustomed to working together and creating positive alliances. They are not used to living in a community or having to cooperate. These are big challenges his organization faces in its hair styling training program aimed at offering travestis a way out of prostitution through learning a trade.¹⁶² He additionally finds fault with some of the stronger travesti organizations such as ALITT, run by Lohana Berkins. He and Anita explained that Berkins had acquired

¹⁵⁹ Paula. Travesti in the situation of prostitution. Personal Interview 2006. Anita. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006

¹⁶⁰ Angela Vanni. Laywer. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁶¹ Diana Maffia. Ombudsman Office. Personal Interviews 2005 & 2006.

¹⁶² Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

several sewing machines and materials in order to teach sewing courses to travestis. However, as Berkins' work tends to be more political and less hands-on with the general travesti population, she has not had sufficient attendance or interest in the classes. FBAS offered to work with her to enhance participation and attendance, however Berkins refused the offer. Freyre attributed this refusal to Berkins' desire to control the project, even if this jeopardizes its success. "She is very individualistic, she does not want alliances with anyone. She wants to carry all of the laurels."¹⁶³

Julio Talavera, does not find such fragmentation so unusual among social organizations, especially regarding finances. He does, however, find organizational unity and strength essential to advancement. Talavera suggests that travesti organizations and individuals are not as united as they could be, and that they ought to come together with a united vision, group objectives and solid goals. They need to appreciate that what the Secretary of Health and the Secretary of Human Rights offer them is not easily obtained and not a gift, but rather the result of years of unified struggle. Talavera says, "it would help me very much if twenty organizations came together and said 'we want more things, condoms are not sufficient.' But the reality is that this does not happen, and I am left colliding with state structures without the support of these organizations."¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, given travestis current predicament in Buenos Aires regarding the topics covered above: laws, employment, family, education, housing, health care, alcohol and drug abuse, police abuse, identity cards, public perception and discrimination, it is

¹⁶³ Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Julio Talavera. Buenos Aires Ministry of Health – AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

clear that we have a moral and strategic imperative to improve this group's standard of living. A foundation for change has been laid by the efforts of both activists and travestis themselves. Legally, travestis have the same rights to health, education and work as any other citizen. Now the framework of equal rights must be expanded to encompass significant changes and improvements in living standards. Travestis need to take responsibility for educating themselves on their rights, while appropriate government entities and officials must advocate for travestis in policy debate and offer opportunities for travestis to emerge from what is now a dismal state of existence.

In the next chapter, I will show how some government offices have made minor efforts to remedy the situation, and how these efforts have resulted almost entirely from the prerogatives of individual public officials rather than the government as a whole. With the departure of individual advocates from certain posts, initiatives to aid the travesti population have largely fizzled out and in most cases failed. Chapter Three will chronicle these limited efforts made by the government on behalf of the travesti population of Buenos Aires, often in partnership with private interest groups and organizations.

Chapter III

Public Policy Initiatives: Building Public-Private Partnerships

Government response to this marginal group has been slow and inadequate. There are several explanations for why this is so. First, as this group and their problems have become increasingly visible, the Argentinean nation has faced economic crisis, high unemployment rates and even higher percentages of citizens living below the poverty line. The travesti population, like other marginal groups of society, has experienced some of the worst effects of the 2001 crisis. However, being such a small and socially isolated group, government leaders have found little motivation for focusing attention on travestis, among much larger problems. Although the economy is certainly picking back up, those affected worst by the crisis are not experiencing the same rebound as middle and upper class Argentineans. Many remain in a very stagnant position.

What concerns the public most and in turn politicians regarding travestis is how they directly affect public health. This is mostly through high rates of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, transmittable to the population at large by travestis in the situation of prostitution and their clients. Thus HIV/AIDS is the one area where the government has participated, usually with private partners, in assisting the travesti population. Unfortunately, other needs and challenges that travestis face are not addressed as much, rendering many public health efforts in vain. Society and the state need to see that marginalization caused by poverty, poor education and discrimination keep many travestis without a choice but to survive through the situation of prostitution.

This is how and why many ultimately contract HIV/AIDS and begin drug and alcohol addictions that further aggravate health crises. If the state could begin to address the roots of travesti problems, then efforts combating public health threats would prove more successful.

This chapter will reflect on efforts by the state to address the travesti population's problems. More specifically, it will focus on public-private partnerships that in which the government of Buenos Aires has participated that directly affect the travesti population of Buenos Aires. These include the Ombudsman Office's "Construction of the Travesti Citizen" project and GTZ's "Grupo Tacones" supported by the Ministry of Health.

Construction of Travesti Citizenship (Ombudsman Office)
Construcción Ciudadanía Travesti (Defensoría del Pueblo)

*"The state does not have one attitude alone. There are spaces that are very friendly and there are spaces that are very hostile and this depends very much on the functionary in charge and his/her willingness to work with travestis. The state does not change one time and forever, authorities change and history changes. Today the Ombudsman Office does not work with travestis. I believe now they are filing complaints at the Office of Human Rights."
-Malu Moreno*

The Ombudsman Office¹⁶⁵ brought to life a small project conceived by Area Queer (with Buenos Aires University), ALITT and CHA to support the travesti population. These three groups suggested that the Ombudsman Office help them run a campaign teaching travestis their rights by visiting the red light zones and passing out informational fliers. Maffia was Ombudswoman (1998-2003), in the Area of Human Rights, when this campaign was presented. Diana accepted the suggestion and for the rest

¹⁶⁵ The Ombudsman "is an Institution of the Nation which acts with full independence and autonomy, receiving no instructions from any authority. This institution is created within the jurisdiction of the National Congress and its jurisdiction is established in section 86 and section 43 of the National Constitution and Act No 24.284 and modified by Act No 24.379. The mission of this office is to defend and protect the human rights and all other rights, guarantees and interests enshrined in the Constitution and the Law; and to control the exercise of the public administrative functions." www.defensor.gov.ar

of her time with the Ombudsman Office she worked to develop it with these organizations (mostly UBA QUEER), a few assistants, and several of the office's lawyers. She had no funding for it, only basic office expenses. Unfortunately, this program was only developed in Maffia's last year with the office, and although they had hopes for its continuation, it died with her. The Ombudsman Office's new incumbent did not continue efforts with CCT.

Malu Moreno, Maffia's primary assistant at the time, described the scene when CCT came into being. "The Ombudsman Office had existed for ten years, in that moment, but the travestis never came. This occurs with the majority of human rights institutions and governmental organizations. Many exist, but many populations living in vulnerable situations do not access them for various reasons: because they do not know the institution or their rights and, on occasions, because the institutions are expulsive to travestis. But when Diana came into office, there was a change in the city of Buenos Aires, it had just established a new Constitution. With this new constitution the Ombudsman Office had changed some of its functions."¹⁶⁶

Moreno and Maffia explain that the first step was to establish circles of confidence and to define the space in the Ombudsman Office as a space where travestis could be comfortable filing grievances. They had to define what types of complaints could be made there and what types of responses travestis might receive from the office. The biggest activists began to bring in the first complaints, the majority had to do with police abuse. Moreno explains that police abuse today remains one of travestis' principle problems. Initially travestis came in accompanied by a travesti activist or representative from the office, however, soon they were comfortable coming in on their own. But the

¹⁶⁶ Malu Moreno. Ombudsman Office- Diana Maffia's Assistant. Personal Interview 2006.

office did not only want to work with complaints and promoting rights, they did not just want travestis coming in to file complaints. They also wanted travestis to know their rights. CCT began creating pamphlets to address this.

The information CCT disseminated via pamphlets targeted women and travestis in the situation of prostitution. Members of the University of Buenos Aires' QUEER studies center distributed these fliers at night in the red light zones. The fliers included information advising them of their human/civil rights, broaching topics such as abuse, warning them about health risks and offering legal assistance. For example, a flier might include a series of rights, how to respond when in a situation of police abuse, and under what conditions police could detain them. They explained that in order to identify the travestis the police needed to see their DNIs (national identity documents) and that the police must then return the document (it is very common for police to keep the document and demand a bribe to give it back). The fliers included contact information for lawyers (with AMMAR), doctors (associated with CHA), the Buenos Aires University, the Ombudsman office, ALITT and other organizations and peoples willing to help this group. CCT offered workshops in the hotels and homes of travestis to teach them how to defend themselves from police abuse, how to make an official complaint/ grievance, and how to read legal language. Such lessons prepared citizens with an understanding of how long police could legally detain them, on what merits, and in what conditions. They sought to empower the travesti population with knowledge.

Maffia's CCT conducted a survey of the travestis they worked with to better understand how they define their community, political capacity, and social challenges. Maffia stressed how important it was for travestis to construct and reinforce the travesti

identity while simultaneously erasing negative stigmas. As travestis begin to assimilate she believes it is important that they not lose their sense of identity and community.

CCT also created a map of the 23 police commissions and highlighted the areas of greatest risk/danger for vulnerable groups based on the information they received regarding police abuse. Regarding health, CCT initiated formal complaints against hospital discrimination and poor treatment, they began making phone calls and asking for appointments for the travestis and worked for equal medical attention for travestis.

One triumph for Maffia's CCT was getting a law passed that allows students to be called by the name of their choice. The symbolism behind language can be very powerful, and therefore to pass this law allowing a travesti to be called by her female name in school is also to accept her chosen gender identity. School is difficult enough for most travestis. Not having to constantly worry that a peer or teacher will call them by their male names and humiliating them makes the education process and staying in school more bearable for the trans population.

An effort that can be considered both a failure and a success was CCT's attempt to organize a work-training program. With the desire to offer travestis in the situation of prostitution an alternative type of employment, CCT opened a hair styling school in Flores. Flores is one of three neighborhoods where travestis in the situation of prostitution concentrate. They found a teacher interested in volunteering his talent with this population __ days a week and set up additional workshops that the students would participate in covering topics such as human rights and health care. They offered a \$200 peso monthly stipend to the students, to compensate them for their time. For those in the

situation of prostitution to put aside time to go to school when they could be working or sleeping is a much bigger commitment than for the average person.

Unfortunately, Rapisardi explains, the school failed because the state did not have the resources to fund the program.¹⁶⁷ Moreno adds that the failure was also due to a high dropout rate of students, largely attributed to the fact that classes were offered in the daytime, which is when travestis in the situation of prostitution usually sleep. Many were also fearful to leave their hotels in daylight because of discrimination. She reminds us, “you do not do the minimum and get results when you work with this type of population. You have to go out and find them.”¹⁶⁸

A challenge Moreno saw with CCT was that almost all complaints filed by travestis were redirected to Maffia’s office. If a travesti complained about potholes in the street or plumbing problems, those complaints still came to the Human Rights office. People knew that they offered services to this marginal group, and therefore all complaints ended up in the Human Rights office instead of the appropriate public facility. She also found it a great challenge to get institutions and professionals to acknowledge and accept travestis without having to go through the Ombudsman Office. Moreno explains that, “work with institutions depends on the functionaries and the bureaucracy. One of the things that cost us the most was convincing lawyers that travestis were citizens and had the right to file complaints like the rest of citizens.”¹⁶⁹

Alba saw the program as both a success and a failure. She was frustrated with its brevity, a common challenge with groups or individuals attempting to support marginal populations. She stressed that political and social projects need to be implemented that

¹⁶⁷ Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁶⁸ Moreno. Ombudsman Office – Diana Maffia’s Assistant. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Moreno. Ombudsman Office – Diana Maffia’s Assistant. Personal Interview 2006.

are long term and sustainable, and with the support of the state. Shorter projects do not last long enough for significant progress to be made. She viewed CCT and Maffia's efforts as political management more than a policy and faulted CCT's inability to create a stronger work/labor insertion program. Alba feels that "travestis need a space and policy that is much more distinct than that provided by CCT and Grupo Tacones."¹⁷⁰

Unfortunately the Ombudsman Office did not keep records of this specific program, and therefore they do not know how many travestis with which CCT came in contact through the different services they offered. And although the Ombudsman Office does keep track of the number and type of annual complaints, they only segregate the numbers by male and female. Rapisardi found that in some respects CCT was a failure because they could not broaden the concept of citizenship, and while they were able to intervene in civil rights, they could not advance in the areas of employment, education or citizenship. Maffia reveals that if she had the opportunity to do the program again with the Ombudsman's Office, there is one thing she would change. She would create more publicity. When they ran the program, she explains, they remained very cautious in publicizing their efforts. Today, she would direct another CCT program with greater confidence because of her better understanding of the socio-political situation and more useful contacts and connections.

High Heels Group, AIDS Coordination (Muniz Hospital)

Grupo Tacones, Coordinación SIDA (Hospital Muniz)

Grupo Tacones was a public-private partnership. It was a program organized by the state's AIDS Coordination program director and financed primarily by the German

¹⁷⁰ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interviews 2006.

Technical Cooperative (GTZ).¹⁷¹ In Argentina, Grupo Tacones was a smaller project that GTZ financed, aimed at HIV/AIDS prevention. GTZ was working through several avenues with both the Secretary of Health of the city of Buenos Aires and the Ministry of Health of Argentina on HIV/AIDS prevention. One avenue was HIV/AIDS contraction through drug abuse and addiction. Another focused on the HIV/AIDS crisis within sexually diverse populations. A third avenue was HIV/AIDS in the adolescent population, run by Alejandro Freyre. GTZ distributed a budget for HIV/AIDS prevention to these three areas and the money ordained for sexual diversity ended up funding Grupo Tacones.

In fact, it was Victoria Barreda, who was in charge of Buenos Aires' Coordinación SIDA since its inception in 2000, who initiated Grupo Tacones. Barreda has a university degree and work background focusing on the GLBTTTI populations, in particular the MSM (Men who have Sex with Men)¹⁷² population. In the 1990s, Barreda became interested in the concept of gender and the feminine gender of travestis. When she began working with Coordinación SIDA in 2000 she also became interested in how HIV/AIDS has affected the travesti population and the scarce public policy resources available to address the epidemic. Travestis were, and still are, clumped into the "homosexual" category in official HIV/AIDS statistics. She proposed to her director that they work on a public policy initiative to improve services for travestis at hospitals. She decided Muniz Hospital would be the best hospital around which to build the project because of its accessibility to the travesti population, compared to other hospitals.

¹⁷¹ GTZ works to create more sustainable environments for some of the most vulnerable groups in many developing countries around the world.

¹⁷² The MSM population is not the same as the homosexual population. Quite often MSM men do not consider themselves to be homosexual and have relationships with women.

Hospital Muniz specializes in infectious diseases and has been one of the primary hospitals to work with the HIV/AIDS population since the disease became a major and recognized public health issue in the 1990s. Because of its experience working with marginal populations infected with HIV/AIDS, staff proved less averse to working with travestis than doctors and nurses at other hospitals. Still, the hospital has come a long way in understanding and accepting this population. Once Barreda established a relationship with the hospital, she proposed the formation of Grupo Tacones to GTZ. GTZ agreed to finance the project for two years. That money went primarily to paying stipends to travestis working with Barreda, covering basic expenses of running the program, and creating informational pamphlets to be distributed to the travesti population. The government's contribution was the condoms they distributed and, of course, Barreda's services and salary.¹⁷³

Carolina Grosse, GTZ's primary coordinator for this project, explains that GTZ's Grupo Tacones was a 2-year project that began in November of 2003 and only recently ended in late 2005 (Barreda says 2001-2003). While GTZ's projects do tend to be short-term, GTZ's goal is to have a long-term effect. What GTZ would ultimately like is first, to see populations develop a greater capacity in which they can protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. Secondly, GTZ desires to see local NGOs link up with state health programs and institutions in a long-term, more sustainable relationship so that these organizations will not find themselves dependent on foreign aid. While Grosse was in charge of the general coordination of the project, she has no specialization working with populations infected with HIV/AIDS and was only put on the project because it was so small. She

¹⁷³ Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

clarified, “we work with travestis that are representatives of the population but we do not work in the field with them.”¹⁷⁴

The key actors in Grupo Tacones, in addition to Barreda, were a sociology student, Virginia Isnardi, who was doing an internship through the program, and a travesti, Luisa, who later became vital to the program’s survival. Together, they offered a variety of services. They worked with the hospital to improve services to the travesti population, as travestis generally face very hostile and discriminatory environments in hospitals. Grupo Tacones also facilitated travestis in making appointments with different specialists in the hospital, a task that can be daunting and time consuming for many travestis. They offered weekly workshops every Wednesday morning at 11am to discuss different topics affecting travestis, such as sexually transmitted diseases, documentation, gender and HIV/AIDS. Barreda clarifies that these were topics the travestis themselves chose to discuss. They also visited other travesti patients in the hospitals, offering them company and seeing to any needs they might have. Luisa visited zones, like Constitución, and hotels populated by travestis to offer free condoms and discussions on HIV prevention. She would also offer information on Grupo Tacones’ services. Luisa and other travestis additionally went to discos and clubs to disseminate this information.

Grupo Tacones furthermore created a pamphlet for general distribution. This was the first time that Coordinación SIDA and the Secretary of Health put out promotional material that had the face of a travesti with make-up on it and referred to travestis as “Chicas Travestis.”¹⁷⁵ In other words, it was the first time they put out a flier using the

¹⁷⁴ Grosse. GTZ. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁷⁵ The Spanish language uses feminine and masculine pronouns and endings. “Chicas” is girls, “Chicos” is boys. Whereas travestis were once referred to as “Los travestis,” suggesting they are masculine, today they are referred to as “Las travestis,” the feminine version.

feminine form of “Chicos” to denominate the travestis. The fliers addressed human rights, medical rights, the right to a free and confidential HIV test, the best hospitals to use, etc. The fliers included information on the Ombudsman’s Office as well, a place where they could file complaints of abuse and discrimination. Like the Ombudsman’s informational pamphlets, these were very important because they empowered travestis with knowledge of their rights to non-discrimination and medical attention and offered them a means to protect and defend those rights.¹⁷⁶

During these years Grupo Tacones also began to work with Alejandro Freyre, president of the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation. Freyre had begun to work with a group of travestis in “Hotel Toledo” situated in Constitución neighborhood. Hence, when travestis who passed through Hotel Toledo needed to go to the hospital, they were put in contact with Grupo Tacones. “In this manner, we made a good team,” Barreda says of Tacones and FBAS. Freyre’s work will be discussed at more depth in Chapter 4.¹⁷⁷

Barreda attributes much of the program’s success to having a travesti working with Grupo Tacones. She praised Luisa’s work and said that when Luisa left Grupo Tacones (because GTZ could no longer pay her salary) it was very difficult to continue successfully running the program. Barreda also finds one of Grupo Tacones great successes to be utilizing a public institution that has traditionally been exclusionary and discriminatory towards travestis and turning it into a space where travestis could meet to discuss health challenges and other obstacles they face, comfortably over mate and cookies. And finally, Grupo Tacones was one of the first ever policy initiatives by the state to help the travesti population, “We were not a NGO. We were a health policy

¹⁷⁶ Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁷⁷ Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

situated in a public hospital,” Barreda explains. “Travestis have never had this. That the government, in a public hospital, would offer them pamphlets, condoms and sometimes pay them for offering chats and workshops with other travestis.”¹⁷⁸

There were similar and distinct challenges confronted by Grupo Tacones. Barreda, like Grosse, would have liked to see the program continue. However the conditions of the subsidy were only for two years. She would have liked to strengthen alliances within the hospital to have better connections with services like dermatology, infectious diseases, and neurophysiology. She also recognized that the time slot of the weekly workshops was not conducive to most travestis’ schedules due to the nature of their work. She says now, “If you try to organize meetings in the morning, you will fail.” She also attributes sometimes poor and often sporadic attendance to problems of irregularity and disorganization in this population. For this reason, Barreda says “When you work with travestis it is very difficult to evaluate how many travestis have been helped or if you are successful or not. It is very difficult to evaluate how many travestis continued with Tacones because of their irregularity.” She estimated that during some weeks ten travestis would show up, and other weeks only three would attend. Barreda also said that the individualism and competitiveness within this population was a challenge. Travestis in the situation of prostitution are often very self-involved, largely due to exclusionary experiences throughout their lives and the competitive nature of sex work. Creating a comfortable environment for the travestis participating in Grupo Tacones’ efforts, in which travestis supported each other, was a challenge. Unfortunately, another weakness that can be found is the lack of statistics or factual information on the work Grupo Tacones did, who attended sessions, what issues they focused on, the success

¹⁷⁸ Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

and failure of their different efforts etc. While Grosse blames this on the fact that the group “works with prevention, not discrimination,” it would still have been beneficial to take quantifiable measurements of the program’s activities, success rates, numbers of travestis involved, etc.¹⁷⁹

Talavera, who worked with Barreda until he became head of Coordinación SIDA, said of Grupo Tacones, “In my opinion, Tacones was not successful because it was an intellectual look, rather than a realistic look into the problems of the travesti population.” Talavera criticized the program for taking place in a hospital, where travestis are often maltreated and in which general access remains difficult. He faults the program for functioning only a very short time, “they were working for three or four months as a concrete and profound group, before Tacones found itself emptying out as it did not have much sense.” What is more, Talavera suggests that what the state offered the travestis was to listen, offer information and pass out condoms, however “the problematic of the travesti population is much more than just this. They could not develop an organized project, for example, a specific room in which travestis with HIV could be attended to.”¹⁸⁰

Alba, on the same note, argues that no strong policies exist in relation to this community. She recognizes that in the case of Grupo Tacones, it was an unsustainable project for Coordinación SIDA and for the travestis. “It was an unpolished space, given in a public hospital, a space with a very limited number of people. It was a very short project that did not achieve, or continue attracting travestis, nor did it continue to grow as a group and acquire other spaces.” When asked why the group did not grow, Alba

¹⁷⁹ Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Talavera. Ministry of Health – AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

responded, that it was because there was never a political or social accompaniment. “They had never intended to undertake the complexity of the travesti situation or the travesti identity today in Buenos Aires, which all has to do with the lack of access not only to health but also to education, work and legal protection. There was not government help except in cases of extreme vulnerability, extreme poverty, for people with HIV and for those in prostitution.” She added that it was very frustrating for Coordinación SIDA to not be able to move beyond the preliminary step; they were never able to work with the group’s real problems. “It was a valuable experience, but it was an anecdote in a very barren panorama of what we refer to as policy.”¹⁸¹

Related Organizations

Secretary of Human Rights:

Since Diana Maffia left the Ombudsman Office in 2003, the Secretary of Human Rights began receiving complaints from travestis regarding police abuse. Since this time, the main interaction of this office with the travestis revolves around abuse and does not deal much with problems related to health or education. Ana Gonzalez of the office explains that they are only in an initial stage of organizing and creating a consciousness of travestis’ rights.

The Secretary of Human Rights did organize a discussion on issues pertaining to the transsexual and travesti populations last year. The office has also participated in the national plan against discrimination, which includes an entire chapter on people of different sexual orientations and gender identities and a series of recommendations to avoid rights abuses. Some of the recommendations address how schools should deal with

¹⁸¹ Alba. GTZ. Personal Interview 2006.

trans students and sexual minorities. Others concern the police edicts and the co-habitation codes, and medical assistance for the whole country. The national plan was approved by presidential decree and now has to be put into practice. It was created with the consultation of travestis, transsexual, gay and lesbian organizations during 2004 and 2005.

They have also participated in smaller initiatives such as creating a panel of different medical specialists (such as endocrinologists and plastic surgeons) and lawyers to discuss the situation of the GLBTTTI populations. Although some began to appreciate and understand the complexity of the problems at hand, most did not. For psychologists, many still see transvestitism as an illness that can be corrected. Likewise, she believes most of the country, especially outside of Buenos Aires, has a difficult time accepting gender diversity and different sexual orientation. “The cultural norm of society is predominantly for punishing that which strays from the norm.” Interestingly, although Gonzalez said she was not familiar with either Grupo Tacones or Construcción de Ciudadania Travesti, she mentioned she was familiar with Diana Maffia’s work and that “she did a very good job. She created visibility in many aspects.” Gonzalez also noted that the police edicts and Code of Co-Habitation are the basis for the police to commit abuses and should be suspended or modified.¹⁸²

Ministry of Health

In October of 2005 the Ministry of Health and the national AIDS program formed a commission on sexual diversity. In this space the GLBTTTI community directly participates. They meet with all sectors of civil society to learn about the challenges they

¹⁸² Gonzalez. Secretary of Human Rights. Personal Interview 2006.

confront and the suggested solutions or policies these sectors believe would benefit them. This is how Dolores came in contact with Marcela Romero of ATTTA, who is now the primary liaison between the Ministry of Health and the travesti community. This is also how they became involved with Beatriz Giri who is currently performing a study on sex work in Buenos Aires for the ministry and AMMAR.¹⁸³

For two years the Ministry of Health has supported GTZ's work with Coordinación SIDA and the program in the Buenos Aires province. They encourage the participation of civil society associations, in which the travesti population is represented. "Here travestis should have a very active level of participation and a leading role," said Dolores Fenoy of the Health Ministry.¹⁸⁴ Moreno insists that the Secretary of Health has worked very well with Coordinación SIDA for some time, but that in other areas of the Secretariat, there were problems. She claims that there are hospitals, dependent on the Secretary of Health, that treat travestis very badly, while others have special projects.¹⁸⁵

Coordinación SIDA

Coordinación SIDA opened its doors five years ago and with it an area for sexual diversity. Today Julio Talavera is in charge of this work, however before him Victoria Barreda headed it. It was during Barreda's time with CS that she also became involved in Grupo Tacones. Coordinación SIDA is, more-or-less, a network of institutions that distribute condoms for free. Since opening this network, Coordinación SIDA has worked to connect with organizations working with the travesti population. Through these organizations they have sought out information on where travestis concentrate in the city

¹⁸³ Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁸⁴ Dolores Fenoy. Ministry of Health. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁸⁵ Moreno. Ombudsman Office – Diana Maffia's Assistant. Personal Interview 2006.

and what their dominant needs are. However everything returns to simply passing out condoms. For two years Coordinación SIDA and the Secretary of Health have been working with GTZ on their HIV/AIDS prevention projects in the city and in the Buenos Aires province, complementing and supplying the work of these travestis organizations. However, Talavera reveals that with only two people working in Coordinación SIDA, they are not as capable as they would like to be.

One of their goals has been to enable travestis to become promoters of health. Many have obtained formal work within Coordinación SIDA, such as Marcela Romero of ATTTA. Romero has become a spokesperson for the travesti population regarding health issues to the Secretary of Health. Because of such relationships, Talavera explains, “We have a very strong connection with them, we receive materials that range from condoms to educational collateral.” They also try to coordinate with other government sectors. For example, the travestis in Hotel Gondolin were having problems with police abuse, and Coordinación SIDA put them in contact with the Sub-Secretary of Human Rights for the city. This sub-secretary has a program to file complaints against police violence, and travestis have been able to access it. The travestis with Hotel Gondolin filed complaints against police that were demanding money from the travestis. As a result of this intervention, the situation has improved in the area.

Coordinación SIDA has also established a relationship with Consejo del Menor y la Familia (CONAF), to intervene with travestis that are minors. Talavera explains that they have been trying to provide young travestis with assurance that they can live more normal lives, become educated and work in the formal sector. They are trying to prevent

travestis from feeling typical feelings of isolation and rejection that often result in them running away.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

The accomplishments and efforts recorded above are substantial in comparison with how travestis are generally treated in the rest of Argentina and Latin America. The Ombudsman's office of Buenos Aires initiated the Construction of the Travesti Citizen as a program to reach out to the travesti population and teach them their rights. The Ministry of Health's AIDS Coordination, with German NGO financing, ran Grupo Tacones as a support group for travestis with HIV/AIDS. AIDS Coordination also provides free condoms to different groups working on HIV/AIDS prevention. The Secretary of Human Rights for Buenos Aires has recently begun to present claims of police abuse made by the travesti population at several round table discussion groups including prominent doctors and lawyers.

Unfortunately these policies specifically targeting the travesti population have had a short shelf life. Without specific policies and efforts focused on this population, travestis' situation will not change significantly. Furthermore, words are one thing and actions are another. If the Buenos Aires and Argentinean governments do not act in accordance with the laws they establish and pacts they sign, these laws and pacts prove meaningless.

¹⁸⁶ Talavera. Ministry of Health- AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

Chapter IV

Civil Society's Response to the State's Unsatisfactory Efforts

“I do not know if the travesti population knows what the city government does. What they know is that they can go through intermediary organizations to access what the state has. Minimal things, at a fragmented level, because there is no general policy [for travestis].”
–Julio Talavera

While acknowledging some praiseworthy legal modifications and policy efforts undertaken by the state of Argentina, unfortunately, the government has still failed many marginal and vulnerable populations, including travestis. For the travesti population, sexual orientation and gender identity combined with a history of poverty have resulted in detrimental discrimination, abuse and disenfranchisement. More so than the state, it has been individuals who have initiated policy efforts aimed specifically at helping the travesti population. Fernandez points out, “It is the individuals in government that make the difference, not governmental institutions. It is the person, and when this person leaves, the link is broken between the state and group.”¹⁸⁷ When Diana Maffia left the Ombudsman Office, the program was dropped and travestis no longer felt comfortable or welcome to visit with complaints. Moreno states, “If travestis perceive that an institution is no longer a space where they will listen to the travestis’ complaints and take them seriously, they will stop going.”¹⁸⁸ Another individual, Victoria Barreda, envisioned and initiated Grupo Tacones. While she was permitted to run the group as a state employee, it was funded by GTZ, an international organization, rather than by the state. Aside from Maffia’s program, all other government-supported aid is related to HIV/AIDS prevention.

¹⁸⁷ Josefina Fernandez. Author & Anthropologist. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁸⁸ Malu Moreno. Ombudsman Office – Diana Maffia’s Assistant. Personal Interview 2006.

They do not touch on the specific travesti population, much less the other obstacles the population confronts, even though these obstacles are integrally intertwined with HIV/AIDS. In fact, the state has not performed any statistical, social, or anthropological studies on this population. There is no information on how many travestis exist in the city, what percentage are infected with HIV/AIDS, what the average life expectancy is, what their greatest obstacles are that keep them from formal sector work etc. Travestis are still grouped with gays when looked at as a marginal group, and men when the population is divided by sex for the purpose of hospital wards and voting. As a result, no one knows even how many travestis there are in Buenos Aires. Estimates range from several hundred to 18,000.¹⁸⁹ This lack of statistical information is a considerable problem. Without knowing the size of this population, we cannot understand how extensive travestis' problems are. The subjects of this study unanimously agree that the state has failed to include and integrate this marginal group into society and treat them as citizens of the state.

Members of civil society have responded to the state's inability to act by taking matters into their own hands and including travestis in some private organizations. Travestis have also initiated a number of travesti-run organizations supporting the population. What is apparent from the interviews conducted in this study is that several organizations' efforts are substantially stronger and more organized than other groups' efforts. The Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation and ATTTA are two of these groups. They

¹⁸⁹ When subjects were asked how many travestis exist in the capital, Marcela Romero estimated only 500 to be visible in the capital while Talavera estimated 18,000 exist in the capital and Buenos Aires province (data he says he got from an investigation from the International Commission of Human Rights of Gays and Lesbians. I contacted them several times and was directed to a member of the organization who has not responded to my requests for this information). Alba suggested there are probably about 10,000 travestis in the capital, Flavio Rapisardi suggested about 1,000, and Diana Maffia estimated there are several hundred.

are both in contact with other organizations aiding travestis as well as with different government representatives, particularly within the Ministry of Health and office of the Secretary of Human Rights. ALITT, Lohana Berkins' organization, while proclaiming its superiority over other groups and certainly making important strides, nevertheless proved somewhat of a disappointment.

This chapter is dedicated to providing an overview of these civil society organizations, how their involvement with travestis began, what their efforts entail, and information on their leaders. While the work of each of these organizations is significant to the populations with whom they work, and to hopefully enhancing travestis' access to medical, educational and employment opportunities, their power and ability to create real and substantial change is not enough. Therefore, hopefully these organizations' efforts will empower the travesti population with knowledge and resources that will merit the attention of the state to eventually commence a policy to aid this population.

Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation

Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (FBAS)

The Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation¹⁹⁰ is one of the strongest organizations working with the travesti population. Although the Foundation's main goal is HIV/AIDS prevention, its president, Alejandro Freyre, recognizes that just disease prevention is not sufficient. HIV/AIDS rates are affected by a multitude of factors such as education, discrimination, housing, drug and alcohol abuse and employment. If the Foundation's goals are to be achieved FBAS recognizes that it must address more than just HIV/AIDS. It must also tackle these other social challenges as well. Freyre's Foundation does this by

¹⁹⁰ The information on FBAS is a compilation of several interviews with the president of the Foundation, Alejandro Freyre, and a handful of other employees and volunteers, in addition to GTZ's 2005 report on organizations supporting efforts to combat AIDS amongst vulnerable groups.

working with travestis to not only to teach them about safe sex and prevention, but also about their rights, domestic and international laws, additional health concerns, and about their own gender identity. FBAS also offers workshops teaching travestis a job skill if they choose to leave prostitution. Freyre's tireless efforts have reached out to the Ministry of Health, the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Human Rights, the Secretary of Social Development, UNAIDS, GTZ, a company that produces condoms, organizations that support travestis, women in the situation of prostitution, dance clubs, and private and public educational institutions. The efforts made by Freyre and the FBAS team are significant and some of the greatest in the history of the travesti population to date in Buenos Aires. When both Victoria Barreda and Julio Talavera were asked which organization they believed was the strongest supporting travestis, both mentioned FBAS and ATTTTA first.

The Foundation is a non-governmental organization with legal recognition. It was founded in 1995. The organization initially focused on HIV/AIDS prevention for young people, but expanded to include focuses on sexual diversity and youth in schools as well. It defines itself as a community activism organization. Today FBAS has a variety of public and private supporters. In 1998 the Lusida Program (the National AIDS Program-Ministry of Health of the Nation) became FBAS' first financier. With this, FBAS learned how to write projects and was provided with the funding necessary to create a video clip on safe sex that they could use with their work at discos and parties. In 2000 they moved from the living room of a house to their first office located in a red light zone. They chose this area because it placed FBAS close to a travesti population, which is one of the primary populations they strive to work with today. In 2000, like Grupo Tacones, FBAS

also developed a project with GTZ that Alejandro Freyre looks back upon as “an instance of great growth: we learned that systemization is a necessary work tool.”¹⁹¹ During 2000 FBAS also became a member of the First National Network of Adolescents and Youth in sexual health and reproduction in Argentina and in 2001 became a member of the Forum of NGOs related to work with AIDS in Argentina. The city’s AIDS Coordination and the Province of Buenos Aires’ Program of AIDS Prevention are also members of these networks. Since 2002, FBAS has been the cofounder of the Argentina HIV/AIDS Task Force with the GLBTT community and the men who have sex with men (MSM) community. FBAS’ materials are utilized by other civil society organizations and were edited in 2002 by GTZ and by UNAIDS (The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS).

Since 1999 the business Kopelco, which produces Tulipan condoms, has partnered with FBAS to promote HIV/AIDS and STD prevention. Together they implemented a sexual education program for public and private schools in Buenos Aires and the province of Buenos Aires. It has been running since 2002. As of 2003, FBAS has become a distributor of free condoms. They distribute 15,000 condoms monthly. This is supported by Buenos Aires’ AIDS Coordination (Secretary of Health of Buenos Aires) and the National AIDS Program (National Ministry of Health). They distribute the condoms at their offices located in Constitución, Once, Flores and Villa Urquiza. They also go to red light zones to distribute them.

In 2003 FBAS and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria initiated an AIDS prevention project specifically for gays, travestis and MSM (men who have sex with men). The project began with the initiation of two Labor Microenterprises,

¹⁹¹ GTZ 2005 Report.

a “Hair Salon Service” and a “Sewing Academy.” These programs aimed to serve as labor insertion programs for women and travestis in the situation of prostitution. The city’s Secretary of Social Development’s General Office of Microenterprises also supported these. Today the Hair Salon Training Program is an essential program to the work of the Foundation.

In 2004 FBAS began working with the Secretary of Social Development’s Nutritional/Alimentary Program to incorporate 70 travestis into the program. They developed HIV/AIDS prevention programs in the work environment with businesses and in the prison environment through adult education programs. It was also in this year that Freyre explains, FBAS began to really emphasize the quality of their work and create an image for FBAS. They constructed a webpage, produced their own marketing materials with a FBAS logo, and began to mail out information with their logo. FBAS wanted to show clearly the complexity and diversity of its organization. The Foundation works with 48,000 students in schools annually, in prison environments, developing microenterprises, in voluntary activities with Muniz Hospital, with youth prevention projects, and in work force training. In 2005 FBAS began working with the Voluntary Program “Be United” of the city of Buenos Aires to help individuals trying to integrate into society, such as youth and travestis. The rest of this section will discuss the FBAS’ efforts to support the travesti population.

Hair Salon Training Program

FBAS has offices in four locations, all of which are in, or are relatively close, to red light zones. They are in Constitución, Flores, Villa Urquiza and Once. The Office of Real Estate for the city of Buenos Aires ceded two offices, and one is shared with a local

network of Argentinean women living with HIV/AIDS. As the Foundation has a large work team, they are able to guarantee a set schedule of open hours adapted to the populations with which each office works. While the offices are open to people of any sexual orientation and women in the situation of prostitution, their current focus is the travesti population. The Salon training school was located in Flores its first two years in operation and is now located in the Villa Urquiza office. It is also important to note that more than 30 of the individuals working with FBAS are travestis. Therefore, quite a few members of this organization's staff belong to the same population they are working to support. This is important, of course, as it offers a stronger inside perspective into the travesti population's needs and creates stronger connections within the community itself.

The Hair Salon training program FBAS runs is now nearly 4 years old and has graduated about 100 travestis. It began in 2003, with the support of the city's Secretary of Development's New Labor Roles Program of the General Office of Micro-Enterprises. It is a training and labor insertion program for those in the situation of prostitution who desire to leave it. FBAS does not believe that sex work is a job, but is rather a habit or situation, and that those in the situation of prostitution are unemployed. The program accepts all interested applicants, knowing a fair amount will drop out before completing the program. Generally 40-50 travestis in the situation of prostitution apply for the course and around 20 might graduate. The salon training takes place 4 days a week for six months and is led by two volunteer teachers. The fifth weekday is dedicated to workshops led by another individual named Luis, in which a variety of topics are discussed such as gender, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, drugs, values, civil rights, where to file legal complaints, and how to handle different legal encounters. A social psychologist

works with travestis on issues of living together and lawyers, doctors and anthropologists are brought to speak with them as well. Freyre insists, “It is not so simple as just implementing a hair styling school. It is also necessary to help offer another type of mindset.”

Students may miss no more than four classes in order to graduate from the program. Upon graduation they receive a diploma and party, symbolic of their achievement. Participating in this program is a very big step for many travestis because it signifies a drastic change in lifestyle. Travestis in the situation of prostitution tend to be unaccustomed to having a schedule, and so choosing to suddenly adhere to a daily routine of attending classes, arriving on time and prepared, is much more difficult than it would be for the average person. Freyre suggests this is one of the travestis’ greatest challenges. Many drop out for this reason. Those that stay in the program will ultimately be placed in internships with hair salons that are willing to work with travestis and are typically associated with NGOs. Travestis participating in the yearlong program are given a stipend of \$200 pesos a month to compensate them for their time, a fee subjects like Freyre, Barreda, and Maffia suggest is essential. While this money is welcome compensation, Freyre notes that if travestis enroll only for the money, it will not be enough of an incentive for them to continue with the program. They will find their money spent in a matter of weeks on a daily Coke. Travestis that are truly interested and invested in the program will also learn to focus on managing their money more carefully.

Freyre also notes that one of the other principal challenges for this population is learning to coexist and work as a team. It is a group usually not used to living and working as a community outside of buying drugs, shopping for clothes or working on the

streets together. For some, he explains “It is very difficult for them to work in a team and in this program there are too many life changes such as working as a group, adhering to a schedule, and administering their own resources,” for many to succeed. There is additionally a lot of initial discrimination within the group of travestis. Luis explains that some might discriminate against others for not having breasts and more voluptuous hips and buttocks, and might therefore call those travestis “gay men” rather than travestis. Eventually, they learn that they can be different among themselves. And often these travestis become the voice of the organization, contacting universities and other travestis. The Foundation greatly values such communication and initiative coming from other travestis. Nevertheless, Luis affirms that it is a great amount of work to get students to this point, it involves a period of adaptation, helping travestis to feel comfortable and valued, checking up on how the travestis are doing, and ensuring they are involved in the whole process.

Morning and afternoon sessions are offered, and the work students do, such as promoting salon services to clients and cutting their hair, is unpaid. They may get tips, but the cuts are free to promote their work and learn. Freyre explains that working in a hair salon is much more than just cutting hair. The travestis must go out and look for clients, maintain a clientele, be well-dressed, bathed, act professionally, learn how to wash and cut hair, develop these skills and be punctual. He explains, “The stylist is ‘being,’ not doing. Prostitution implies ‘doing’ something.”¹⁹²

Anita is a travesti who was once in the situation of prostitution. She came to Buenos Aires at the young age of fourteen and was in the situation of prostitution for years, in many of Buenos Aires’ red light zones. Anita offers her experience with this

¹⁹² Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

program: “My arrival at the Foundation was very important for me. The Foundation has opened many doors for me.” She participated in the hair salon training program and graduated. Anita explains, after accomplishing this, she no longer wanted to be in the situation of prostitution. She has realized her abilities to do more with her life. “I continue on this road, and today I want to finish my secondary education.” She has begun volunteering once a week with FBAS’ Constitución office. During these hours she is responsible for assisting anyone that visits the office. She offers all of the services and information mentioned above by FBAS such as discussing with travestis HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, getting tested, the hair salon school and she tells them her story. When the author of this study visited the office, Anita was working. She served as a FBAS representative, discussing its services and goals. She was extremely informative, confident and helpful with all of the information she conveyed. In a later interview with her and Freyre, Freyre praised Anita’s improvement in her work and hopes she continues on this path towards a trained and paid job with the Foundation.

Anita says of her work, “When I see new girls, I am not egotistical, I try to identify with them, to satisfy their needs. We all live with terrible deficiencies, we live in tiny places, we are always sick, we work when it is raining, and when it is cold. Sometimes we do not use condoms because of money, we are robbed and beaten. People throw eggs at us. We are the humiliation of the street. People that don’t want us in their doorways will throw water and garbage on us and tell us to stay away from their children because we are a bad image for them. But if they live in a red zone, it is their responsibility to manage this topic with their kids. There are good and bad neighbors.” Anita understands the harsh reality many travestis live with, and she is an example of one

who has left prostitution in search of a better life and more dignified employment. FBAS' hope is that other travestis that can relate to her will see possibility of another life too.

Luis suggests that the travestis who participate in the course have the overall reaction of feeling valued. He suggests that many have families and friends who also react very positively to this, happy that they are learning new skills. As for the public, they experience stronger interaction with the travestis who are advertising their salon services on the streets and cutting customers hair. Travestis also establish relationships with the salons where they do their internships, further enhancing their public interaction. Sometimes the salons teach them coloring and highlighting, while some even end up hiring their interns. However, the efforts involved in finding salons to work with travesti interns cannot be underestimated.¹⁹³

Prevention Activity in Dance Clubs

FBAS also has a project promoting HIV/AIDS prevention in dance clubs in the city. Eight team members (4 gay and 4 travesti) go to three dance clubs (Amerika, Sitges and Angel's) over 52 nights a year. On the nights that they work, they go to two clubs and speak to around 120 people. They also pass out about 520 condoms each night, about 54,000 over the course of a year for this activity. The condoms are provided by Kopelco (producers of Tulipan condoms) and The Global Fund Against AIDS. The FBAS team members that go to the clubs speak to individuals about safe sex and prevention, using condoms properly, reducing risks, they offer information about hospital services and try to promote getting tested for HIV. They also offer information on where to get free condoms from the government and information on FBAS' services. They distribute fliers

¹⁹³ Alejandro Freyre, Luis (Rehabilitation course teacher) & Anita (Volunteer). Personal Interviews 2006.

for this sexually diverse population and show a video clip on the recently discussed topics. Their target audience is men who have sex with men (MSM), including the homosexual population and travesti population as well.

General Support in FBAS' Offices

In each of FBAS' offices, there are office managers that typically run the offices on a weekly basis. Many enlist the help of volunteers as well. For example, Valeria is the office manager of the Constitución office and she has a committed volunteer who comes in each day of the week, Anita is one of her volunteers. Anita said that about six to eight travestis come daily on average. Services that these offices provide are: attending to travestis who need condoms, maintaining a system of information and records, communicating with the Flores office (headquarters) and AIDS Coordination of the city to ensure a sufficient supply of condoms and other prevention-related materials, and recruiting travestis around the office to participate in workshops that take place on Mondays. The office in Constitución was currently promoting Hormone Treatment counseling, in which travestis meet with a doctor for free who can counsel them on administering hormones. All of the offices have been providing free condoms since 2003. 15,000 are distributed monthly, and they are distributed in bags of 20 condoms and ten packets of lubricant.¹⁹⁴

The office visited in Constitución is actually a room rented out in a dilapidated hotel in the red light district. Outside of the hotel a dozen travestis in the situation of prostitution are visible working on the streets. The room is extremely tiny (perhaps 10x10 feet), and has just enough room for a desk, a few chairs and a couch. The

¹⁹⁴ GTZ 2005 Project & FBAS website.

conditions are bare minimum – the aforementioned furniture, a dry erase board, informational fliers and pamphlets, and posters promoting prevention on the walls from GTZ. When workshops are performed here participants are in an intimate space. Sometimes, particularly when Freyre gets special speakers, such as doctors and lawyers, to lead the workshop they find alternative space in a nearby hotel (the hotels in the red light zone are all hotels lived in by the poor who cannot otherwise afford to rent an apartment). In these instances, FBAS representatives will create informational fliers on the workshop topic, time and place and will post them around the surrounding hotels. For example, during the interview performed with Anita, Valeria and Alejandro they were preparing for a doctor who would be offering a workshop on hepatitis the following week. The illness is apparently becoming increasingly worse in the neighborhood and the Foundation wants to educate travestis and neighbors about it.¹⁹⁵

In observing a workshop, one travesti visited because she was concerned she had a sexually transmitted disease due to recent symptoms she had been experiencing. She had never come to the office before. While she said she always uses protection, several times condoms have broken. Freyre was wonderful at relating to her as he discussed with her an array of topics. He asked her about her life, family, and boyfriend before getting into more intimate details such as suggesting she change the condoms she uses to certain brands and types that are more durable. She was using condoms appropriate only for vaginal sex that could otherwise break without enough lubricant. Freyre actually showed her the best condoms to use, opened one up and showed her different ways to put it on using a prosthetic penis. He discussed the symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases and where she could go for medical attention. This broke out into a discussion of how

¹⁹⁵ Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

difficult it can be to get medical attention as a result of hospital discrimination, and that often doctors will demand travesti patients first get an HIV/AIDS test before they will treat them. Freyre offered a lengthy discussion on gender identity, general expectations of feminine and masculine identities, and he explained where the term “transgender” is derived. He did this in a participatory style enlisting participation from the others in the room and using the dry-erase board providing visual stimulus. The overall experience felt very positive, in which the new travesti seemed comfortable with Freyre and interested in the information he was sharing with her.

Education

And FBAS works strongly in education, sending permanent teams that work year-round to public and private schools to offer daylong seminars that cover a variety of topics. Topics can range from sexual education, sexual orientation and gender, sexual diversity, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS and prevention, pregnancy, drug use, and how to use a condom properly. They can also touch on the travesti population in particular and address challenges they confront with discrimination, poverty and access to the health system. The content, of course, varies based on grade-level and what the schools permit. This program has been in effect since 2002 and reaches 48,000 students annually. It is significant to the travesti population because it is reaching students at a younger age to teach them about sexual diversity and non-discrimination. Of course, the hope is that students confused about their gender identity or sexual orientation may understand themselves better, and that their peers will also learn that non-discrimination and acceptance are important issues today. Aside from workshops and seminars offered

by NGOs such as FBAS, the average high school student does not usually have much of a sex education background in school aside from a biological discussion of female and male anatomy. Freyre estimates that about 70% of the schools they work with are in the provinces of Buenos Aires and have drastically greater need for these courses than in the actual capital. Some students become involved in a sub-project of the Foundation's Education program called the Voluntary Adolescent Program, in which youth interested in working towards community intervention. Weekly seminars are organized that cover the many issues the Foundation works with. The young promoters visit Hospital Muniz with the travestis that visit as well.

Health and Hospitals

The Foundation is not currently able to offer HIV/AIDS testing itself. However it hopes to open several testing centers in the future particularly for travestis and other sexual minorities. As previously mentioned, the Foundation has relationships with several hospitals: Hospital Muniz, Hospital Fernandez and Ramos Mejia Hospital. FBAS has been working with the hospitals for years, first with heterosexual and homosexual patients and later with the travesti population. These introductions went rather smoothly based on their previously established relationship. Speaking specifically of Ramos Mejia Hospital, Freyre praised the hospital for giving FBAS' feedback on their work, consulting FBAS on improving testing for this population, and calling travestis by their chosen names. For two years, FBAS had fought for funds for a project supporting anti-retroviral treatment adherence among patients who have a difficult time taking their medications. "The confidence and link between the hospital and the Foundation is every time more

rich and complex.” FBAS is working particularly closely right now with Ramos Mejia Hospital to establish one of the aforementioned testing centers and waiting rooms specifically for travestis. Travestis would be able to go to this center for shorter periods of hospitalization and attention during the day, where they can hydrate themselves, rest and take their medications. Condoms, snacks, mate and magazines will make the office comfortable for patients. Appointments can be set up with different specialists through this office as well. This will also be a place where information can be collected on the population to use to improve their situation, as the state has none available. Recently, when interviewing several FBAS members, they received word that the center within the hospital has been approved. The Foundation will not have to pay rent or utility, only the cost of their own materials and the Foundation will have a representative working in the office as a counselor and secretary. The main concern is when the center will actually be constructed, which Freyre says is in the hands of the state.¹⁹⁶

Other Projects

Freyre notes of these projects, “The idea is that one project gives sustainability to another, because they are all part of the same organization and in some way they have objectives in common.” Again, he sees the importance of recognizing how different facts of life affect each other. FBAS has other projects as well. Groups also make monthly visits to Muniz Hospital to visit travestis there. The Foundation participates in a summer campaign on prevention and works with a Pepsi Music Festival to offer advice on safe sex and prevention. FBAS also works with schools in prisons. They offered a workshop at one prison, where the supervisor of prison schools was very impressed and asked that

¹⁹⁶ FBAS Interviews in Flores office.

FBAS offer the workshop in all of Buenos Aires' prisons. As a result of this work, the FBAS and the Voluntary Program of the city of Buenos Aires government have agreed that beginning in 2006 all courses for health practitioners will require participation in community service in prisons. FBAS has additionally been working with the Office of Children and Adolescents and the city's Children's Shelters to offer workshops on sexual diversity. They have been asked to draw up an individual project for each home. Bringing awareness to sexual orientation and diversity to prisons and children in shelters and homes is evidence of how widespread FBAS' efforts are and is evidence that the city has been supporting, to some degree, the work the Foundation does. Of course, the question remains, why does the city not provide these types of workshops and education itself?

State/Government

During one interview, Freyre visited with some state employees to discuss his concerns involving the Foundation's work with the travesti population. In this meeting he discussed the educational materials the state provides to teach sex education, which he feels are not sufficient for a sexually diverse population. The charts show only heterosexual couples and individuals, whereas he feels there should also be homosexual couples and travestis included to make these populations feel more included and comfortable.

Freyre's encounter that day with his state supporters illustrates FBAS' continual struggle to make ends meet. There was a recent conflict stirred up by a Coordinación SIDA representative who angrily threatened to halt distribution of condoms to the Foundation because FBAS requests \$1 pesos (or about \$0.30 cents) for these bags of

condoms and lubricants. Freyre has tried to explain that the money goes towards helping pay the expenses of the office and that without it they could not afford to maintain the office. He also explains that if a travesti says she does not have the money, they will of course give her the condoms regardless. In a way, paying the \$1 peso for the condoms and knowing the money goes to maintaining the office should be a positive experience for the travestis, who feel like they are more connected to the office and responsible for its wellbeing. Freyre had also brought along Anita, who explained some of the challenges travestis face relating to health, social discrimination, housing discrimination, drug abuse, improper use of hormone and silicone, and lack of information. The state employees were pleasant, were interested and clearly valued Freyre's message. However, the manager proved reluctant to contribute to the organization without financial support from other government offices as well, as support for the travesti population alone could bring sharp criticism. They also suggested that any campaign would have to encompass a broader segment of the population, such as gays or HIV positive groups.

While FBAS' engagement with the government seemed to go extremely well, upon leaving Freyre explained that this was his eighth visit to the office to discuss the same topic and that it always goes the same. The office is receptive to Freyre's concerns and suggestions, but rarely acts on them. On the other hand, Freyre explains that he cannot complain because this is also the office that helped the Foundation get government approval to drape a red condom hundreds of feet long down the city's obelisk on World AIDS Day, a project the Foundation had been trying to get approved for years.

New Projects

Freyre has been very content with the fruits of the Foundation's labors. His desire is to communicate this success to the state, to other groups working with the population and to more travestis through several projects. One such project is to create a video reflecting on a number of travestis, perhaps about fifteen, who have graduated the hair salon-training program and have successfully changed their lives because of this. By creating a documentary with these testimonials, he hopes to change public perception of the travesti population and encourage and empower travestis in the situation of prostitution to reach for more in life. Another project is designing a calendar with a similar mission. Photos of individual travestis who have left the situation of prostitution for formal sector jobs would be posted for each month with a small blurb about their current employment and contact information, should people want to contact them for a haircut or other salon service. Another proposal involves creating t-shirts for travesti awareness.

The Foundation has also combined efforts with ATTTA. They have offered technical support and rehabilitation courses. They have supported ATTTA in creating materials that can be used specifically for the travesti population, materials that will be used both by ATTTA and FBAS. Likewise, both organizations are members of the National Coordination for Sexual Diversity Rights (CONADISE). Being members of CONADISE has been beneficial as it encourages relationships with travestis and other sexual minorities.

Overall, the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation has an impressive list of achievements and projects it has undertaken. Nearly every subject interviewed that had

something to say about Freyre's work with FBAS only sung its praises. The employees' knowledge and presentation were impressive to say the least. The only criticism of the Foundation was a miniscule one from Julio Talavera, who said, "One of the best organizations is FBAS, in spite of the fact that I do not agree with hair salon jobs." Talavera acknowledged that it is certainly a better option than none, but it must be remembered that travestis' interests go far beyond just cosmetics or hair.¹⁹⁷ Freyre explained that the Foundation surveyed the travestis they worked with to choose a set of vocational skills to teach, and the majority chose the hair salon program. While Freyre would most definitely agree with Talavera, FBAS' services can only cover so much ground. It should also be remembered that incorporating a program such as the hair salon training school has been a very difficult task. Freyre reiterates, there is no need for more hairdressers in the city, and the city additionally has no interest or need in helping the small travesti population. The Foundation has really had to advocate for this program, insisting that the absence of public policies for this vulnerable group (especially those living with HIV/AIDS and in prostitution), a group interested in learning new skills to enter the labor market and showing confidence in the Foundation.¹⁹⁸ He has experienced months in which the government has not paid the promised funds for the program, and Freyre has even had to fight for food stamps for travestis that have been abandoned by government services.¹⁹⁹ Victoria Barreda suggests that Freyre has done an excellent job "Removing the concept that transvestitism is something sexual; they can be hair stylists,

¹⁹⁷ Julio Talavera. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

¹⁹⁸ Alejandro Freyre. FBAS. Personal Interviews 2006.

¹⁹⁹ Alejandro Freyre, Public Audience against the Code of Contraventions, 3/22-23/04.

lead workshops, be promoters. I believe it is a marvelous policy, it changes their mentality so that their lives can change.”²⁰⁰

Association of Argentine Transvestites, Transsexuals and Transgender (1993)

Asociación de Travestis Transexuales y Transgeneros Argentinas (ATTTA)

ATTTA (originally ATA), was formed on June 25, 1993 by a group of travestis who decided to protest the police edicts after being violently beaten by police in the home of one of the travestis. They sought out the legal defense of Carlos Jauregui, a member of a group called Gays for Civil Rights. Jauregui not only helped them, but also invited them to organize a group of travestis to join the gay march.²⁰¹ Therefore, the first unified act by this group of travestis was to participate in the June 1993 Gay March (today the Gay, Lesbian, Travesti, Transsexual and Bisexual Pride March). On this day they began their fight for visibility as an organized group. They learned about other sexual minority groups (gay, lesbian and bisexual) that before they did know existed. From that point on this group of travestis began meeting weekly in each other’s homes to discuss challenges and needs they faced, and they brainstormed on how to improve their predicament, particularly with regard to police abuse and detention. They simultaneously worked to be included in gay and lesbian groups, many of which at that time, unfortunately, also discriminated against travestis. ATTТА’s main goal was to make every travesti aware of her rights and to increase “representation in the planning, execution and evaluation of policies that involve the travesti population.” These rights included the right to medical attention and education, as well as rights pertaining to the police. ATTТА wanted to decrease unjust detentions by the police, and so they began a campaign in which they

²⁰⁰ Victoria Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

²⁰¹ Lohana Berkis, “Un Itinerario Político del Travestismo,” *Sexualidades Migrantes: Género y Transgenero*. 2003, 128.

filed daily complaints for such detentions. However, as their activism increased, so too did the abuse and violence perpetrated against them.²⁰² ATTTA explains that the increase of abuse and discrimination became psychologically traumatizing, and travestis lived in perpetual fear that each day could be their last. Fortunately, a few years later ATTTA and other groups were rewarded with an end to the police edicts. Angela Vanni, a lawyer who has supported and educated this population from the start says, “In five years we overturned the edicts that had been there for fifty years.”²⁰³ Vanni continues to educate the travesti population about their legal rights, advises them on the best way to respond to situations, and offers general legal counsel.²⁰⁴

ATTTA’s other two primary goals have been to change society’s perception of travestis and to give travestis their own representation. The former goal largely incorporates the tendency for society to associate all travestis with prostitution and delinquency. Romero²⁰⁵, ATTTA’s current General Coordinator, explains that travestis are in the situation of prostitution because it is how they survive. After these individuals begin to construct their travesti identity, usually around nine or ten years old, they encounter problems with their families, schools, police and society, ultimately making it impossible for them to find work. ATTTA also stresses that travestis do not fall into the “Men who have Sex with Men” (MSM) category, first, because travestis do not identify with the male gender but rather consider themselves a third gender, and secondly,

²⁰² One of the original founders and the second General Coordinator, Maria Belen Correa, is now in the United States having received political asylum in 2002. Current General Coordinator Marcela Romero explains that Correa faced a great amount of discrimination and physical threats during ATA’s initial years. She received phone calls with information about her and her family’s movement with threats of abuse and the “disappearance” of her and her family if she did not stop her activism. Correa also organized an international network of trans-organizations. Marcela Romero.

²⁰³ Footer, Kevin. “Transvestites Find New Freedom in Buenos Aires.” *The Buenos Aires Herald*.

²⁰⁴ Angela Vanni, Personal Interviews 2006.

²⁰⁵ Romero is GC since 2005, she is 40 years old, has a 7th grade education, is in the situation of prostitution and is HIV positive.

because this categorization insinuates travestis are or have relations with gay men whereas in reality travestis almost always have relations with heterosexual men. Romero points out that gay men would not be attracted to travestis, who look like women. As for the latter goal, today ATTTA represents the travesti population through the National AIDS Program and the city's AIDS Coordination program. The organization emphasizes the importance of travestis representing their own causes. They point out that if travestis are not representing their own issues, other groups may misconstrue or use this group for their own benefit.²⁰⁶

Ironically, ATTTA's name comes from one of the travestis' main enemies in the past, the police. In 1989 some police began to mock a group of travestis, saying, "Are you the Association of Argentinean Travestis? What do you think you are going to do, file a complaint? Or go on television and tell on us?" The group looks upon this moment as a prediction of what was to come.²⁰⁷ ATTTA became the first travesti organization in Argentina's history. In 1996 ATA's name changed to ATTA, incorporating "transsexuals," and in 2001 they added "transgender" and became ATTTA. In 2001 they also made their movement national, establishing offices in other Argentinean provinces. Today they have fifteen offices all over Argentina and relationships with the Red Cross, the REDARD, the National AIDS Program, the Latin American Transsexual Network, Buenos Aires' AIDS Coordination, the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation, the Fulanas (a lesbian organization), AMMAR (Association of Argentinean Meretrices Women) and the French Alliance. Under ATTTA's Maria Belen Correa, trans organizations have been

²⁰⁶ GTZ Informe 2005.

²⁰⁷ GTZ Report 2005, 61.

united internationally under one “Trans Network,” in which ATTTA is the base. Correa, today, works from her new base in New York.

The headquarters remain in Buenos Aires. A General Coordinator, elected every two years, works there and is responsible for managing all of the offices. The elected person is responsible for carrying out projects every 3 months. ATTTA strongly believes that ATTTA representatives need to be active and performing tasks when in office. Additionally, each of the fifteen offices has their own regional coordinators. The organization works with scarce resources and financing which is very limiting. They explain that because of such minimal financing, not only do they not have money to complete the projects they design but also do not even have the money to create solid presentations to request funding. An example of one of the aforementioned projects is ATTTA’s recent Trans Conference in Tigre, a neighborhood outside of Buenos Aires. The conference was open to all travestis, sexual minorities, and straights. Its main purpose was to united and educate people on sexual diversity and travestis issues through speakers and workshops. Alejandro Freyre of FBAS led a workshop on prevention. Angela Vanni directed a workshop on trans-phobia and human rights for trans people. A third speaker discussed the trans population in jails. The conference was impressive. Romero and peers found free housing to use, had food and beverages available for purchase, and had many informational fliers, posters and pamphlets to pass out. The speakers and workshops were engaging and interactive. They charged only a small fee of \$15 pesos to participate.

There were only two criticisms of the new event. One was that anyone interested in participating was instructed to wait at a specific time in the Tigre train station to meet

with the others before taking a boat to the island where the conference was held. However, no one was waiting from the conference and the investigator was only able to make contact with the group after stopping a travesti rushing by to inquire if she was going to the conference. The second was that the workshops began hours later than scheduled and the first workshops lasted much longer than expected. Therefore, not everyone could stay for the entire conference as it continued well beyond the last available transportation off of the island. Only those that planned to spend the night there were able to participate in all of the workshops.²⁰⁸

ATTTA is additionally a member of CONADISE (Comision Nacional de Diversidad Sexual) / National Commission of Sexual Diversity). This is an organization consisting of about 50 sexually diverse organizations in the country. Romero sits on the national committee, and the rest of the members are representatives of gay or lesbian groups. Romero finds fault with the commission because she believes many of the participating organizations are ghost organizations that present projects in order to receive funding and that never actually follow through with their plans. She says there are only several organizations that actually do substantial work, mostly: ATTTA, FBAS, and Las Fulanas.

ATTTA's efforts include teaching HIV/AIDS and STD prevention, initiating and growing relationships with health centers, offering workshops, creating an awareness about drug and alcohol abuse, and finally fostering dialogue with other GLBTT organizations, the community, and state institutions. ATTTA's prevention efforts are similar to those of FBAS. They visit red light zones in Palermo, Constitución and Once two times a week, as well as dance clubs, to distribute condoms and informational

²⁰⁸ Trans Conference, National ATTTA Network, 2006.

pamphlets. GTZ has helped ATTTA fund this activity, and they also have the support of the city's AIDS Coordination. Romero acknowledges that some groups (most likely ALITT) do not agree with this activity because they feel it promotes prostitution, however she stresses the importance of this activity because the reality is that most travestis in Buenos Aires and Argentina are in the situation of prostitution and therefore need to learn how to protect themselves and their clients from spreading and contracting harmful and deadly viruses. She notes that most travestis do not live beyond 35 years of age, proof that prevention efforts are necessary. They also offer services such as workshops and meetings to discuss topics about which any individual travesti or group of travestis may be concerned. These cover not only issues of prevention and AIDS, but also topics such as diet, drugs, hygiene, travesti identity, filing complaints, communicating with political figures and hospital representatives, and empowering travestis with leadership skills. Health workshops often result in an ATTTA member accompanying travestis to get tested. ATTTA also trains travestis to be "health promoters." This entails learning the skills necessary to communicate with someone concerned that she might be ill or infected with HIV/AIDS. Their ultimate goal is to help travestis make the decision to get an HIV test and learn how to live their lives from that point on, whether they are infected or not.²⁰⁹

ATTTA representatives also follow up their work to see if it is effective. They have gone undercover to red light zones to see if travestis are using condoms, and Romero has found overwhelmingly that they have. She describes a night when she encountered a distressed client who could not find a travesti in the situation of prostitution who would not use a condom. ATTTA members are predominantly sex

²⁰⁹ GTZ Informe 2005.

workers, and as such, they find that they have three functions with their clients. One, they are advocates and teachers of using condoms. Two, they are psychologists. They spend a lot of time listening to clients' problems and their histories. And three, they are sex workers.²¹⁰

ATTTA recently participated in a workshop with Hospital Fernandez that was organized by Las Fulanas, a lesbian organization. Travesti, lesbian and gay representatives met with hospital staff to discuss concerns about hospital treatment and discrimination. The event was a success, as members of sexual minority groups learned that many doctors and other medical employees are simply challenged with the lack of knowledge about these groups, which makes medical staff perhaps feel awkward in handling such patients. The staff, in turn, was able to understand these patients' fears and discomforts when entering a medical establishment. They also learned that many travestis and vulnerable groups might not understand concepts such as re-infection and adhering to a medication. This is a workshop Romero would like to repeat in the future with other hospitals, however no plans to set this effort in motion were shared.²¹¹

In 2007, the annual Latin American AIDS Forum will be held in Buenos Aires. The congress will last for five days and will organize many workshops. 4,000 invitees will come from all over Latin America. ATTTA is on the local Board of Organizational Advisors and is in charge of all the trans community's representation. This is the first time the trans community will be represented at this forum. ATTTA would like to work with FBAS and the Red Cross to offer sensitivity training to airport, hotel and transportation employees in preparation of the trans community's arrival. The trans-

²¹⁰ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

²¹¹ GTZ Informe 2005.

network will offer workshops on adolescent trans, trans in jails, and trans in the situation of prostitution. They plan to ask the government permission to participate in all of the workshops offered due to the high frequency of HIV/AIDS in the trans population.²¹²

In the future, ATTTA would like to offer leadership workshops, in which travestis can be empowered in every province with computer skills so that they can perform research and office work, rather than have to hire someone outside of the organization to do it. Romero explains that obtaining education is still very difficult in most schools in Argentina, because travestis would not be allowed into school if they showed up in the opposite sex's clothing, or they would feel so discriminated against that they could not concentrate or perform adequately. ATTTA also feels that today that its efforts must focus more on the provinces than on the city, as travestis in Buenos Aires have much more support through organizations and institutions like GTZ, AIDS Coordination of the Ministry of Health, the Secretary of Human Rights and others. She explains, “[In the capital] we have good health, we can walk freely, the gay community can have civil unions. What we are looking for is that this can exist in the rest of the country, that police edicts are changed in the provinces, that there are civil unions. Gays and lesbians fought for something very important, the civil union. We are seeking the freedom to choose our gender identity. We are seeking the ability to be what we choose, trans people.”²¹³

Another future goal on ATTTA's agenda is improving their relationship with society. Due to neighborhoods' complaints that travestis in the situation of prostitution are the cause of delinquency and robberies, something ATTTA strongly debates, they are planning to organize with AMAR (female sex workers union) a community discussion.

²¹² Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

²¹³ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

They want to bring together the neighbors, police (their “first enemy”), and business owners, to explain that their work is not the cause of drugs, delinquency and robberies in the area. They want to explain that this environment was already there when sex workers arrived.

What is also interesting within this population is the element of race. Samantha (a travesti sex worker from Colombia), explains that there is a huge flow of immigrants from Paraguay, Uruguay, Colombia, Peru, Dominican Republic. She explains, the majority of travestis are good, but there are bad ones. About two-thirds work legally and one-third do not. This third are the ones who come, work for a bit, rob residents, and leave. ATTTA becomes upset when they are blamed for these robberies, as they say they have nothing to do with the travestis of ATTTA. There are also fights for space, and some travestis will claim corners and not allow others to work there. These disputes can get more heated when they are between Argentinean citizens and illegal immigrants. Samantha explains that this is very problematic, and it should be more first come, first serve. They see the Peruvians as especially problematic.

In reality Romero explains, ATTTA would like to see the police become more involved, if they could do so honestly. If the police would watch what was going on, respect that prostitution is not an illegal act and therefore cannot be punished, and would pay closer attention to actual delinquency and theft, the travesti population and the neighbors would feel much better. But the police do not want to do this²¹⁴

In summary, ATTTA is probably the strongest of the travesti organizations in Argentina, and perhaps in Latin America. Over the past thirteen years it has grown from a small activist group in the capital to a national organization with international links and

²¹⁴ Marcela Romero. ATTTA. Personal Interviews 2006.

efforts as well. It has fought the police edicts, established relationships with other activist organizations related to sexual diversity and HIV/AIDS, and connected with several government offices such as the Ministry of Health and AIDS Coordination in Buenos Aires. AIDS Coordination director, Talavera, says of ATTTA, “ATTTA is an organization with strong political influence in the city. They participate in political discussions.”²¹⁵ Like FBAS, the organization deserves commendation for addressing the many challenges that travestis face, rather than only a few. While ATTTA representatives admit they have a long way to go in their struggle for government and societal recognition and support, the organization has also come a long way.

Association for the Struggle for Transvestite and Transsexual Identity (1994)
Asociación Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual (ALITT)

ALITT, the Association Fighting for Transvestite Identity, was formed in 1994 by a travesti named Lohana Berkins.²¹⁶ She originally was a member of ATTTA but left for political reasons.²¹⁷ What largely differentiates ALITT from ATTTA is that ATTTA works more hands-on with the travesti population, addressing immediate needs and challenges as well as longer-term desires. On the other hand, ALITT is more ideological and essentially a political organization seeking to have the travesti identity recognized by society and the government through lobbying for rights in schools, work and health. Like other advocates, they want authorities to implement labor insertion programs. The most obvious difference between the two organizations is ATTTA’s work with travestis in the

²¹⁵ Julio Talavera. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination. Personal Interview 2006.

²¹⁶ A third organization, OTTRA, also split off from the original ATA. This group strongly supported prostitution as a lifestyle of the travesti population. It is no longer in existence.

²¹⁷ Interestingly, Fernandez and Berkins says that ATTTA (ATA) formed in 1991, while current ATTTA president Marcela Romero and Gondolin Civil Association president, Monica Leon, say it formed in 1993. This is, perhaps, evidence that these groups do not have as strong communication and organization as they are capable of.

situation of prostitution. ATTTA recognizes that many travestis prostitute themselves to survive, and so ATTTA distributes condoms and teaches these travestis about safe sex. Vicky Barreda explains that ALITT “is not interested, for example, in HIV/AIDS. They are interested in identity, and they would not participate in any program that had to do with the distribution of condoms.”²¹⁸

Berkins says of her organization, “Our first fight was for our rights, now we are constructing the travesti citizen. It is a daily fight.”²¹⁹ She explains, “Self-victimization was once the strategy we used to be accepted. Several years passed before we began to perceive ourselves as people with rights and with our own identity, neither masculine nor feminine.” Berkins considers the travesti population to be overcoming “the lack of language available to name its diversity and include travestis with other minorities,” as a viable social group.²²⁰ ALITT teaches travestis about political action through workshops and debates that address identity and civil rights. There is no evidence of ALITT collaborating with other travesti groups but they claim to work with some feminist groups and human rights organizations.²²¹ Berkins does acknowledge that they have a long fight ahead of them. “In spite of the fact that this is very important work, we lack much in political terms; we are excluded and prostitution continues to be the first source of income.”²²² Her work with anthropologist, Fernandez, reflects on the 420 travestis that have died in the past five years. They estimate that over 60% died of HIV/AIDS, the

²¹⁸ Vicky Barreda. Ministry of Health, AIDS Coordination, High Heels Group. Personal Interview 2006.

²¹⁹ Berkins/Fernandez. *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. 2006.

²²⁰ Berkins/Fernandez. *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* 2006, 129-130.

²²¹ *Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice* website. 2005.

²²² Berkins/Fernandez. *La Gesta del Nombre Propio*. 2006.

second leading cause of death was assassination (17%), and the rest died from infections related to silicone injections and surgeries, cancer, cirrhosis, overdoses and suicide.²²³

In analyzing ALITT's effectiveness, it is important to note that individuals from organizations representing the travesti population, such as Talavera (AIDS Coordination), Freyre (FBAS), Fenoy (Ministry of Health), Gonzalez (Secretary of Human Rights), Grosse (GTZ), Rapisardi (UBA Area Queer) and Barreda (Grupo Tacones), all suggest that ATTTA and FBAS are the strongest organizations supporting travestis. Scholars, on the other hand, interested in issues of identity and longer-term goals of the population, such as Barrancos (UBA professor), Fernandez (anthropologist) and Maffia (Ombudsman Office), perceive ALITT to be the stronger organization.

The University of Buenos Aires' Rapisardi says, "ALITT is a very small organization, two travestis."²²⁴ His evaluation and the other subjects' reflections seem to suggest that ALITT is not an organization, so much as one individual fighting for her travesti identity to be acknowledged by society and the state. Unfortunately, it has been impossible getting any information on the organization from an ALITT representative. They have no website, unlike ATTTA and FBAS. A variety of phone numbers are listed on different websites, but no number actually corresponds.²²⁵ ALITT additionally has a variety of different email addresses posted on different websites, but no universal one. ALITT did not respond to multiple emails over a period of a year sent to all of these addresses explaining this study and asking for a meeting. Without a website and correct contact information, and with no organizational representatives returning emails and

²²³ Berkins/Fernandez. *La Gesta del Nombre Propio* 2006, 13.

²²⁴ Flavio Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

²²⁵ One number did momentarily correspond, the personal cell phone of Lohana Berkins, on which the investigator left a message. Berkins never returned the call and a few days later canceled the number.

phone calls, the functionality and credibility of ALITT as an organization is questionable at best. ATTTA and FBAS, on the other hand, have websites and are easily available to discuss their efforts. Both were also interested in sharing their work beyond a formal meeting and offered invitations to workshops, conferences and meetings with other representatives from their organizations.

What appears evident is that Lohana Berkins, more than her organization, has sought and received attention. She moved to Buenos Aires from Salta in 1974 at the age of thirteen. Her upper-class family treated her abusively and had thrown her out of their home due to her effeminate behavior as a boy. She hitchhiked her way to the capital, and there a community of travestis in the situation of prostitution adopted her. She has lived as a travesti and worked in the situation of prostitution during a dictatorship and under democratic governments, under the Police Edicts and under the Code of Contraventions. She has spent about nine years of her life in jail, arrested under edicts against cross-dressing, not carrying identity documents, creating a public scandal and prostitution. During the time that the Edicts were in place, she estimates she spent about four nights of the week in jail and three nights out of jail. She recalls many times not being attended to in hospitals due to her gender identity. Barrancos considers “Lohana Berkins to be “an exceptional person intellectually and in her passion for her beliefs. She comes from a difficult life and has confronted many of the struggles of a travesti’s life, principally the fight to leave prostitution.”²²⁶

Berkins was a founding member of ATTTA in the early 1990s, and has spent years visiting AIDS stricken travestis in shantytowns, teaching travestis about their rights and how to fight police brutality, and working to improve the self-esteem of the travesti

²²⁶ Dora Barrancos. University of Buenos Aires. Personal Interview 2006.

population, first with ATTTA and now through ALITT (since 1994). In 1995 she left prostitution and went back to school to learn clothing design.²²⁷ In December of 2000 she graduated from secondary school with the highest grade point average in her class.²²⁸ Since 2000 she has worked as a secretary for a city councilman, Patricio Etchegaray, of the Communist party. She claims she is the first travesti to survive outside of prostitution. She has also run for Congress on the United Left. In 2001 Berkins was sponsored by IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission)²²⁹ to attend the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, and there she held a briefing for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' staff on the situation of travestis in Argentina. She has worked with Diana Maffia in the Ombudsman's Office on the Construction of Travesti Citizenship program. Together they fought to pass a resolution through the Secretary of Education allowing travesti students to be called by a name appropriate to their gender. Berkins and Maffia worked to create and publish a 1999 survey of the socio-economic predicament of the travesti population in Buenos Aires. This year she and Josefina Fernandez, an anthropologist, compiled six essays for a short book called "La Gesta del Nombre Propio." The essays reflect on the findings of Berkins and Maffia's surveys done for CCT and offer a bit more insight into the life of the travesti population in Argentina. These 320 surveys conducted in Buenos

²²⁷ Alejandra Sarda. "Transvestites Sue Buenos Aires Police Force." *Written on the Body*. Lesbian Archives and Library. 2/10/96.

²²⁸ Marcela Valente. "Small Victories Seen For Sexual Minorities." IPS- Inter Press Service/Global Information Network. 2000. 10/2/2000. & Maria Suarez Toro. "Lohana: Dicotomizaciones que se imponen a la fuerza." Interview for a book chapter, modified for a program on the International Feminist Radio. 2002.

²²⁹ "The IGLHRC documents and advocates against human right abuses based on HIV status, sexual orientation, and gender identity." www.iglhrc.org/files/iglhrc/reports/Argentina_trans.pdf

Aires Capital, the greater area of Buenos Aires and Mar del Plata appear to be the only quantitative work done on this population.²³⁰

University of Buenos Aires Area QUEER

The University of Buenos Aires' Area Queer began working with the travesti population in 1996. It was also during this time frame that the organization began to utilize the concept "QUEER," an effort to better incorporate the travesti movement as well as articulate together the gay, lesbian, bisexual and travesti struggle. In this year, Rapisardi recalls the other organizations that existed to help travestis, including OTRA (which no longer exists), ATTTA (then ATA) and ALITT. Rapisardi explains, UBA's Area QUEER works on projects of investigation and intervention, two concepts they believe should not be divorced when policy intervention is concerned. Their work involves "intervention, discussion, producing literature, letters, monographs, debates and opinions that pertain to a conflict." The group calls these projects "Cultural Interventions." Protesting the *Codigo Contravencional* was one of these "Cultural Interventions" organized by Area Queer in 1996. Rapisardi explains, "We wrote critical analyses for government representatives in which we informed them about why they should oppose the Code. We also made movies that included reference to travestis."

A few years later, UBA's Area Queer was one of three organizations (CHA and ALITT being the other two) that constructed the project "Construction of the Travesti Citizen" (CCT) and presented it to the Ombudsman Office. As discussed in Chapter 3, this was during Maffia's last year as Ombudswoman, so the program only lasted briefly before being dropped with Maffia's departure. While CCT existed, Area Queer was

²³⁰ Berkins, like Fernandez and Maffia, identifies herself as a feminist.

primarily responsible for visiting red light zones to distribute information to travestis and women in the situation of prostitution. Unfortunately, Rapisardi notes, “Many travestis cannot read. Therefore, you pass out a flier and it does not serve anything.” Area Queer was also primarily responsible for organizing and running CCT’s hair salon training program in Flores and further participated in organizing workshops to help travestis successfully cope with police proceedings.

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the CCT program largely failed in enhancing employment opportunities and citizenship for travestis. Time and resources both proved in short supply. Rapisardi finds much fault with the state for the travesti predicament. He explains, the state offers virtually nothing in the form of public policy to help the population. “AIDS does not kill the travestis. The state kills them because they do not give them resources. It is the responsibility of the state.”²³¹

Homosexual Community of Argentina (1984)

Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (CHA)

The Homosexual Community of Argentina (CHA) is the oldest GLBTT organization in Argentina. It opened its doors in 1984 and was the first GLBTT organization to be legally recognized in 1992. CHA’s main purpose is to fight discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Today CHA offers free workshops and classes for adults and adolescents, free assistance applying for a national identity card and other documents, information on free condom distribution centers, free legal advice, free mental health care and a 24 hour hotline for discrimination complaints. Initially this organization supported homosexual men, however today it also supports other sexual minorities such as travestis. CHA claims it was the first organization to work

²³¹ Flavio Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

with the travesti population on preventative health care and condom use. While CHA's first campaign directed at travestis in the situation of prostitution was initiated in 2001, a representative explains that they began working with the travesti population before this, in the 1980s. In the late 1990's, CHA worked with UBA's Area Queer and ALITT to create the program, Construction of the Transvestite Citizen, that they introduced to Diana Maffia in the Ombudsman Office.²³²

CHA's efforts with the travesti population are limited. Like other government institutions and civil society organizations, it takes an individual's efforts and energy to create a pro-active initiative for the travesti population. Martin Engelman is this person for CHA. Engelman is clearly passionate about working with this population. However, his efforts appear more representative of himself than of CHA. CHA may be one of the organizations Marcela Romero and Josefina Fernandez both speak of when they reference organizations that claim to offer services and support for travestis in order to solicit extra funding, when in reality, these services are designed for gays and have no travesti recruitment or participation. While the website offers educational courses, HIV/AIDS information and therapy groups that are open to the trans population, when asked how many travestis participate in such groups Engelman says the services are primarily "designed for gay men. They are open to lesbians and travestis also, but they do not attend." The only real contact with travestis appears to be through Engelman's work at Hotel Gondolin.

²³² CHA has also initiated a "STOP AIDS" campaign that began in 1987 and continues today, was part of creating the new Civil Union law for gays, has worked on the modification of the National Anti-Discrimination law to incorporate gender identity and sexual orientation. It collaborates with more international and domestic organizations for GLBTT-related causes than any GLBTT group in Argentina. www.cha.org.ar

Engelman became interested with the population in 2001 after participating in a conference given for Argentina's Women's Day, in which some travestis were invited to participate. In 2003 he became involved with the travesti population when he and a group of psychology classmates visited the Hotel Gondolin to offer a therapy and reflection session to its residents. Hotel Gondolin is a hotel housing about 45 travestis in the situation of prostitution. Engelman says these travestis are some of the worst off economically and that there is a lot of violence within this group. Most are from a conservative northern province in Argentina called Salta. Engelman recalls that initially the group of travestis was in constant conflict. They would fight with each other, show up to meetings late, and attendance was sporadic until it became very difficult for Engelman's peers to justify continuing their work.

Engelman however did continue and he has been working with this group of travestis ever since. "I fight for and with travestis, transsexuals and transgenders because I consider them to be one of the most affected groups of sexual minorities. It is what moves me and calls me to work." He works primarily with health-related issues, such as using condoms, HIV/AIDS testing, helping travestis infected with HIV/AIDS take their medications consistently, enhancing patient – doctor communication, and accompanying travestis to the hospital. He has also worked with the Ministry of Health and AIDS Coordination to widen hospital resources for travestis. For example, they have pushed for more flexible and longer hours available to those taking HIV/AIDS tests. Engelman also accompanies the travestis he works with to the movies and theatre,²³³ helps with paperwork for obtaining documents such as national identity cards, and helps file

²³³ Engelman does this because he believes it is important for travestis to be comfortable moving around in all situations and he believes offering them company doing such things helps.

complaints against police abuse. Not long ago, Engelman recalls the police entering the hotel and physically assaulting the travesti residents. They robbed the travestis of all their money, justifying their actions by saying one of the travestis had robbed a client. This injustice reminds Engelman of why he does this work that can often be exhausting.

Engelman also mentioned a campaign he is starting called “No’ to Silicone.” A high percentage of travestis use industrial silicone, a material harmful to the human body that causes infections, cancer and other health risks. Travestis use industrial silicone rather than getting implants as a result of poverty and ignorance. Engelman’s campaign would bring travestis to see doctors who can determine what level of damage the silicone has done to the body and how to best control it. Engelman recognizes that the campaign cannot go totally against silicone because aesthetics are very important to this group. With respect to hormones, they have recently begun to work with Duran Hospital on medically regulating hormones. This is a response to a growing concern for travestis buying over the counter hormones and ingesting quantities much greater than is recommended or healthy. Neither of these campaigns are mentioned on CHA’s website, nor is any of Engelman’s work with Hotel Gondolin.

Gondolin Civil Association (2003)

Asociación Civil Gondolin

The first travesti organization fighting for the visibility of this group was called Travestis United (TU), led by Kenny Michelli. In 1993, after TU’s disintegration, ATA was formed. However, due to political differences, as previously mentioned, two groups split off from ATA shortly after: ALITT and OTRA. OTRA was headed up by Nadia Echazu, Monica Leon and Andrea Aldonate. In 1999 Monica Leon was named the

TRANS Queen by ATA, ALIT, OTRA, the Ombudsman Office and other human rights organizations seeking to nominate a leader of the trans community. In the same year Leon left OTRA and began working with CHA. There she was the Coordinator of Civil Rights for Travestis. One of her objectives, in this role, was to solicit the right to change one's name legally. This has yet to be accomplished. Leon also went back to secondary school and began university studies in law. She created the Gondolin Civil Association in 2003. Leon is currently living in Paris, hoping to receive political asylum after being violently assaulted by the police in the Gondolin Hotel.²³⁴

Leon has spent thirteen years now as a trans activist. Her activism is due to the state not taking responsibility and action for this vulnerable group. She believes “the state is absolutely responsible for the travesti problem,” and that, “the governments have not evolved... some regulations have been changed in the Federal Capital, but the interior of the country continues in the past.” For over a decade Leon visited trans residents in the hotels where they lived to promote health and discuss risky behavior that makes one more susceptible to compromised health, such as HIV/AIDS infections. One hotel in particular was the Gondolin Hotel.²³⁵ She has also promoted issues pertaining to civil rights and human rights and the construction of the travesti identity. Yet with such high levels of social marginalization and institutional violence, Leon felt that one factor in particular needed to be tackled before other problems, such as HIV/AIDS, could be addressed. She points to alcohol and drug abuse and addiction. Alcohol, cocaine, crack, pasta base, and marijuana are among the most popular substances abused by this population. She

²³⁴ More information on Monica Leon's personal story can be found in the Annex.

²³⁵ Vicky Barreda explains “In the Gondolin Hotel, there are only travestis from Salta. The others were thrown out by the Saltenas. When they mark their territory it is sagrado. The older ones mark it and the younger ones must offer something in return for working there. Living day to day is survival, they fight every day.” –Vicky Barreda, Personal Interview 2006.

expresses her concern that no investigation has been done on this crisis within the trans population, and so it has become her focus.²³⁶

When the owner of the Gondolin Hotel died in 2000, all of the travestis' debts to that owner also died.²³⁷ What is more, the owner had no kin and therefore the hotel was taken over by the travesti residents and has been run by them ever since. Leon continued to visit this hotel over the years and saw that the travestis' addictions were not diminishing, nor did they take precautions against sexually transmitted diseases. In fact almost all of the residents were using pasta base (crack) regularly. The drug destroys the lungs over a period of several years, and thus also contributes to a high prevalence of multi-resistant tuberculosis within pasta base users. Leon began to visit travestis in Muniz Hospital weekly as well, seeing the same pattern of travestis abusing drugs, falling ill and dying from preventable diseases.

In March of 2003 Leon finally decided to move into the hotel, and in April she founded the Gondolin Civil Association. Today Monica Leon is the president of the Gondolin Civil Association. The Association addresses a variety of issues such as health, human rights, prostitution, and drugs during regular gatherings. They receive free condoms from AIDS Coordination that they distribute primarily to people in the situation of prostitution. She established relationships with Fernandez Hospital and Muniz Hospital to bring between 30 to 45 trans monthly for check-ups to control tuberculosis. She also got Aguas Argentinas to cancel the hotel's debt and begin servicing the hotel

²³⁶ Leon was also a drug addict to cocaine, marajuna and alcohol at one time. Today she does not support groups, like NEXO, who distribute free syringes and materials in the name of prevention, like in Holland. She believes people should stop using drugs. This is an interesting contradiction to her support of distributing condoms for those in the situation of prostitution.

²³⁷ The travestis, in 1998, collectively decided to stop paying their rents which were \$300-400 pesos a month for each room.

with potable water, something they had not had since 1998. Leon has encouraged the travestis living there to take ownership of the hotel by responsibly paying taxes and bills, something the group has since done. In 2003 she also created a room in the hotel called the Birdcage. This room is on the top floor of the hotel where any trans person, without a place to live, can stay until she establishes herself in the capital. She explains that trans people from abroad and from all different Argentinean provinces come to stay in this room initially before finding their own housing.²³⁸ In December of 2005 Leon faced an assault on the travestis of the Gondolin Hotel by the police. The police robbed the travestis, beat them, and shot Leon eight times in the legs. They justified this act by saying they were looking for a travesti who robbed a client. Monica Leon has since been residing in Paris, hoping to receive political asylum.

Leon has also worked with the Sub-secretary of Human Rights and the Ombudsman Office, however she does not work with other trans organizations such as ALITT and ATTTA. Leon explains, “In my perspective, they have a vague idea of reality, corruption, the illegal use of silicone, the European trafficking of travestis in the situation of prostitution, murders between trans, cocaine trafficking with foreigners; activists always hid these problems that pertain to us and that we ought to stop. I live independently from the other Argentinean activists; I consider myself the black sheep of the international and national GLBTT movement. I do not allow any injustice to pass; it is black or white. It will never be gray.”

²³⁸ Engelman or Talavera noted that this room is extremely small.

Other Organizations

There are several other organizations that have supported or still support the travesti population. OTRA, established in 1994 is no longer in existence. Futuro Transgenerico is another group that Fernandez mentioned is more closely aligned with ALITT. Unfortunately, information on this group was not available online, and no representative responded to inquiries about the organization. The Board of Rights for Children and Adolescents offers assistance to children that are sexually exploited and in the situation of prostitution. A subject interviewed also mentioned they are offering services to travesti minors as well. A pastor of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Argentina and Uruguay, who is also the coordinator of Pastoral Ecumenical HIV/AIDS, regional coordinator of the World Lutheran Federation's Plan of Action for HIV/AIDS, and member of Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in Geneva, works with travestis interned at Muniz Hospital. Pastor Lisandro Orlov and a small team visit these travestis, listening to them and discussing topics such as constructing identities, changing attitudes and vocabulary. They also have travestis staying with them in their halfway house, Solidarity Hostel. Pastor Orlov faults society and churches for not reflecting more on this identity, but instead discriminating against it. He also notes the debilitating effects of having weak leadership within the travesti community itself. Angela Vanni points out that Tulipan, a company that produces condoms, supports the travesti population in the situation of prostitution by providing free condoms.

Cooperation and Dissention Between Groups, and Media Influence

Based on material available on the organizations in Buenos Aires Capital supporting travestis, and on the information shared by organizational representatives, this

section has unveiled a number of efforts to eradicate the numerous crises plaguing the travesti population. Organizations have sprung up to fight the immediate needs of the travesti population, such as human and civil rights violations and compromised health. Others tackle larger problems that require more time before results will show, such as fighting discrimination based on gender identities and sexual orientation (through education, labor insertion programs, etc.) and constructing the travesti gender identity. These organizations have clearly developed in response to the lack of effort by the government. Some are stronger than others, such as FBAS and ATTTA. These organizations are fighting to advance the travesti population and draw them out of poverty and discrimination. Yet they do not unite and work together to create a stronger foundation. Subjects are unanimous in saying that travestis, as individuals, and travesti organizations, are extremely individualistic and competitive.

Barreda recognizes the harm caused by travesti organizations not taking advantage of each other's resources, "They ought to unite because it would give them more strength. But instead of looking for points to unite, they look for points of division. Some fight for documents, others fight for work opportunities but there is no single issue in common. It is very frustrating because there is such a great need but the foundation to work with is very fragile." Fernandez similarly notes that conflict always exists between travesti organizations. However, she does not seem to feel it is unnatural or particularly negative. "The groups are not enemies but they have differences, much like gay and lesbian organizations do. They also have leadership disputes. It is nothing serious, but tensions do exist." ALITT and Futuro Transgenerico, with which Fernandez works, have a closer alliance. "ATTTA practically does not exist," since the old president, Correa, left

to live abroad. Fernandez explains that of the organizations claiming to support the travesti population, the majority are homosexual organizations that open their doors for travestis to participate in their HIV/AIDS programs in order to get extra financial support from international and external organizations. In reality though, these programs are conducted for gay men, not travestis. “The travesti participation in these programs is zero.”²³⁹

Rapisardi puts much of the blame on the state, “The development of civil society is basically very weak, and without the help of the state it will not function.” The travesti movement has been sustained by the gay movement but cannot become an autonomous political group because of its extreme marginal status. “They live in a situation of extreme poverty and violence that leaves no margin to initiate or realize a project. At least in these conditions I do not believe they can do more. They are saturated.” ATTTA and FBAS are two of the stronger organizations working with travestis, and the state helps somewhat in the area of health. But essential complementary efforts have not been made for fixing living standards, education and employment.²⁴⁰ Talavera adds that GTZ and the Global Fund are about the only two outside organizations funding travesti-related causes. However, groups that want this funding must have a link to the state, because state support is one of the conditions GTZ requires for funding. Talavera suggests that a strong link exists between ALITT, ATTTA, FBAS and the International Commission of Gay and Lesbian Human Rights, directed by Alejandro Sarda and Marcelo Ferreira. Together they file complaints against other states/governments. They are representatives of the UN. Different organizations have different influences and actions. Some work

²³⁹ Josefina Fernandez. Author & Anthropologist. Personal Interview 2006.

²⁴⁰ Flavio Rapisardi. University of Buenos Aires Queer Studies. Personal Interview 2006.

more concretely and hands-on with populations, some have local political influence, and some have international ties.

Conclusion

In conclusion, state failure to provide adequate or even minimal support to the travesti population of Buenos Aires has driven civil society to react. Organizations have sprouted up proclaiming their support for the travesti population and interest in defending travestis' human rights. But the civil society response has not provided enough attention or financial support to force needed changes. With further government recognition of travestis and sexual minorities, efforts to absorb and include this group into society will be more accepted. The direct benefits to local communities of less poverty, less prostitution, and less health threatening sexual behavior should be the drivers that keep the government of Buenos Aires involved. Government involvement in the travesti predicament proves essential for the improvement of both travesti living standards and Argentinean society.

The following chapter aims to seek out policy alternatives that will incorporate the efforts of the state and dominant civil society organizations to develop a society that discriminates less and offers travestis an opportunity to improve their living standards. Policies should be holistic and thus aim to affect all of the issues touched upon in Chapter Two.

Chapter V

My Policy Suggestion: A Transitional Road to Social Integration

Chapter five, “A Transitional Road to Social Integration,” focuses first on analyzing subjects’ suggestions for improving the situation of the travesti population. I then use these suggestions to create a policy recommendation for the population.

Subject Feedback Concerning Necessary Changes

When asked what subjects felt must be done to improve this population’s predicament, they unanimously stipulated that necessary changes require multi-institutional efforts. Supporting this population involves tackling multiple facets, including health, employment, education, housing, documentation, and social acceptance of different gender identities. Subjects secondly agree that specific policies, particularly social insertion policies, ought to be implemented for this population. The third necessary change that subjects advocate is the reinforcement of anti-discrimination laws and pacts governing the country. And lastly, subjects stress that the travesti population must be a part of these efforts in order to make them effective. Travestis’ counsel must be sought and they must work with the state to seek solutions.

Where to begin addressing these challenges remains a point of contention. Some suggest tackling immediate needs first, such as health and employment, while others suggest focusing primarily on constructing the travesti identity and working to dispel stigmatizations and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender orientation. Victoria Barreda, who leans more towards the former view, warns, “It is an ant’s job,

slow, one step forward and a few steps back. It is a costly job that requires a lot of patience.”²⁴¹

Below follow the suggestions of interview subjects with experience in developing aid programs for the travesti minority in Buenos Aires. First, I will explore the responses of subjects who believe in catering to the immediate needs of travestis. Second, I will explore subjects who see the principal challenge as tackling issues of identity. The former include CHA’s Martin Engelman, FBAS’s President Alejandro Freyre, AIDS Coordination’s director Julio Talavera, former AIDS Coordination director and Grupo Tacones’ director Vicky Barreda, the Ministry of Health’s Dolores Fenoy, GTZ’s Carolina Grosse, Gondolin Civil Society’s President Monica Leon, and ATTTA’s President Marcela Romero. While these subjects believe gender orientation and non-discrimination are pertinent, they suggest alleviating immediate needs first. Several suggest tackling job opportunities first, because the majority of travestis are in the situation of prostitution and have no other alternative and because creating job opportunities opens doors to health care and a different type of visibility for the population in society, among other benefits. Barreda suggests that in working with the travesti population, goals must not be too big or ambitious. She explains, this population lives day-to-day; they do not think ahead of the future because many do not expect to survive long. In her view, pushing long-term goals on travestis, such as improving public health or quality of life, often proves futile. “They think of today, not of tomorrow, they are very conditioned by drugs and violence. They cannot take on long-term projects. For

²⁴¹ Victoria Barreda, Personal Interview 2006.

travestis, there is day-to-day, there are not future projects. They are in a situation that makes them very defensive; the world is their enemy.”²⁴²

- **Employment**

Subjects such as Gonzalez, Rapisardi and Barreda, to name a few, suggest that the government create a specific policy for travestis offering them work opportunities. Once travestis are formally employed, society will see them in a new light. Other travestis in the situation of prostitution will be empowered to leave prostitution, by following the example and precedent set by formally employed travestis. Ana Gonzalez suggests that labor insertion policies directed at travestis, as well as policies to prevent police persecution, are immediate needs that must be dealt with. She believes the solution for travesti youth is prevention, offering early alternatives to sex work. However, for the rest of the adult travesti population, the first step is a new job through labor insertion programs. While she recognizes that smaller efforts and events have been organized over the years to enhance visibility for this population and its problems, such as workshops, round table discussions, and panels, Gonzalez believes longer-term specific policies for travestis are necessary. She would like to see efforts combined in “distinct spaces like the Secretary of Human Rights, the Ombudsman’s Office, and the University of Buenos Aires.” Once employment opportunities are established, other areas, like education, can be tackled. Likewise, Flavio Rapisardi prioritizes employment and housing. This should be treated as “an emergence from an emergency state,” he explains, and public jobs should be offered in service areas like tourism. Once these areas are improved, education and health would be priorities. Rapisardi explains, education and health are not first

²⁴² Victoria Barreda, Personal Interview 2006.

priorities because they do not guarantee travestis work and housing. Malu Moreno suggests the government should initiate “symbolic policies,” hiring travestis to work in government offices. This might influence other employers to be more open to hiring travestis as well. Finally, Barreda suggests, “It would be interesting to create micro-enterprises with job training, especially in areas of art. I think you need to think of clothing design, make-up; things that they like.”

- **Health**

Health is the area in which the state invests most for the travesti population. However, it is not necessarily because the state feels this is the highest priority for improving the travesti population’s situation. Health efforts by the government are more likely a response to public fears and demands about disease, especially HIV/AIDS. Talavera explains, “public policy is not generated in response to the needs of this sector. Public policies exist because travestis generate problems for the rest of society.” This is true of policies affecting many vulnerable groups in the world. Once a marginal group’s situation threatens or creates problems for the rest of society, the state reacts. Until this point, these groups go largely unrecognized. Health is undeniably a high priority for any vulnerable group. However, while it is extremely important, improving travesti health does not change other circumstances affecting their lives significantly. Therefore, while it proves necessary to focus on the health crisis of this population, efforts must also be exerted in other areas for real results. Rapisardi recommends a pilot program in a few hospitals be established that can set an example for other hospitals.²⁴³ Dolores Fenoy,

²⁴³ Flavio Rapisardi, Personal Interview 2006.

similarly, recommends that medical staff be trained to attend all people, including the trans population, without prejudice.²⁴⁴

- **Education**

Those that focus on education recommend a course on sexual education in schools that incorporates gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as topics such as discrimination, homophobia or transfobia. These subjects also emphasize a need for policies that focus on keeping travestis in school and encourage older ones to go back to school. Romero believes the first priority in aiding the travesti population is education so that travestis are empowered with the necessary tools to seek out a job like everyone else. However, this assumes that discrimination in education and employment do not exist, when in reality it is precisely this that keeps many minority groups unemployed. Therefore, it seems that educating travestis alone would not be enough to improve their current situation. Rapisardi looks at education from another standpoint, and encourages training staff and students in a state anti-discrimination campaign. He explains that while the results of this campaign would not be felt immediately, efforts to combat societal prejudices and would create a more comfortable relationship between society and travestis in the long run. The campaign, Rapisardi suggests, should be accompanied by pertinent legislation including gender identity and sexual orientation in the national antidiscrimination law (Article 11 of the national constitution).²⁴⁵ Rapisardi and Talavera both encourage universities to study transvestitism in the classroom and would like to see

²⁴⁴ Dolores Fenoy, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁴⁵ Currently, in Argentina only Buenos Aires and Rosario include gender identity and sexual orientation. Venezuela is the only Country to embrace this nationally in Latin America.

anthropological studies done on this population to help the state and society better understand travestis.

- **Laws**

Many subjects also recommend modifying the Civil Code, Code of Contraventions and national laws. Talavera suggests that the state currently acts “against all of the international pacts the government has signed.”²⁴⁶ Martin Engelman would like to annul the Code of Contraventions and modify the national anti-discrimination law to include gender identity and sexual orientation. He also thinks specific laws and policies should be developed for travestis, guaranteeing their right to work, health, and change of name. Likewise, Rapisardi believes non-discrimination based on gender identity laws should be established, in which students, educational faculty, public offices, and the health system, all agents of public power in the city of Buenos Aires, are trained in antidiscrimination, not only for travestis, but for the poor, immigrants, women etc.²⁴⁷

- **Identity**

Some subjects focus greatly on identity as a primary goal in fighting travesti problems. The University of Buenos Aires’ Dora Barrancos, the Ombudsman Office’s former director Diana Maffia, researcher Beatriz Giri, lawyer Angela Vanni, Pastor Lisandro Orlov and anthropologist and author Josefina Fernandez emphasize the importance of first and foremost fostering a travesti identity that is acknowledged by the government. One avenue these subjects have pointed to in accomplishing this is to change the Civil Code and hence allow individuals to legally change their names. If

²⁴⁶ Julio Talavera, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁴⁷ Flavio Rapisardi, Personal Interviews 2006.

travestis were able to legally change their names, it would signify an acceptance of their chosen identity. Additionally, should the government permit this change, it would become a catalyst for society's perspective to shift away from viewing travestis as disguised men and towards an acceptance of their chosen identity. For example, when a travesti is trying to rent an apartment, apply for credit at a bank, apply for a job, vote, or purchase something with a credit card she has to show her identity card. Many travestis pass as women and are treated as such until someone sees their identity cards exposing their male sex. This creates an atmosphere of discomfort and shame for the travesti and general discomfort and discrimination in society. If travestis had identity cards with their chosen legal names, this small and relatively costless effort would create large and meaningful change.

Ana Gonzalez explains that while travestis may want to leave prostitution, it is very difficult not only because of money, but also because of their psychological state. Many have problems with their self-esteem and only know how to live as prostitutes. These feelings are reinforced when the state and society do not acknowledge their travesti identity.²⁴⁸ However, the change mentioned above, would improve self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. Pastor Orlov adds, "To make society feel more comfortable with this population, I must work with the conviction that every person has a right to an identity. Trans people have a culturally constructed identity and it is their choice to be in the world in a determined form, the same as all other people. I believe a need exists to work on acceptance of the plurality of identities that exist in our society and culture, of

²⁴⁸ Ana Gonzalez, Personal Interview 2006.

which transgender people are a part. There ought to be a form of choice and determination in the exercise of citizenship.”²⁴⁹

- **Communication Between Travestis and State & Between State Institutions**

Subjects unanimously agree that the state must change its mentality in order to improve the situation of travestis. It is the state’s responsibility to initiate efforts and specific policies for travestis. Dolores Fenoy feels the government must initiate a cultural change involving a shift in the mentality of legislatures, public functionaries, the medical field and society. The state, she contemplates, needs to truly contemplate the travesti situation and address their actual needs (health, justice, education and social development).²⁵⁰ Talavera seconds this notion, saying, “The state has the capacity, but not the political willingness because this is not a problem of the majority, it is a problem of the silent minority.” However, he suggests, if the state would look at travestis as citizens, then it might create legislation to support this group.²⁵¹ Dora Barrancos adds that the state needs to initiate campaigns focusing on the concept of citizenship and non-discrimination. Giri points out that police training would be particularly beneficial.

Subjects also agree that the government needs to work *with* the travesti population, and not *for* them. Travestis need to have a voice in these matters. By establishing relationships with the travesti community and working with representatives, the state will better understand travesti problems, what policies travestis will be more receptive to, and how to gain the trust of the population. Romero explains, “It is this government’s responsibility to sit down with us and talk with us... to have an opportunity

²⁴⁹ Pastor Lisandro Orlov, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁵⁰ Dolores Fenoy, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁵¹ Julio Talavera, Personal Interview 2006.

to communicate and share what is happening all over the country, not only in the capital. They ought to understand that people cannot be arrested for dressing in women's clothing. It would be good if they would hear this from our mouth."²⁵² Barreda also supports this idea, suggesting, "The state should create a policy training travestis to become promoters for their peers. These travestis will feel like they are doing something meaningful and worthwhile, and those they communicate with will be more receptive to someone who is also a travesti."²⁵³ Pastor Lisandro Orlov explains, "It is necessary for this population to be protagonists in their own promotion, rather than have other people and institutions promoting and managing initiatives for transgender people."²⁵⁴

Additionally, subjects agree that the efforts of the state and civil society must be interdisciplinary, or multi-institutional. No one sector should be working on travesti problems. There should be a concerted effort within multiple organizations. Tackling the many challenges the population faces and addressing these problems more holistically is the only way to realize long-lasting and substantial effects. The Ministries of Health, Human Rights, Education, and Social Development are several of the more important institutions to form this unified effort.

- **Challenges**

"A common philosophical as well as practical question is 'What private troubles warrant definition as public problems and thereby legitimately raise claims for amelioration by public resources?'"

-Eugene Bardach

Despite the obvious challenge stated by Rapisardi, that "the state is not attending to vulnerable populations like immigrants, the poor and travestis," Ana Gonzalez also

²⁵² Marcela Romero, Personal Interviews 2006.

²⁵³ Victoria Barreda, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁵⁴ Pastor Lisandro Orlov, Personal Interview 2006.

points out, “We are still in the early stages of just trying to install the *debate* of transvestitism in society.” While the travesti predicament in Buenos Aires is very grave, the miniscule window through which the state and society look upon the population reflects only the very surface of the travesti community. They see men disguising themselves as women, scantily clad, and prostituting themselves. Travestis are generally perceived as an immoral group of people who have chosen a shameful way of life that serves only to corrupt society’s morality. Few within the state and society know the real lives and challenges this population faces. Therefore, one challenge is simply shifting society’s perception of travestis as immoral to revealing travestis’ sad reality.

On the other hand, Monica Leon explains another challenge may prove to be the most difficult hurdle to overcome in any of the efforts directed at improving travestis’ quality of life. Leon suggests, “It is important that the state implement an adequate Social Insertion program for Trans,” like in France. “The drama is that a trans thinks that prostitution is forever and that the money she earns will change her life and she rejects social insertion. Some trans reject sex work and look for another alternative, but these are rare cases, the great majority of trans do not have an alternative opportunity for dignified work.”

“If you ask why trans do not access education, it is simply that they earn money without studying by exposing their lives to prostitution and later they die. This is the life of trans people in Argentina and in many countries in the world.” Leon currently resides in Paris, France where a social insertion institution for trans people exists. This French program, Leon explains, receives more money than most of the world’s social insertion programs, and yet it does not work. “The trans people continue in prostitution and they

do not see that if you study you can work in the area you like.”²⁵⁵ This disheartening observation by Leon seems to suggest that perhaps this is a population that demands “instant gratification.” From this analysis one might deduce that the travesti culture generally lacks patience to learn the value of saving money, living frugally to create savings, studying and learning skills that will one day support a formal sector job and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Policy Recommendation: The Red Light Theater Cooperative, a Transitional Road to Social Integration

Given the recommendations and perspectives of the subjects interviewed, and the existing literature on this population, I have chosen to focus on offering a policy recommendation that will increase alternatives to employment for travestis. This policy recommendation is not intended to serve as a general solution to travestis’ problems, but rather as a model for the future and a catalyst for improving their situation over time. In creating a distinct employment training opportunity for travestis, other facets of life will also be affected, such as increased visibility and interaction with society, increased awareness of healthy lifestyles, enhanced feelings of self-worth, and decreased health risks from working in prostitution. Like Flavio Rapisardi, I find that evidence suggests we should prioritize employment and housing in helping travestis improve their lives. Education and health are extremely important and should always be part of any policy initiative, but these areas cannot become the main focus until travestis on the street now can be guaranteed decent work and housing.

Thus, in the following pages, I would like to provide an example of a policy option that interest groups and concerned individuals might recommend to the government of

²⁵⁵ Monica Leon, Personal Interview 2006.

Buenos Aires. The recommended policy is a Theatre Cooperative, a theatre-based job-training program involving government representatives as mediators between international, national, and local NGOs and advocacy groups to support a travesti employment initiative. The Theatre Cooperative will serve as a transitional organization for travestis working in prostitution. The end goal is to help travestis integrate themselves into mainstream society, mainly by exiting the profession of prostitution. The Theatre Cooperative will offer diverse job training opportunities to travestis in sales, marketing, acting, production, stage design, music, lighting, as ushers, etc. These skills will ultimately enable travestis to obtain formal sector work outside of the theatre. The production of theatrical works for the public, based on travestis' lives and experience, will also serve as a venue for fostering public awareness about issues that affect travestis as well as the general population, like STDs.

Criteria

I have developed the concept of a Theatre Cooperative based on eight chosen criteria, outlined by Eugene Bardach for determining the value of policy efforts to improve society over time. Bardach explains that "...criteria are evaluative standards used to judge the goodness of the projected policy outcomes associated with . . . [policy] alternatives."²⁵⁶ Bardach designed and utilized parameters for measuring the value of policy efforts, and I used his criteria in developing the Theatre Cooperative so as to encompass the overall efficiency, effectiveness and fairness for the travesti population and the greater community of Buenos Aires required in order to make such an effort worthwhile. These criteria are as follows:

²⁵⁶ Bardach 2000, 19.

Efficiency considers the monetary cost each alternative will require from the public. Bardach describes it as “maximizing the aggregate of individuals’ welfare as welfare would be construed by the individuals themselves.”²⁵⁷ He also goes on to explain that while this is one of the most important criteria when taking into consideration cost-effectiveness and cost-benefits, it does not always reflect well upon social justice. Bardach explains, “If the values at stake have few or no human defenders and therefore no human pocketbooks to back an estimate of willingness to pay, the efficiency criterion might underestimate these values even if by some conception of justice they ought to be weighted heavily.”²⁵⁸ Because Argentina is under great financial stress right now, this criterion will prove especially important, as funds may not be available for allocation to such a controversial minority group.

Short-Term Effectiveness, “producing a decisive or desired effect”²⁵⁹ is used to measure both the percentage of travestis who are able to obtain alternative (formal sector) employment as a result of the implemented policy.

Long-Term Effectiveness considers the percentage of travestis able to retain this employment for one year or more once they begin. This criterion therefore measures the outcome, or success of the potential policy solutions. If travestis cannot obtain and retain jobs, then the alternatives are ultimately unsuccessful, and therefore particular emphasis must be placed on this criterion.

Fairness and Justice evaluates how fair, or just, each alternative is to all involved. This must take into consideration all parties, including the travesti population, employers and society.

Community Integration measures the success with which each alternative is able to decrease discrimination and increase social acceptance of this minority group. This is important because as the ability to understand and accept others who may differ from

²⁵⁷ Bardach 2000, 20.

²⁵⁸ Bardach 2000, 21.

²⁵⁹ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

traditional social norms increases, comfort levels also increase, and society is better able to accept and integrate the travesti population.

Political Acceptability is the sixth criteria, and has tremendous influence on the outcome of each alternative. If an alternative elicits strong public and political opposition and/or little support, then the alternative is not feasible and cannot move forward to produce successful results.

Robustness represents the durability of the alternative. Should an alternative have a lasting impact, or at least survive beyond the initial stages, it is considered robust.

Equality of Opportunity is the last criterion. This criterion measures whether or not the alternatives minimize obstacles keeping travestis in the situation of prostitution.

The Red Light Theatre Cooperative:

I propose a job training initiative with the support of the government, to encourage activists, human rights advocacy groups and other NGOs from both Argentina and abroad to create employment-training programs in specific vocations for travestis in Buenos Aires. These groups would work together to generate the funds and manpower necessary to establish one to three theatre cooperatives, in which training would be devised to prepare travestis to perform different jobs within the theatres. This initiative will combine efforts with the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Health, the Secretary of Human Rights, the Secretary of Social Development and interest organizations serving the travesti population of Buenos Aires, both domestic and international. The purpose of this policy is to encourage and enable greater involvement of international organizations specializing in transgender issues with local groups already trying to support travestis in Buenos Aires. The government delegation would consist of representatives from the four offices mentioned above, in addition to a representative from the Ombudsman's office. These government officials would work with the executive board of leading local non-government organizations (NGOs) run by and/or

supporting travestis and transsexuals, such as Asociación Lucha por la Identidad Travesti y Transexual (ALITT), Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgeneros Argentina (ATTTA) and Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (FBAS), to mediate between local and international aid groups and design resource allocation for the project. In this way, the government would empower a committee composed of representatives from well-established Argentinean organizations to solicit international groups and interested communities within Buenos Aires to implement a concerted effort to better employ travestis. Employers of travestis and donors to the program would receive tax incentives from the city, with the government and private organizations working together to promote the initiative and involve the public.

The program would thus be spearheaded as an extension of FBAS's hairstyle training program. The first program of this kind was through the Ombudsman office at la Escuela de Flores. Fifteen students graduated from the Ombudsman's program, meeting four hours per day for six months, and making 200 pesos per month. As stated in Chapter 4, the school works with extremely limited funds and materials to train travestis in these skills. This proposal of establishing travestis' theater cooperatives, to greatly enhance public attention around the problem of travestis in the situation of prostitution, would build upon a well-designed but very small policy project with FBAS. Up to three theatres in Palermo Viejo, San Telmo, and/or Recoleta would provide the core prospect of this initiative, as a controlled small-business venture for travestis leaving prostitution. The travestis participating in the program would hold positions that every theatre requires, as ushers, ticket salesmen and marketers, lighting maintenance, actors, set designers, stage hands, music, management etc. The theatres would thus provide employment training in a

number of fields and operate predominantly at night. Travestis in the program would train for their positions by day, gaining the skills they need for their theatre jobs. Those interested in make-up and hairstyle would train with the FBAS' program, while those interested in the other facets of operating a theatre would undergo training in these fields, including accounting, theatre management and services, the performing arts, advertising and marketing, initially with the cooperatives' organizers and leaders and, ideally, later as interns with local businesses. Some could ultimately become teachers of such skills for the cooperative. The theatre shows, in turn, would serve as marketing events for the specific salons that are employing travestis, as all hair and make-up in the shows would be the responsibility of in-house staff. Locations in the barrios listed above would draw from a diverse customer base of tourists, wealthy and middleclass locals, homosexuals and other travestis. In a society that currently discriminates, fears and shuns this minority, there are few other sectors that would employ them. Ultimately, the influences of this Policy will have different effects on different individuals, from travestis in the situation of prostitution to audience members to local businesses participating with the program. Some travestis will be empowered with "more constructive life choices", in some it will "[heighten] the realistic perception of" health and civil rights, some may not be affected, and some will be affected in ways we cannot yet determine.²⁶⁰

The entertainment industry is the one area where sexual minorities are accepted by society, as can be seen by the famous Argentinean travesti and actress Florencia de la V and other shows with homosexual characters. Therefore, the theatre cooperatives would provide travestis with job training opportunities in one of the only socially acceptable industries for travestis at this time. This project would allow for the travesti

²⁶⁰ Bardach 2000, 30.

community to find employment in a welcoming, dynamic and potentially profitable environment, furthering social integration in Buenos Aires through attendance at the shows and helping to create different employment opportunities for different personalities, abilities, and talents within the travesti community. The theatre shows would also provide a needed forum for travestis to communicate their issues and the serious challenges they face to the greater public, through comedic but also informative scripts and performances. The shows might also function as a mouthpiece for NGOs and the government in promoting both the civil rights of transgender and homosexual citizens as well as the dangers of unsafe sex. Success and publicity may provide the opportunity for traveling shows, with acts taken to the provinces and other poorer less-educated areas, to spread the government's message about social acceptance and safe sex.

Because theatre is generally not the most lucrative of businesses and tends to be subsidized by the government, emphasis would have to be placed on job-training and social acceptance rather than solely on employment. However, if this idea were to expand to incorporate neighboring restaurants, cafes, music venues, art galleries, and cinema, the operation could become quite profitable indeed. Or, replicating Chicago's famous "Second City" theatres, in which people are seated at tables and order food and drinks throughout the performances, the travesti theatre cooperative could provide opportunities for travestis to also work as chefs and waitresses, while bringing in additional revenue. Connections to local businesses and the neighborhood economy would support the development of internship programs for theatre members, giving travestis real experience with outside organizations and positively introducing the group to society.

Diana Maffia who spearheaded the Ombudsman's CCT, believes the travesti population would embrace this program, but emphasizes the need for travestis to also be reimbursed for their time. Assuming the theatre cooperative will not generate enough income to provide salaries to its employees, travestis would have to receive some sort of stipend. Ideally, travestis would therefore be reimbursed at least minimum wage, based on local and international NGO donations and potential income from the productions and services the cooperatives would offer. Enlisting support from the Ministry of Social Development's programs supporting labor training and insertion would also prove necessary.

The theatre cooperative policy would call for representatives of the government and local NGO's to work together to solicit funds and then delegate those funds for the functions of the Theatre Cooperative. As shown in the chart, the city of Buenos Aires will nominate a governmental committee, a representative from the Ombudsman's Office, as well as from the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Development and Human Rights. Each of these Ministries and the Ombudsman Office has already been in contact with travesti organizations to varying degrees. The NGO Executive Committee will be made up of representatives from each of the three dominant and credible organizations aiding this population, the Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation (FBAS), ATTTA and ALITT.

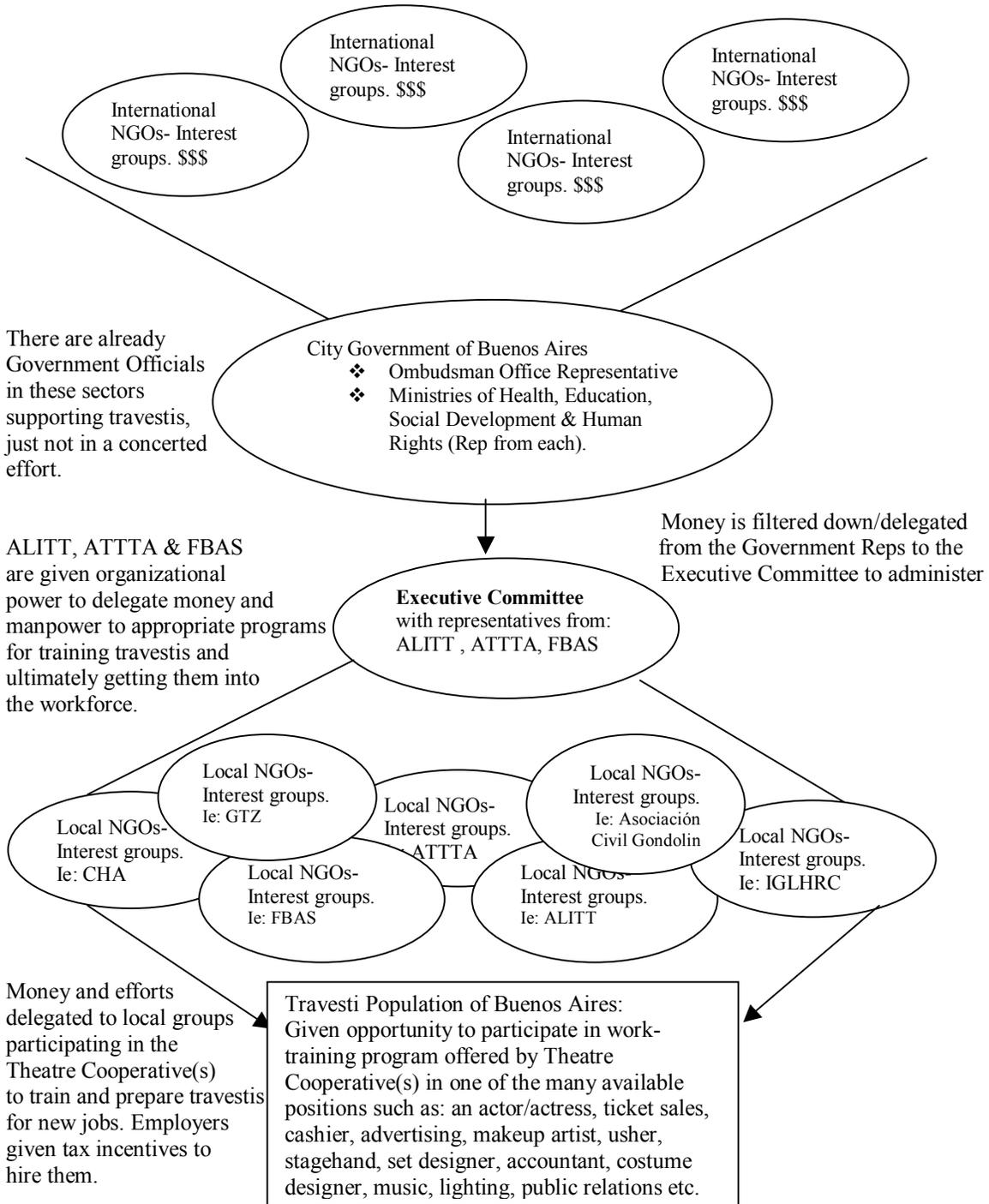
Realistically, it will be difficult at this time to get significant funding locally, as Argentina is still feeling the weight of the 2001 economic crisis. Therefore, an emphasis will have to be placed on obtaining funds from international aid organizations. The government committee will be responsible for soliciting such sponsorships and doing grant writing. The government will provide credibility to the requests. This committee

will then filter the money down to an NGO Executive Committee, made up of leading NGO representatives, to use in running the Theatre Cooperative. Both committees will be held accountable to one other by quarterly meetings and through keeping written records of how funds are used.

The Executive Committee will then be responsible for organizing volunteers from other organizations to lead workshops and bring in the teachers for the Theatre Cooperative. This committee and its volunteers will also be responsible for recruiting travestis in the situation of prostitution to learn more about the Theatre Cooperative and become involved. They will be responsible for all of the workings of the Theatre Cooperative at large as well as for publicizing it and bringing in audiences and revenue.

The following chart shows the dynamics of the Theatre Cooperative:

Larger International NGOs and Interest Groups filter money and support through the Buenos Aires City Government and Local NGOs and Interest Groups, in response to the City Government contacting them and giving verbal support for this initiative.



For example, FBAS may be able to open up its hair salon training program to the Theatre Cooperative. ALITT may be able to use its political connections and experience to lead vital workshops, as well as use the sewing machines recently donated to them to teach sewing classes and costume design. These organizations can solicit volunteer actors and acting teachers to offer free acting classes, and they can contact local businesses to create internship opportunities for travestis. Essentially, it is the Executive Committee that will be most responsible for making the Theatre Cooperative successful.

Overall Goals of the Theatre Cooperative

There are both short-term and long-term goals of the Theatre Cooperative. Plainly stated, the short-term goals are to provide travestis in the situation of prostitution with the opportunity to participate in a job-training program with the theatre. The long-term goal is widespread employment of travestis in formal sector jobs, outside of the Theatre Cooperative. Because travestis will most likely only be receiving stipends for their work with the theatre, there is no opportunity for them to become “rent-seekers.” Therefore, those truly interested in formal sector work will eventually seek it out. Ideally, partnerships formed between local businesses and the Theatre Cooperative will make possible internships, which will further aid in the employment transition. Another short-term goal is sensitizing the public to the travesti population, with the long-term goal of social integration of the travesti population into society at large. A third short-term goal is to set up weekly workshops for those participating in the Theatre Cooperative on topics related to health, civil rights, and computer skills. The long-term goal of this is to encourage travestis to return to school and complete their primary and secondary education. An important goal for the Theatre and the travesti population will be to

legitimate their efforts. One way of doing this is to take the shows out of the theatre and into public arena, including schools, public meetings and city functions. Having public institutions and city officials acknowledge the efforts of the Theatre and the importance of its work in dispelling discrimination and social stigmas will give the Theatre's mission credibility and enhance travesti morale. Ultimately, reducing discrimination and increasing opportunities for travestis to leave prostitution for work in the formal sector are interdependent goals and efforts.

Why the Theatre Cooperative is a Good Policy Option According to my Criteria

- It is inexpensive. The city invests verbally and through the participation of three valuable city representatives. It incurs limited costs to make contacts soliciting international organizations' support, and in expanding the hairstyle training program through the Ombudsman's office. It additionally is a long-term investment that empowers a population to become self-sufficient and not depend on welfare. Long-term effects would also include improved health, which would ultimately save the state money. (Efficiency)
- It taps into a worldwide movement supporting GLBTT that can provide funding to this controversial minority group, which the government cannot easily provide. (Efficiency)
- It creates training and employment opportunities in which the travestis could obtain and retain employment on the basis of merit, without having to fear workplace discrimination and job loss. (Efficiency, Equality of Opportunity)
- It creates a forum in which the experiences of travestis can be heard, felt and understood, and in which travestis can still see themselves as individuals with individual interests choosing one of many different job titles suitable to their abilities, desires and talents (Effectiveness, Justice, Political Acceptability).
- Travesti sex workers are provided training and opportunities to find alternative work to prostitution, and to enter society in a more acceptable role. (Effectiveness, Community Integration, Equality of Opportunity)
- Employers that hire these workers will be given tax breaks, and salons specifically participating in the program will receive complementary advertisement in the theatres. (Justice, Community Integration)
- It can significantly decrease prostitution in Buenos Aires, as travestis represent a major part of the prostitutes in the city. (Effectiveness, Political Acceptability, Community Integration)
- It will improve health within the travesti community and community at large, both immediate and long term, by eliminating dangerous, often unsafe, sex. This will

- result from decreased prostitution and potentially from educational lessons and messages found in performances. (Community Integration, Political Acceptability)
- It enables the city government to deal with issues of prostitution and travestis without being too hands on, and without investing too much monetarily. (Political Acceptability, Community Integration)
 - All parties participate out of their own freewill (Justice).
 - Ought to start out strong and gain momentum as commercial reputation of the theatre cooperative develops, giving travestis more public acceptance, and increasing participation of outside NGOs in the program (Robustness).
 - The state, as the mediator, will increase public acceptance and awareness of problems of discrimination against homo/transsexuals, prostitution, and HIV/AIDS through their verbal support of this policy option (Political Acceptability, Community Integration).
 - This program can serve as a model for other minority and disenfranchised groups in the city, to improve their quality of life and level of opportunity (Justice, Robustness).
 - A long-term decrease in discrimination (Justice, Community Integration, Effectiveness).
 - Decrease police abuse and increase accountability (Justice).

Possible Constraints of the Recommended Alternative

- Dependence on the funds of predominantly international organizations (Efficiency).
- Financial discrepancies of travesti income, high potential pay from prostitution (Efficiency).
- Unemployment in Argentina is already at 17.3%, making support for a job-training program of such a specific and controversial group politically difficult (Effectiveness). (CIA World Fact book 2004)
- The willingness of the travestis themselves to participate in this initiative is not known, and cannot be assumed, because their financial situation may be more secure in the sex trade than in alternative work (Effectiveness).
- Discrimination in society may be too strong at this time to allow for significant changes in the employment opportunities of travestis (Community Integration).
- “Does society (or you) value Z more or less than X?”²⁶¹ **Does society value** rehabilitating, reeducating and retraining the travesti population, thereby decreasing health threats to the greater public and improving the red light zones, **more or less than** morals and traditions that suggest travestis are unfit for society and undeserving of help
- “The most common sources of failure are neglecting to consider the resistance of bureaucratic and other stakeholders in the status quo, and the lack of an entrepreneur in the relevant policy environment who has the incentives to pick up what seems like a great idea and see it through.”²⁶²

²⁶¹ Bardach 2000, 37.

²⁶² Bardach 2000, 40.

Long Term: Sex Education in Public Schools and DNI Cards

The above smaller-scale-proposal would be most effective in conjunction with a larger initiative, such as requiring all public schools in Argentina to teach sex-education courses that would include lessons on gender identity and sexual discrimination and allowing travestis to change their names on their DNI (national identity) cards. Non-discrimination campaigns led by the state would also prove very productive, acclimating citizens to different gender identities through commercials and other types of government sponsored media. These efforts are important because they, again, legitimize the travesti population. They create a new visibility for the population, shifting views away from travestis as prostitutes, sexually immoral and abnormalities, and toward travestis as individuals that live and breath just like every other citizen.

Near the completion of this thesis, a national sex education law, the National Programme of Comprehensive Sex Education, was passed on October 4, 2006, requiring a basic sex education curriculum to be taught in all Argentinean schools. The Senate passed the statute, already approved by the Chamber of Deputies in August, by a margin of 54-1. The Ministry of Education will have 180 days to work with a commission of experts to draw up a curriculum “combining biological, psychological, social, emotional and ethical aspects.” Unfortunately it does not address gender and sexual orientation in depth. The goal is to have the curriculum implemented within four years, starting in pre-school and lasting through high school. The curriculum must contain relevant, reliable and current information. This accomplishment has not come easily, as opposition from conservatives and the Catholic and Evangelical churches has been fervent.²⁶³ The

²⁶³ The Economist 10/19/06.

Archbishop of La Plata, Hector Aguer, “accused the state of ‘promoting sexual corruption’ and ‘inciting fornication, lust and promiscuity,’” because of this law. However, the opposition has been somewhat alleviated by “a phrase in the law stipulating that ‘every educational community [can] adapt proposals to their socio-cultural situations.’”²⁶⁴ Obviously, passing such a significant law is a huge win for society, and a step forward for those of different genders and sexual orientations, that may now work towards having gender and sexual orientation as well as discrimination issues incorporated into the curriculum.

Subject Feedback to my Proposal

A very simplified version of this proposal was presented to subjects for feedback. The proposal above has evolved and adapted to this feedback, and so is not the same as what subjects initially read. Feedback regarding my initial proposal was not unanimous. Many subjects voiced caution, such as Martin Engelman, Josefina Fernandez, Julio Talavera and Alba. They cautioned stigmatizing travestis into an arts and entertainment industry. While they were receptive to job training and enjoyed ideas of micro enterprises focused on offering travestis a transitional path out of prostitution, this particular alternative caused them to pause. Engelman voiced another very real concern, “There is another important factor, travestis earn more as a prostitute than as a hair stylist and perhaps they won’t like it. Therefore, they have to train in areas they like.”²⁶⁵ While their caution is understandable, and such potential stigmatizations should not be taken lightly, the benefit of this program is that travestis have the option to train in a variety of

²⁶⁴ The Economist 10/19/06.

²⁶⁵ Martin Engelman, Personal Interviews 2006.

industries. The travesti interested in the more artistic and creative side can work in set design, hair styling or costume design, while the travesti interested in business can train in advertising, accounting, and management. Likewise, the travesti interested in technology can train in music, lighting, and online (as a site designer etc).

Other subjects offered quite positive feedback, in addition to suggestions, to this proposal. Vicky Barreda was the most enthusiastic about the idea. Earlier in our interview she had actually suggested a policy solution should incorporate a training program focusing on creative elements such as hair and clothing design. Upon hearing this proposal in more detail she responded, “Excellent. I am totally in agreement with you. I would love it.” She wanted more specifics on which actors will be involved, and stressed needing to be more specific about what resources will be needed.²⁶⁶ Beatriz Giri also likes the idea of working in an artistic environment. She explains, in this area they also feel greater social acceptance.²⁶⁷ Dora Barrancos responds, “The proposal is very good, it seems very good to have a specific policy.” She continues to explain that there are many cultural centers, so something more specific is better. She stresses that it ought to be a forum for society to get to know the travesti community. Barrancos stressed that good incentives for travesti organizations to become interested in and encourage travesti participation were, however, necessary. To do this, she stressed being in good contact with organizations working with this population, like the Secretary of Social Development.²⁶⁸ Likewise, Diana Maffia suggested that the travesti community will like any project trying to help them, especially those trying to help them express themselves. She drew a parallel between this policy suggestion and a group of local women who

²⁶⁶ Vicky Barreda, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁶⁷ Beatriz Giri, Personal Interview 2006.

²⁶⁸ Dora Barrancos, Personal Interview 2006.

performed skits to express challenges they confronted in life. Maffia explained that they found the experience very therapeutic, a testimony to the fact that the same would likely be true of the travestis that will participate in the Theatre Cooperative(s). Maffia again stressed the importance of involving the Secretaries of Health, Human Rights and Education and using them as support bases, something I have since incorporated into the my policy suggestion. A final recommendation by Maffia is to legitimate this project by having the theatre perform at schools, public festivals and meetings held by the Secretary of Human Rights. On the other hand, Maffia also shared some challenges to expect. One is finding incentives for travestis to get involved and convincing them it is worth their time to train for the job. Another is getting funding and publicizing the program. And finally, Maffia mentions that travestis often show up late or inconsistently.²⁶⁹ Malu Moreno said of the proposal, “It seems to be a good idea. The changes must be cultural and it is good to have a space where travestis can show their lives. The key in your project is to incorporate travestis into the project, the organization. The travestis will come if they see other travestis working in the institution.”²⁷⁰

Other Policy Options for the City Government to Reduce Sex Work and Increase Alternative Employment for Travestis: Analysis of Other Alternatives & Projected Outcomes

Other alternative policy solutions may also work. For the purpose of this investigation, I have devised a solution that I feel best fits the current situation, however the following suggestions are other alternatives that I feel could also serve the current Buenos Aires travesti predicament. Below I have listed several alternative solutions to the theatre cooperatives and the pros and cons of each.

²⁶⁹ Diana Maffia, Personal Interviews 2005 & 2006.

²⁷⁰ Malu Moreno, Personal Interviews 2006.

1. Let present trends continue undisturbed.
2. Make prostitution illegal.
3. Institute affirmative action or quotas in the work place.
4. Create a program to encourage the completion of high school and further vocational school attendance.
5. Pursue a joint anti-discrimination campaign on social awareness in the schools and neighborhood communities, combined with new efforts by the city government to enforce anti-discrimination laws.
6. Create alternative national identity cards for transgender citizens.

1. Let present trends continue undisturbed

Pros	Cons
- No Cost	- Does not increase alternative employment - Continues to add to increased risks in health (of travestis and society) - Continues to add to discontent of society, does not benefit community integration

Projected Outcome
No change in employment opportunities. Possible increase in health risks.

2. Make Prostitution Illegal

Pros	Cons
- Decreases prostitution - Decreases sex tourism - No Cost - Clarifies historical & legal ambiguity	- Creates black market - Possible political backlash - Increases police brutality - Further division between community and travesti prostitutes

Projected Outcome
Likely failure. A black market would be created, further polarizing society from travestis working as prostitutes. No, or little, increase in alternative forms of employment for travestis working as prostitutes.

3. Institute affirmative action or quotas in the work place.

Pros	Cons
- Effective in getting travestis jobs - Cost Free - Acknowledges minority group identity - Robust	- Politically challenging- would face social resistance by the public and employers -Would require complementary training programs

Projected Outcome
Possible success. Initially it would face political opposition, however may prove most robust in that it will produce substantial results over time. However, the social and political feasibility and opposition to this would likely be very high. It will also require little monetary cost.

4. Create a program to encourage the completion of high school and further vocational school attendance.

Pros	Cons
- Political acceptability - Should be inexpensive as would use already existing academic structure.	- Would not guarantee employment - Travestis may not be willing to participate without guarantee of job

-	Should enhance community integration
---	--------------------------------------

Projected Outcome
Unlikely success. Although training and education is an excellent tool, it does not assure the end result of employment for a controversial minority group.

5. Pursue a joint anti-discrimination campaign on social awareness in the schools and neighborhood communities, combined with new efforts by the city government to enforce anti-discrimination laws.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creates community awareness and increases community comfort (or decreases fear) of travestis - Opens doors to other discriminations being dissolved - Enforces anti-discrimination law - Publicizes issues - Starts at root of problem (with Youth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expensive (law) - Lawsuits could alienate community members - No direct revision for employment, therefore effectiveness in alternatives for employment not guaranteed - Politically challenging

Projected Outcome
Possible success. Creating a more comfortable environment towards acceptance and understanding of minority groups is a first step towards greater community unity and integration. Once this begins, doors will open to employment opportunities for those skilled travestis.

6. Creating alternative national identity cards for transgender citizens.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Costless - Should aid in housing dilemmas, work, legal and other social dilemmas - Politically feasible - Recognizes minority group identity (tipping point?) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Potentially ineffective - May have no effect on employment rates

Projected Outcome
Unlikely success. Although this has the potential to be a “tipping point” alternative, leading to a series of positive changes, the risk is too great that nothing would result at all, that discrimination would remain the same, and that unskilled travesti workers would remain unskilled and working as prostitutes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I find that a travesti specific job-training program is as excellent response to the problem of unemployment and subsequent prostitution among travestis. The program, run largely by local and international NGOs and advocacy groups, with the assistance of the city government, will train travestis to work within the designed theatre cooperatives and ultimately for local businesses. The Theatre Cooperative will provide

travestis with job training and new skills, will employ them in the theatre cooperatives in many different types of jobs, and will further provide them with a comfortable work environment free of discrimination. It will improve the relationship between the travesti community and Argentine society by enabling travestis to be identified with work other than prostitution, by increasing opportunities for travestis to interact with other members of the community, and by creating a new awareness of who travestis are and about the exceptional challenges they face in society. Finally, because it will be funded largely from outside government sources, there will be less opposition and more political acceptability. Other policy options, such as those listed above, all confront greater hindrances, such as too great of a monetary cost to the government, lack of political feasibility, lack of public acceptance, or lack of employers' consent, little guarantee of increasing employment, or too short of a lifespan. Thus, not only should the Theatre Cooperative prove successful in its initial goals of providing alternative sources of employment to travestis, but it also has the potential to be particularly effective in other respects, mainly in providing awareness and understanding about sexual minority groups and safe sex. This project might also set a precedent for other minority groups to follow, as a community building and profitable job development initiative.

I do recognize that I have made several assumptions, which if incorrect, could change the chosen alternative. I assume that travestis would be interested in this work. While subjects interviewed have suggested that the population would be quite receptive to this idea, a quantitative study would best support this chosen alternative. I also assume that those involved will earn enough money while training in their new jobs, lessening the possibility of a return to more profitable prostitution. Lastly, I assume that the support

from larger NGOs and advocacy organizations will prove forthcoming. If it does not, the program would no longer be feasible, as the government would be very unlikely to fund it entirely.

A limitation I faced in developing this policy proposal was the lack of data in existence, in Spanish or English, on the travesti population in Buenos Aires. In reality, it is “the lack of statistics or proper data on travestis in Buenos Aires [that] points to their marginality” (*The Herald*, 11/19/04). Again, while a more substantial quantitative study would best support this investigation, I believe the research I conducted on the streets and the data I collected through interviews with travestis, community members, government employees, NGOs and advocacy groups was substantial enough to make the deductions present in this study.

There is also a good chance that this initiative will face a fair amount of public disapproval, as other emerging minority groups fighting for rights and better treatment have in the past. However, I believe there is a market for this type of cooperative, as can be seen in the success of homosexual and transsexual characters and themes in the entertainment industry, in Europe, the United States and Argentina as well (Florence de La V). Should there be resistance, I assume that it would eventually subside, as travestis would be employed in sectors of society where acceptance is already remarkably high compared to most other sectors.

Conclusion

This study has chronicled the recent history of travestis in Buenos Aires, a largely neglected group of Argentinean citizens that confronts life-threatening poverty, widespread abuse, and dependency on prostitution. My exploratory research has provided a base of needed data on the experiences of travestis in Buenos Aires and efforts by the state and society to ameliorate the detrimental problems faced by this group. This paper has further offered up introductory methods to help the state and society efficiently and justly integrate travestis with the rest of the Buenos Aires community and establish for travestis a new precedent of employment outside of prostitution. Effective policies and initiatives to raise travestis' particularly poor living standards are necessary for the health of the Buenos Aires community and possible, even with the limited public and private resources available.

Historically, sexuality has been both regulated by governments and society in Buenos Aires and yet also left somewhat at a distance, as difficult issues like prostitution and gender identity challenge many citizens' most basic values and principles. Our observations of the travesti experience in Buenos Aires have made clear that regardless of particular moral prerogatives which question the legitimacy of travesti identity or condemn any resort to prostitution even under desperate circumstances, the need for direct and specific policies to improve the lives of travestis in Buenos Aires and provide them with alternative employment to prostitution proves apparent. Furthermore, it is job training and employment transition programs in particular that must spearhead efforts to change the situation of travestis in Buenos Aires, so that advances in health and education can follow. Health and most especially HIV/AIDS have become major drivers for the

public to invest in social programs to benefit travestis, as HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases prevalent in this population threaten the entire community. Likewise, long term results in the process of improving travesti living conditions and levels of opportunity will depend heavily on the success of raising the group's incredibly low standards of education. Yet neither of these essential conditions for travesti development can take root without first getting travestis off the streets, out of prostitution, and into some semblance of mainstream employment and participation in society.

Thus, taken from the considerations of academics, professionals, activists and travestis chronicled in this study, I have outlined in the final chapter of this paper a possible way forward. This way forward focuses on employment and social integration primarily, calls for government participation in the program, but definitively depends upon private funds from supportive NGOs and social organizations to establish the structure of my proposed theatre cooperative. Theatre and the arts need not be the only fields possible for developing alternative employment for travestis, and the model outlined in chapter five might apply to any number of different programs concentrating on other industries. But there are many very good reasons for focusing on theatre and the arts in developing employment opportunities for travestis, not least because the arts have traditionally served as a bridge between divergent groups in society, both in Buenos Aires and throughout the Western world. Theatre in particular also remains an accessible and effective conduit for conveying messages to the public about needed changes in society and the realities faced by abused minorities.

Another final element of this research and my conclusions that should be noted here is that this study offers only an introduction to the travesti population and its severe problems, while moving quickly forward to a policy application to help change the difficult conditions that travestis face. Not enough, indeed, barely any research quantitative or qualitative exists on travestis in Buenos Aires and Argentina. And it is my belief that further research will not follow without serious action now to make public the importance of this group from a health standpoint and the devastation this group faces from a human and civil rights standpoint. In a sense, we must find ways to organize community and government action to draw more attention to travestis before needed quantitative and qualitative surveys and investigations will actually happen in the future.

So I leave you with an incomplete work, which advises a focus on immediate job training and employment transition efforts for travestis in Buenos Aires, of whom 80 to 90 percent remain unwillingly trapped in the throes of prostitution. Government leadership and minimal private investment could quickly draw needed attention to this group, better organize and unify individuals and institutions already involved in solving travesti problems, and create a model in Buenos Aires to enhance possibilities for development both outside the city and elsewhere in Latin America.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Definitions

- **Travestí** (*Transvestite*): In Argentina, a transvestite is “a person identified as a man at birth, who later chooses to identify as a woman.” The person may have sex reassignment surgery, silicone prosthesis and hormone therapy. Transvestites feminize their dress, voice, and mannerisms. “The transvestite adopts a female names and lives full-time in the gender of her choice. Most activists consider ‘transvestites’ a gender in itself.”²⁷¹ Most of the Western world perceives the transvestite as “a person who dresses and acts in a style or manner traditionally associated with the opposite sex.”²⁷²
- **Transgender**: “Of, relating to, or designating a person whose identity does not conform unambiguously to conventional notions of male or female gender, but combines or moves between these.”²⁷³ Virginia Prince coined the term in the 1970s in the United States. This term is a broader term encompassing many sub-categories such as transsexual, transvestite, cross-dresser, drag queen, androgynous people etc.²⁷⁴
- **Transsexual**: “People who desire to have, or have achieved, a different physical sex from their original physical sex. The process of physical transition for transsexual people usually includes hormone replacement therapy and may also include sexual reassignment surgery (a.k.a. gender reassignment surgery).”²⁷⁵
- **Gender**: “refers to the ways in which roles, attitudes, values, and relationships regarding women and men are constructed by societies all over the world.”²⁷⁶
- **Cross-Dresser**: “A person who is cross-dressing is any person who, for any reason, wears the clothing of a gender other than that to which they were assigned at birth. Cross-dressers may have no desire or intention of adopting other behaviors or practices common to that gender, and particularly does (currently) not wish to undergo medical procedures to facilitate physical changes.”²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ ALITT 2001

²⁷² answers.com

²⁷³ Oxford English Dictionary, Draft Entry 2004

²⁷⁴ Wikipedia

²⁷⁵ Wikipedia

²⁷⁶ UN Development Fund for Women

²⁷⁷ Wikipedia

Appendix 2: Data Sources & Techniques

1. Observation: Non-participatory observation for this investigation includes visiting one red-light area, Rosedal Parks, where travestis in the situation of prostitution line the roads soliciting sex while cars pass them. I visited this park several times between 10pm to midnight and recorded my observations of both travesti and client/prospective client behavior from a bench where I sat. Non-participatory observation also includes watching the activities of the travestis in the situation of prostitution from the rooftop of my apartment where I could not be seen, in the evening hours, on Godoy Cruz (the red-light area before the travestis in the situation of prostitution were moved to the Rosedal Parks). Living on Godoy Cruz was also a type of daily observation as I passed many travestis in the situation of prostitution nightly and could hear them through my apartment windows when open.

2. Participatory Observation: Participatory observation includes attending meetings and workshops and an off-site excursion in Tigre offered by FBAS and ATTTA, as well as interaction with some travestis in the situation of prostitution on Godoy Cruz who worked during the day.

3. Semi-Structured Interviews: I interviewed 24 subjects one-on-one, five more than once. Subjects are travestis, are affiliated with organizations supporting travestis, or work with the government in a capacity to help this population. Subjects were first sent via E-mail an invitation to interview with me along with a written explanation of my thesis. The explanation was translated by a professional translator to ensure no miscommunication. I emailed those that agreed to an interview the questions I anticipated asking prior to our meeting. Subjects were asked permission to use a tape recorder, which was used in almost every interview. During the interview, I gave each subject a hardcopy of the questions so that they could answer the questions they were comfortable answering, while ignoring questions they did not want to answer. Therefore, while the questions were used as a guideline for the interview, the interviews were informal and while some subjects answered all of the questions, others answered only some and others took entirely their own paths and disclosed that which they found important to disclose.

4. Interview Instrument: Questionnaires

5. Acknowledgment: It is important to note that interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish. As I am not a native speaker I did record almost every interview with a tape recorder so that I could review each interview thoroughly. Every interview was transcribed. I transcribed several myself, while a professional translator transcribed the others. Therefore, the information, quotes and paraphrasing pulled from these interviews for this investigation comes from recorded material and is therefore accurate. On the other hand, it is also important to point out that this investigation has largely been based on fieldwork and has taken on an exploratory style that is different to the more classical theoretical based thesis. This investigation is composed of research based on previously existing and vital literature as well as personal interviews with travestis and other actors intimately involved in the community. It is important to point out that this project is also an *exploratory*²⁷⁸ study and in many ways a prelude to needed social research in the future. As an exploratory study, this project has the stated purpose of chronicling the recent history of the travesti population in Buenos Aires and its detrimental situation, and of devising immediate possibilities for ameliorating travestis' specific and severe problems through policy applications. In this sense, the methodology of this paper seeks to answer more of a "how" question than any specific set of "why" questions. I ask with this thesis, how to we improve the living conditions of travestis in Buenos Aires and most importantly move them out of unwanted work in prostitution.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Yin 1994.

²⁷⁹ Tellis 1997.

Appendix 3: Map Of Buenos Aires Neighbourhoods



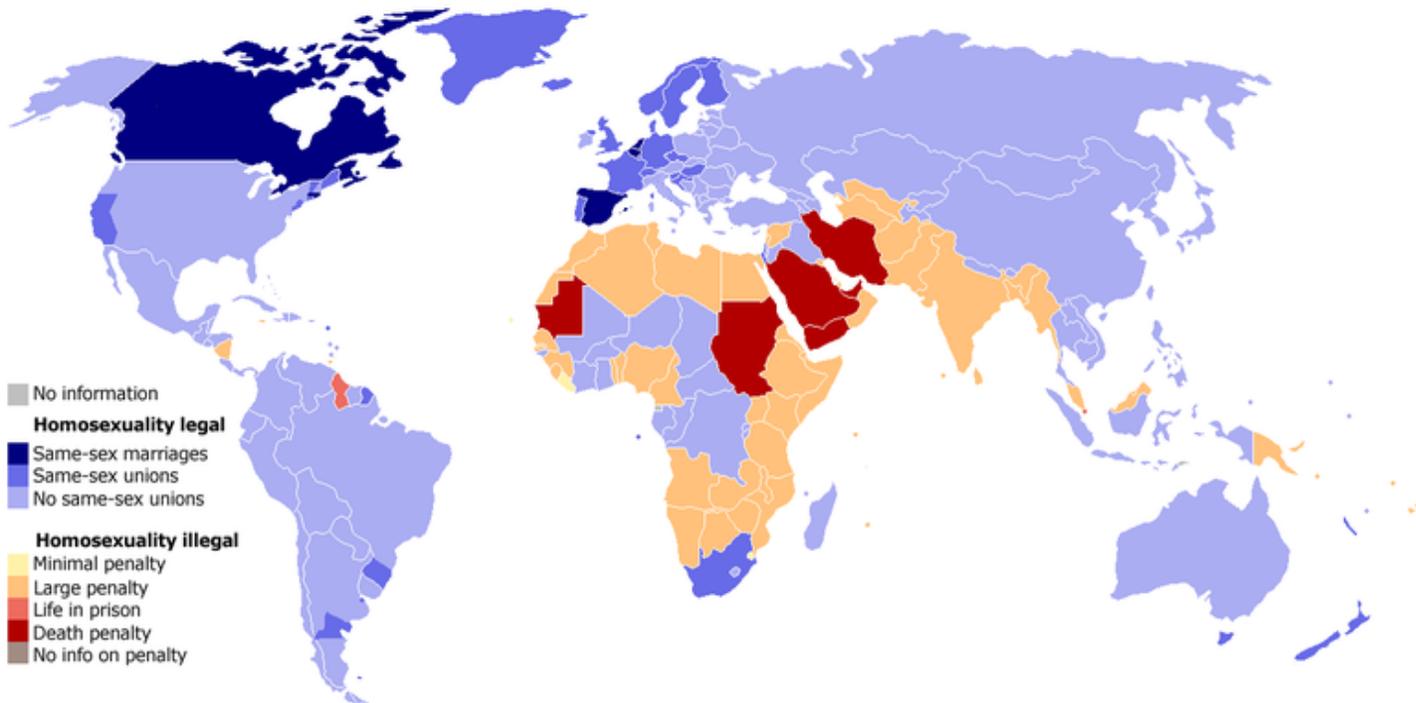
This is a map of the different neighborhoods in the Buenos Aires capital. Highlighted are the three neighborhoods in which the largest travesti populations reside and work.

Appendix 4: Charts & Tables

1. Country Comparison. Legality of: Same-Sex Civil Union, Same-Sex Marriage, Prostitution, and Homosexuality.

	<i>Argentina</i>	Latin America	<i>United States</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Other</i>
Same-Sex Civil Union, Domestic Partnership Rights Exist	Buenos Aires, Rio Negro (2001 or 2003)	Brazil (2000) -----	Vermont Connecticut California District of Columbia Hawaii Maine New Jersey		Croatia (2003) Czech Republic (2006) Denmark (<i>first government to recognize same-sex union, 1989</i>) Finland France (1999) Germany (2001) Iceland (1996) Luxembourg (2004) Norway (1993) Portugal (2001) Slovenia (2006) Sweden (1995) Greenland (1996) Hungary (1996) Finland (2002) Switzerland (2007) United Kingdom (2005)	Andorra (2005) Israel (1994) New Zealand (2005) Australian States: <i>New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory</i>
Same-Sex Marriage			Massachusetts (2004)	Canada (2005)	Netherlands (2001) Belgium (2003) Spain (2005)	South Africa (2006) Israel (recognized, not performed 2006)
Prostitution is Legal <i>(Variations on what is legal. I.e.: Street prostitution, brothels, pimping, use of public space. Most countries have regulations.)</i>	Argentina (However, individual provinces' Police Edicts criminalize it in all provinces of Argentina except Buenos Aires, Misiones & Entre Rios)	Brazil Costa Rica	Nevada Rhode Island	Canada	Netherlands Germany Switzerland Greece Sweden Denmark	Australia: New South Wales, Queensland, Capital Territory, Victoria New Zealand Turkey Bulgaria
Homosexuality is Criminalized/ Sodomy Laws <i>As of 2006, consensual homosexual acts between adults are illegal in about 80 out of the 192 countries of the world; in 42 of these, only male-male sex is outlawed.²⁸⁰</i>		Guyana	Anti-homosexual laws have been invalidated by the 2003 U.S. Supreme Court decision <i>Lawrence v. Texas</i> .		NONE	Punishable by Death: Afghanistan Mauritania Iran Nigeria Pakistan Saudi Arabia Sudan United Arab Emirates Yemen Punishable by Life in Prison: Bangladesh Bhutan Guyana India Maldives Nepal Singapore Uganda

²⁸⁰ [ILGA World Legal Survey](#) (Last updated: 31 July 2000, accessed 19 April 2006); updates from [Homosexuality laws of the world](#)



<i>Poverty in Argentina</i>		
Date of measurement	Extreme poverty	Under poverty line
May 2001	11.6%	35.9%
Oct 2001	13.6%	38.3%
May 2002	24.8%	53.0%
Oct 2002	27.5%	57.5%
May 2003	26.3%	54.7%
2nd sem 2003	20.5%	47.8%
1st sem 2004	17.0%	44.3%
2nd sem 2004	15.0%	40.2%
1st sem 2005	13.6%	38.5%

The table on the left shows statistics of [poverty](#) in [Argentina](#), in percent of the population. The first column shows the date of the measurement (note that the method and time changed in 2003; poverty is now measured each semester). **Extreme poverty** is here defined as not having enough money to eat properly. The **poverty line** is set higher: it is the minimum income needed for basic needs including food, clothing, shelter, and studies.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Wikipedia 2006.

Appendix 5: Argentina: Basic Background Information²⁸²

- 2006 Estimated Population: 39,921,833
- 2006 Estimated Life Expectancy: Women – 80.05 years, Men – 72.38 years
- 2001 Estimated HIV/AIDS: 0.7%
- 92% Roman Catholic (less than 20% practicing), 2% Protestant, 2% Jewish, 4% Other
- Literacy: 97.1%
- Race: 97% White, 3% Other (mestizo, Amerindian...)
- Unemployment: 11.1%
- Living Below the Poverty Line: 38.5%
- 23 Provinces:
 - Ciudad Autonoma de Buenos Aires (aka: Capital Federal)* (Federal District, declared autonomous in 1994 and gaining autonomous status in 1996).
 - Buenos Aires (Province)
 - Catamarca
 - Chaco
 - Chubut
 - Cordoba
 - Corrientes
 - Entre Rios
 - Formosa
 - Jujuy
 - La Pampa
 - La Rioja
 - Mendoza
 - Misiones
 - Meuquen
 - Rio Negro
 - Salta
 - San Juan
 - San Luis
 - Santa Cruz
 - Santa Fe
 - Santiago del Estero
 - Tierra del Fuego
 - Tucuman

(Ciudad Autonoma de Buenos Aires and Rio Negro passed legislation to allow for same-sex civil unions, the first of Latin American governments to do so).

²⁸² CIA World Factbook, 2006

Appendix 6: One Travesti's Story: Monica Leon

Monica Leon has been a feminine transgender person since January 3, 1993. She is originally from the capital of Salta. Leon was born a boy, and at the age of 4, she was sexually abused by her father's friend. Later, at the ages of 10 and 12 she was sexually abused again. By 15 years of age, Monica fell into the situation of prostitution. In Salta she was repeatedly imprisoned for her gender orientation and violated by provincial police for refusing to sleep with an officer. She eventually moved to the national capital, Buenos Aires, where she was also arrested and detained for 24 hours for dressing as a woman. The federal police physically and verbally abused her during this time. Leon was one of the first travestis to file a complaint against this abuse, explaining that she had seen too many trans people die as a result of not being able to defend themselves from the police out of fear.

On October 25, 1994 at 19 years of age Monica found out that she was HIV positive after being tested in Muniz Hospital. The hospital staff yelled out her test result in the waiting room, ignoring the fact that HIV/AIDS test results are confidential and that every patient is entitled discreet disclosure of results and counseling. Monica feels that she probably became infected with HIV as a result of the sexual abuse she experienced by the police in Salta.

Leon was a founding member of ATA in 1993, and a year later branched off with another travesti to form OTRA. In 1999 she left OTRA for political reasons and joined CHA. Her first job with CHA was to solicit the Ombudsman Office for the right to change one's name. In 2003 she moved into the Gondolin Hotel and founded the Gondolin Civil Association, an effort largely provoked after seeing the extreme levels of drug and alcohol abuse by this population and lack of preventative measures taken to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and other STDs.

On December 18th the Gondolin Hotel was surrounded by 60 police who robbed the travestis living there. Their justification for being there was that they were looking for a travesti who had robbed a client. The police stole from the travestis living there and shot Leon eight times in the legs. She decided if she stayed there for much longer she would probably not survive because she could not keep quiet and would not stop denouncing the police for abuses. She fled to Paris and is currently seeking political asylum there.

Appendix 7: Interview Questions

The following sets of questions are some of the questions used by the interviewer to guide semi-structured interviews with subjects. The first example is given in English and the rest are in Spanish. The questions are similar in all interviews, however do vary to adapt to the different backgrounds of different subjects.

Coordinación SIDA

Julio Talavera

1. What is Coordinación Sida's experience with the transvestite population?
How long has it been working with/for transvestites?
What other projects does it support involving travestis?
2. Do you feel that the medical world is adequately prepared to work with travestis?
3. What are the transvestite population's biggest problems regarding health? Do you feel they take preventative measures/are proactive in protecting their health? Why or why not?
4. Can you tell me about your experience with Grupo Tacones?
5. How do you perceive their educational, security, housing, family... situations?
6. What do you perceive to be the greatest challenges and obstacles transvestites face – in regards to survival and social acceptance?
7. What/who are the greatest contributing factors to such challenges/obstacles?
8. How much of the transvestite population do you think is aware of the services organizations offer them?
How do organizations reach/contact transvestites?
9. Which organizations/services in the city best help the transvestite population?
10. Do you think the transvestite population needs to better unite and organize to improve their situation?
What could they realistically do to improve their current health, employment, education and discrimination challenges?
11. Do you think the government should, or is able to, take a larger role in the difficult situation of transvestites?
12. What type of new policy could be implemented to better help transvestites in BsAs? What issues would it address?
13. How could multiple institutions (health, education, justice, social development) cooperate to improve the transvestite population's situation?
14. How can we help the public to feel more comfortable/open/less discriminatory and fearful of travestis?
15. Has the transvestite population changed over the past years/decade(s)? (In terms of practices- dress, prostitution, openness, self-awareness, activism etc. and public perception)
16. Do you feel that those in prostitution would prefer to get different employment if they could?
17. What are the pros & cons of staying in prostitution vs leaving prostitution for other employment? (ie: Is pay better in prostitution than in average job?)

Defensoría del Pueblo: Construcción Ciudadanía Travesti

Diana Maffia

1. ¿Qué necesita el público en general para sentirse más cómodo y no con tanto temor frente a las travestís?
2. ¿Piensa que la población travestí - en general - esta enterada de los servicios que su organización y otras en la ciudad de Buenos Aires brindan a travestís? ¿Cómo tratan las organizaciones o el gobierno de comunicarse o localizar a la población travestí?
3. ¿Cuáles organizaciones en la ciudad ofrecen el mejor servicio a la población travestí en Buenos Aires?
4. ¿Piensa que el gobierno debería tener o esta capacitado para representar un rol más protagónico en lo que refiere a ayuda de la población travestí?
5. ¿Debería implementarse alguna política nueva para mejorar la situación de la población travestí? ¿Qué temas deberían abordarse?
6. ¿Cómo podrían las instituciones cooperar en términos de salud, educación, justicia, desarrollo social para mejorar la situación de la población travestí?
7. ¿De acuerdo a qué normas el gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires protege a la población travestí? ¿Se respetan esas leyes?
8. ¿Cómo se pueden abordar cuestiones de abuso o inconsistencia legal?
9. ¿Qué se necesita para que la materia educación sexual sea obligatoria en las escuelas públicas de Buenos Aires?
10. ¿Qué parte del estado tendría la responsabilidad de velar por el bienestar de la población travestís con respecto al abuso, promoción su bienestar, educación del público en general con respecto a identidad de género y discriminación? ¿Existe alguna esperanza para que esto sea una realidad?
11. ¿Cuál es la relación entre esta población y la religión en general? ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís cree que practican alguna religión?

ATTTA- Lawyer
Angela Vanni

1. ¿Cuál es su experiencia con la población travesti? ¿Hace cuánto tiempo esta trabajando con la población travesti?
2. ¿Puede explicar la relación histórica entre las travestís de Buenos Aires y la ley/el estado?
 - a. Línea de tiempo de la ley: Edicto policiales, Código Contravencional
 - b. Ambigüedades, inconsistencias, abuso de la ley.
3. ¿De acuerdo a qué normas el gobierno de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires protege a la población travesti? ¿Se respetan esas leyes?
4. ¿Cómo se pueden abordar cuestiones de abuso o inconsistencia legal?
5. ¿Qué se necesita para que la materia educación sexual sea obligatoria en las escuelas públicas de Buenos Aires?
6. ¿Qué parte del estado tendría la responsabilidad de velar por el bienestar de la población travestís con respecto al abuso, promoción su bienestar, educación del público en general con respecto a identidad de género y discriminación? ¿Existe alguna esperanza para que esto sea una realidad?
7. ¿Cuáles son los mayores desafíos con respecto a las normas para la población travesti de Bs.As. ?
8. ¿En su opinión cual es la situación de la población travesti en referencia a salud, educación, seguridad, familia, vivienda?
9. ¿Cuáles cree son los desafíos y obstáculos que las travestís enfrentan en términos de supervivencia y aceptación social? ¿Qué o quiénes son los factores más importantes que contribuyan para dichos desafíos/obstáculos?
11. ¿Piensa que la población travesti (en general) esta enterado de los servicios para travestís en la ciudad de Buenos Aires? ¿Cómo tratan las organizaciones o el gobierno de comunicarse/localizar a los miembros de la población travesti?
12. ¿Cuáles organizaciones en la ciudad ofrecen el mejor servicio a la población travesti en Buenos Aires?
13. ¿Piensa que la población travesti debería unirse para mejorar su situación, o están haciendo todo lo pueden? ¿Qué podrían hacer para mejorar su situación en las temas de salud, empleo, educación y discriminación en términos realistas?
14. ¿Piensa que el gobierno debería tener o esta capacitado para representar un rol más protagónico en lo que refiere a ayuda de la población travesti?
15. ¿Debería implementarse alguna política nueva para mejorar la situación de la población travesti? ¿Qué temas deberían abordarse?
16. ¿Cómo podrían las instituciones cooperar en términos de salud, educación, justicia, desarrollo social para mejorar la situación de la población travesti?
17. ¿Qué necesita el público en general para sentirse más cómodo y no con tanto temor frente a las travestís?
18. ¿Cómo ha cambiado la población travesti en los últimos años en relación al vestido, su ocupación: la situación de prostitución, apertura, conciencia de si mismas, activismo y percepción pública o visibilidad?

Secretaría de Derechos Humanos

Ana Gonzalez

1. ¿Cuál es la experiencia de la Secretaría de Derechos Humanos con la población travesti? ¿Hace cuanto tiempo que la SDH esta trabajando con la población travesti? ¿Cuáles proyectos/programas apoya SDH que incluyen a las travestis?
2. ¿Piensa que el campo médico, la policia, las escuelas... estan preparado para trabajar con la población trans/travesti?
3. ¿En su opinión cuáles son los desafíos mayores en términos de la derechos humanos de las travestis?
 4. ¿Cómo fue su experiencia con el Grupo Tacones y Construcción de Ciudadania Travesti?
5. ¿Cuáles cree son los desafíos y obstáculos de las travestis en términos de supervivencia y aceptación social? ¿Qué o quiénes son los factores mas importantes que contribuyan para dichos desafíos/obstáculos?
6. ¿Piensa que la población travesti - en general - esta enterada de los servicios para travestis en la ciudad de Buenos Aires? ¿Cómo tratan las organizaciones o el gobierno de comunicarse/localizar a la población travesti?
7. ¿Cuáles organizaciones en la ciudad ofrecen el mejor servicio a la población travesti en Buenos Aires?
8. ¿Piensa que la población travesti tiene que unirse más para mejorar su situación, o esta haciendo todo lo pueden? Que podrían hacer para mejorar su situación en las temas de salud, empleo, educación y discriminación en términos realistas?
9. ¿Piensa que el gobierno debería tener un rol más protagónico en lo que refiere a ayuda de la población travesti? ¿Qué más podría hacer el gobierno para ayudarlas en términos de salud, educación, desarrollo social, derechos humanos?
10. ¿Debería implementarse alguna política nueva para mejorar la situación de la población travesti? ¿Qué temas debería abordar? ¿Las travestis solo tiene que ser insertadas en la sociedad mediante políticas que afecten a todos los ciudadanos o debería haber políticas que afecten solo a esta población?
11. ¿En qué clases de empleos (y educación) en general la población travesti se interesa?
12. ¿Cómo podrían las instituciones cooperar en términos de salud, educación, justicia, desarrollo social para mejorar la situación de la población travesti?
13. ¿Qué necesita el público en general para sentirse más cómodo y no con tanto temor frente a las travestis? ¿La sociedad siente temor o incomodidad con el transvestismo o la prostitución?
14. ¿Cómo ha cambiado la población travesti en los últimos años en relación al vestido, su ocupación: la situación de prostitución, apertura, conciencia de si mismas, activismo y percepción pública o visibilidad?
15. ¿Piensa que las travestis en situación de prostitución se dedicarían a otra cosa si pudieran? ¿Qué porcentaje de travestis estarían dispuestas a sacrificar el dinero que ganan en prostitución para desarrollar otro tipo de trabajo en un horario más regular?
16. ¿Cuáles pactos internacionales se violan y de qué manera? ¿Qué recomendaría que se modifique en los códigos contravencionales y leyes nacionales?
17. INCLUSIÓN/INTEGRACIÓN: ¿Qué prejuicios hay hoy en sociedad para no incluir a la población travesti en la comunidad? ¿Con qué elementos de disuasión cuenta hoy la población travesti para sentirse

más incluida e integrada en la sociedad? ¿Qué puede hacer la sociedad para integrar más a esta población? ¿Qué pueden hacer las mismas travestis al respecto?

18. CIUDADANÍA: ¿Las travestis se sienten tratada cómo ciudadanas? ¿Sienten que tienen acceso a los mismo derechos? ¿Comprender el concepto de ciudadanía y de derechos? ¿Reconocen los ciudadanos tanto como las figuras estatales que las travestis son ciudadanas y lo hacen en público y en privado?

Estudios Queer
Flavio Rapisardi

1. ¿Cuál es su experiencia y la experiencia de Estudios Queer con la población travesti? ¿Hace cuanto tiempo E.Q. esta trabajando con la población travesti?
2. ¿Cuáles proyectos/programas apoya E.Q. que incluyen las travestis?
3. ¿Cuáles son las metas de E.Q.?
4. ¿Conoce Grupo Tacones del Hospital Muniz y Construcción Ciudadanía Travesti de la Defensoría del Pueblo? ¿Si los conoce, cuál es su opinión al respecto?
5. ¿En su opinión cuáles son los mayores desafíos en términos de salud de las travestis? ¿Piensa que la mayoría de las travestis se cuidan suficiente? ¿Porqué o porqué no?
6. ¿En su opinión cuál es la situación de la población travesti con respecto a educación, seguridad, familia, vivienda, situación con la ley...?
7. ¿Cuáles cree son los desafíos y obstáculos de las travestis en términos de supervivencia y aceptación social? ¿Qué o quiénes son los factores mas importantes que contribuyan para dichos desafíos/obstáculos?
8. Piensa que la población travesti -en general- esta enterado de los servicios para travestis en la ciudad de Buenos Aires? ¿Cómo tratan las organizaciones o el gobierno de comunicarse con o localizar a la población travesti?
9. ¿Cuáles organizaciones en la ciudad son los mejores para ayudar la población travesti en Buenos Aires?
10. ¿Piensa que la población travesti tiene que unirse más para mejorar su situación, o esta haciendo todo lo pueden? Que podrían hacer para mejorar su situación en las temas de salud, empleo, educación y discriminación en términos realistas?
11. ¿Piensa que el gobierno debería tener un rol más protagónico en lo que refiere a ayuda de la población travesti? ¿Qué más podría hacer el gobierno para ayudarlas en términos de salud, educación, desarrollo social, derechos humanos?
12. ¿Debería implementarse alguna política nueva para mejorar la situación de la población travesti? ¿Qué temas debería abordar?
13. ¿Cómo podrían las instituciones cooperar en términos de salud, educación, justicia, desarrollo social para mejorar la situación de la población travesti?
14. ¿Qué necesita el público en general para sentirse más cómodo y no con tanto temor frente a las travestis? ¿La sociedad siente temor o incomodidad con el transvestismo o la prostitución?
15. ¿Cómo ha cambiado la población travesti en los últimos años en relación al vestido, su ocupación: la situación de prostitución, apertura, conciencia de si mismas, activismo y percepción pública o visibilidad?
16. ¿Qué piensa del Código Contravencional/ de Convivencia?

17. ¿Cuáles pactos internacionales se violan y de qué manera? ¿Qué recomendaría que se modifique en los códigos contravencionales y leyes nacionales?

18. ¿Cuáles son las ventajas/desventajas de permanecer en la prostitución o abandonarla por otro empleo (el salario es más alto en prostitución que en otro trabajo)? ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís estarían dispuestas a sacrificar el dinero que ganan en prostitución para desarrollar otro tipo de trabajo en un horario más regular?

19. ¿En qué clases de empleos (y educación) en general la población travestí se interesa?

20. ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís, cree, preferirían mezclarse entre la sociedad como mujer, y qué porcentaje preferiría destacarse como travestí?

21. CIUDADANÍA: ¿Las travestís se sienten tratada cómo ciudadanas? ¿Sienten que tienen acceso a los mismo derechos? ¿Comprender el concepto de ciudadanía y de derechos? ¿Reconocen los ciudadanos tanto como las figuras estatales que las travestís son ciudadanas y lo hacen en público y en privado?

22. INCLUSIÓN/INTEGRACIÓN: ¿Qué prejuicios hay hoy en sociedad para no incluir a la población travestí en la comunidad? ¿Con qué elementos de disuasión cuenta hoy la población travestí para sentirse más incluida e integrada en la sociedad? ¿Qué puede hacer la sociedad para integrar más a esta población? ¿Qué pueden hacer las mismas travestis al respecto?

Preguntas de Seguimiento

Post-Interview Follow-Up Questions

❖ ¿Cuándo una travestís siente que ha sido maltratada por un doctor o por una persona del servicio médico? ¿Cómo dan curso a sus quejas?

❖ ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís quisieran operar su zona genital? (¿se consideran más transexuales que travestís?)

❖ ¿La población travestí solo quiere cambiar su nombre en el documento de identidad o también cambiar su sexo? ¿En el caso de desear cambiar su sexo ellas quisieran ser consideradas como mujeres o travestís?

❖ ¿Qué estudios se han realizados que muestran casos de muertes de travestís? ¿Qué período cubren y cómo se desarrollaron?

❖ ¿En qué clases de empleos (y educación) en general la población travestí se interesa?

❖ ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís viven con VIH/SIDA?

❖ ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís viven con otras enfermedades de transmisión sexual que no sea VIH/SIDA?

❖ ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís estarían dispuestas a sacrificar el dinero que ganan en prostitución para desarrollar otro tipo de trabajo en un horario más regular?

❖ ¿Qué porcentaje de travestís, cree, preferirían mezclarse entre la sociedad como mujer, y qué porcentaje preferiría destacarse como travestí?

❖ ¿Me podría dar alguna información para contactar a Florencia de la V., Alejandra Sardá y Marcelo Ferrera?

❖ ¿Las travestís solo tiene que ser insertadas en la sociedad mediante políticas que afecten a todos los ciudadanos o debería haber políticas que afecten solo a esta población?

- ❖ Capacitación de profesionales que trabajan con travestís: ¿Cada cuánto se realizan? ¿A cargo de quién? ¿Qué organizaciones/servicios se involucran/asisten? ¿Cuánta gente participa? ¿Puedo ver los materiales que usan?
- ❖ ¿Hay encuestas, cuestionarios, biografías cortas o experiencias que pueda leer sobre la población) además de “La Gesta del Nombre Propio”?
- ❖ ¿Cuánto ganan las travestís en situación de prostitución en una noche? ¿En una semana?
- ❖ ¿Quiénes son sus clientes? ¿Son casados, solteros, heterosexuales, homosexuales, de qué edad?
- ❖ ¿Hay clientes que no quieren usar preservativos y que no son conscientes de los riesgos que correr?
- ❖ ¿Cuáles pactos internacionales se violan y de qué manera? ¿Qué recomendaría que se modifique en los códigos contravencionales y leyes nacionales
- ❖ ¿La sociedad siente temor o incomodidad con el transvestismo o la prostitución?
- ❖ INCLUSIÓN/INTEGRACIÓN: ¿Qué prejuicios hay hoy en sociedad para no incluir a la población travestí en la comunidad? ¿Con qué elementos de disuasión cuenta hoy la población travestí para sentirse más incluida e integrada en la sociedad? ¿Qué puede hacer la sociedad para integrar más a esta población? ¿Qué pueden hacer las mismas travesties al respecto?
- ❖ CIUDADANÍA: ¿Las travestís se sienten tratada cómo ciudadanas? ¿Sienten que tienen acceso a los mismo derechos? ¿Comprender el concepto de ciudadanía y de derechos? ¿Reconocen los ciudadanos tanto como las figuras estatales que las travestís son ciudadanas y lo hacen en público y en privado?

Appendix 8: GLBTI – Related Organizations

The following organizations and individuals are those I came across through research and other people. I contacted each of them, some many times, asking for informal interviews. Those mentioned in my paper are those that responded. The others did not, however, I include their contact information for future research.. Subjects interviewed for this paper are underlined below.

ALITT

(Asoc. De Lucha por la Integración Travesti-Transexual)

Lohana Berkins: alittorg@yahoo.com.ar, alitt@arnet.com.ar, alittorg@hotmail.com,
lohanaberkins@yahoo.com.ar, lohanaberkins@hotmail.com

4302.7098, 15.5813.1794, 4361.7993

Grupo Tacones, Muniz Hospital

(HIV prevention support group at Muniz Hospital, supported by BsAs city government and Health Secretary, German NGO finances it)

Victoria Barreda, victoriabarreda@yahoo.com

4383.7103, 15.4915.4633

Futuro Transgenerico

Marlene Wayar: marlenewayar@yahoo.com.ar

6310.7430, 4807.7626

Asociación Civil Gondolin

Luis de Gracia: luisdg@2vias.com.ar, gondolin@mail.com, Aaroz 924

CHA (Comunidad Homosexual Argentina)

Martin Engelman (Mario Pecheny's contact)

15.4974.3035 www.cha.org.ar

informacion@cha.org.ar, denuncias@cha.org.ar

SIGLA (Sociedad de Integración Gay-Lésbica Argentina)

Rafael Freda (President)

sigla@sigla.org.ar, www.sigla.org.ar

4922.3351, 4362.8261

ATTTA (Asociación de Travestis, Transexuales y Transgeneros Argentinas)

Julia Lagos (Coordinator of Asuntos Juridicos)

www.attta.org info@attta.org, attta_argentina@yahoo.com.ar

Marcela Romero (President), (Samantha-Colombia)

Corrientes 2743 4-11, 4759.7138, 4545.7487

Angela Vanni (lawyer)

CONADISE (Coordinación Nacional por la Diversidad Sexual)

Av. Rivadavia 3412, 4867.2752

Otras Ovejas

Ministerios Multiculturales con Minorías Sexuales

Lavalle 376, 2° piso "D" (1047) - Ciudad Aut. de Bs.As.

Tel.: 43 14 59 89

thanks@thanks.wamani.apc.org, <http://www.othersheep.org>

LIDEMS

Liga de Defensa de las Minorías Sexuales

Tel.: 43 13 08 46

lidems@arnet.com.ar

AGAMOS (Asoc. Gay Arg. Contra la Marginación y la Opresion Social)
agamos@hotmail.com

Consejo de los Derechos de Ninas, Ninos y Adolescentes
Maria Elena Naddeo (President) (Diana Maffia's rec)

Ministerio de Salud: Dolores Fenoy dfenoy@msal.gov.ar
Carlos Pellegrini 313, 9 piso, 4323.9029.9053
9 de Julio 1925, SIDA: 0800.3333.444, www.msal.gov.ar
consultas@msal.gov.ar , prog-nacional-sida@msal.gov.ar

Beatriz Giri, giriba_ar@yahoo.com, Researching sex-work for the Ministry of Health and AMMAR

Ministerio de Educacion
www.me.gov.ar
4129.1000, Pizzurno 935

Ministerio de Desarrollo Social
www.desarrollosocial.gov.ar
9 de Julio 1925 piso 13, 0800.222.3294

Ministerio de Justicia y Derechos Humanos
www.jus.gov.ar

Lisandro Orlov (Pastor working with Muniz Hospital)

GTZ
Carolina Grosse: carolinagrosse@ciudad.com.ar
Gtz-argentina@gtz.org.ar Santa Fe 1461 4815.1420
Dr. Peter Weis: saludgtz@datamarkets.com.ar

Alba (travesti employee): alba_rueda5000@yahoo.com.ar , 155 43 62 66

IGLHRC (International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission) New York
iglhrc@iglhrc.org , www.iglhrc.org

APID (Asociación por la Igualdad de los Derechos)
Daniela Castro: danielascastro2004@yahoo.com.ar

UBA: Area Queer
Flavio Rapisardi
4432.1678 , areaqueer@yahoo.com.ar
areaqueer@lpp-buenosaires.net French 2673, 4805.5042/9737

UBA: Instituto Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Genero
Dora Barrancos: dora1508@aol.com

Malu Moreno: malu@icatel.net
Diana Maffia's assistant when Maffia was with the Ombudsman Office. Student.

CASDC (Centro de Acción en SIDA y Derechos Civiles)
Fabian Mansilla (President) censida@yahoo.com.ar

Josefina Fernandez : "Cuerpos Desobedientes"
josefinafer@arnet.com.ar, 4300.9773

HUESPED

Mariana Vasquez: marianav@huesped.org.ar

Rita Strauss: rstrauss@fibertel.com.ar, ritastrauss@huesped.org.ar

4981.1828, 4981.777, 15.4997.4858, www.huesped.org.ar

Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA

Alejandro Freyre (Mario Pecheny's rec) alexfreyre@yahoo.com.ar

Works with SIDA and Travestis wanting to leave prostitution (Inez, Anita)

15.5704.5895, buenosaires_sida@yahoo.com.ar, www.fbas.org.ar

Mauro Garcia Guido (mgarciaguido@psi.uba.ar, 15.5488.0088)

Luis, Natalia (15.4180.7477, 4803.7460)

Coordinación SIDA

Claudio Bloch

Julio Talavera (Alex Freyre's rec), 15.5320.8081

Secretaría de Salud

Carlos Pellegrini 313, 9º piso (C1009ABG)

4323-9029 / 9053

Mauro Cabral (Mario Pecheny's rec): mauro_cabral@hotmail.com

Sexual Ambiguity and legal conflicts with identity cards- Cordoba

Mabel Belucci: 4806 4010(rec by Jessie Koehs, Pablo Gutierrez- Gay Villa- Villa Homosexual?)

La Defensoría del Pueblo de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (Ombudsman's Office): (Construcción de Ciudadanía Travesti: Assist in legal matters, workshop on civil rights, passed law allowing students to be recognized by chosen name, established hairdressing school)

Diana Maffia: dianah@speedy.com.ar 4383.4523, 4383.4529

PAHO (Pan American Health Organization)

www.paho.org, Dr. José Antonio Pagés

PAHO/WHO Representative

Oficina Sanitaria Panamericana

Marcelo T. de Alvear 684, 4o. piso

1058 Buenos Aires, Argentina 4312-5301 al 5304

Angela Vanni agvanni@ciudad.com.ar 4383.8445

Laywer working with ATTTA for over a decade now.

CELS (Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales)

cels@cels.org.ar, 4334.4220

Hospitals:

Hospital F. Muñiz (FBAS, Grupo Tacones)

Uspallata 2272,

ex sala 29,

1º piso (C1282AEN)

4305-0954

Fernandez (Huesped)

Ramos Mejia (FBAS)

Appendix 9: Photos ATTTA's Trans Conference in Tigre



The top left photo shows Alejandro (Alex) Freyre of FBAS explaining his work with Alba (GTZ) under the GLBTTI flag.

The top right photo is of a travesti conference participant and organizer (ATTTA), myself, my classmate Alicia and myself.

The center left and right photos show the conference as it begins and we take our seats.

The bottom left photo is of Angela Vanni (lawyer), Marcela Romero (ATTTA President), and another ATTTA leader. They are opening the conference with introductions.

The bottom right photo depicts Alejandro Freyre leading his workshop on HIV/AIDS, Protection and Prevention.

Fundacion Buenos Aires SIDA



The top left photo is Anita, a volunteer with Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (FBAS). She is explaining the Foundation's Hormone Treatment Therapy (they offer psychological and medical guidance for travestis taking hormones) and FBAS' Hair Salon Training Program. The bottom left photo shows the run down hotel in which FBAS rents a small room as its office. Their window is the left one. The bottom right photo is of the Buenos Aires police.

Travestis in the Situation of Prostitution Soliciting Sex in the Rosedal Parks of Palermo



World AIDS Day 2006



The Buenos Aires Government, Tulipan (a condom distribution company) & a Buenos Aires radio station sponsor putting a giant pink condom on the city's 67-meter obelisk. The obelisk, one of Argentina's most famous monuments, is centered on one of Buenos Aires' busiest streets (also the largest avenue in the world) and is taller than the Statue of Liberty.

Appendix 10: Laws, Codes & Pacts

Police Edicts

(1946-1998): Main Edicts Affecting Travestis

- Escandalo que rezaba: Art. 2-F: Fines those who appear in public view or public places dressed or disguised in the opposite sex's clothing with 600-2100 pesos or an arrest of 6-21 days. (1949).
- Article 2-H: Fines those who publicly incite or offer a carnal act.

Codigo de Convivencia Urbana (Code of Urban Coexistence) / Codigo Contravencional (Code of Contraventions):

The Code of Contraventions was included in the Buenos Aires 1996 Constitution, with the purpose of replacing Police Edicts. It was implemented in March, 1998.

The Code of Contraventions “liberated all sex workers from police blackmailing, prohibited harassment to minors, requested that people who are intoxicated in the street be taken to hospitals instead of police stations, etc.” Many activists worked together to get this approved, working under the title “Neighbors for Coexistence.”²⁸³

Book II, Title I: Integral Protection of the People

Chapter IV: Personal Rights

Article 65: Discrimination. One who discriminates against another person based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ideologies, opinion, nationality, physical characteristics, psychophysical, social, economic conditions or whatever circumstances implying exclusion, restriction or impairment, is sanctioned with two (2) to ten (10) days of public service work or to a four hundred (\$400) to two thousand (\$2000) peso fine.

Book II, Title III: Protection of the Use of Public or Private Space

Chapter II: Use of Public and Private Space

Article 81: Offer and demand of sex in public spaces. One who offers or demands, in an ostensible form, services of a sexual character in public spaces not authorized or outside of the conditions that the activity were authorized, is sanctioned to one (1) to five (5) days of public service work or fined two hundred (\$200) to four hundred (\$400) pesos. In no case is the contravention relevant based on appearance, dress, or behaviors. In the contraventions referred to in the previous paragraphs, proceedings may only be conducted under the decision of a representative of the Fiscal Public Ministry.

Book II, Title V: Temporary Provisions

Temporary Clause: “Does not permit the offer and demand of ostensible services of a sexual character in public localities, before housing, educational establishments or places of worship or in their adjacency. In no case is the contravention relevant based on appearance, clothing or behaviors. ‘Adjacency’ is understood as a distance less than two hundred (200) meters from localities previously described. The contraventions referred to in the preceding paragraph. In the contraventions referred to in the previous paragraphs, proceedings may only be conducted under the decision of a representative of the Fiscal Public Ministry.”

Buenos Aires Constitution (1996)

Article 11: “Recognizes the right to be different.” (“Todas las personas tienen idéntica dignidad y son iguales ante la ley. Título Primero, Derecho, Garantías y Políticas Especiales, Constitución de la Ciudad de

²⁸³ ILGA

Buenos Aires, 1996.”) Including non-discrimination based on sexual orientation has been put on the table, but has yet to become incorporated.

Articles 11, 12, 13: Condemns discrimination and guarantees the right to identity and liberty.

Article 17: “The city develops social policies coordinated to overcome conditions of poverty and exclusion through budgetary resources, technical and human” and “assists people with basic unsatisfied needs.”

Article 37: Right to sexuality

Articles 38-9: The city has a responsibility to protect, rather than prosecute, victims of sexual exploitation. It has the responsibility to offer such victims help to leave such exploitation.

Civil Union: Buenos Aires Capital Federal sanctioned the law 1004 legalizing civil unions 12/12/02, published in the Official Bulletin 1/23/03, and put into effect on 7/21/03. This law was originally presented by CHA.

Domestic Violence Law

2001: Includes same-sex partners

National Constitution

Section 5

Each province shall enact its own constitution under the republican, representative system, in accordance with the principles, declarations, and guarantees of the National Constitution, ensuring its administration of justice, municipal regime, and elementary education. Under these conditions, the Federal Government shall guarantee each province the full exercise of its institutions.

Section 5

Discrimination Based on Sex, Race, Religion, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution and federal law guarantee equality for all citizens. The 1988 Antidiscrimination Law establishes a series of penalties from 1 month to 3 years' imprisonment for anyone who arbitrarily restricts, obstructs, or restrains a person based on "race, religion, nationality, ideology, political opinion, sex, economic position, social class, or physical characteristics." There is no evidence of any systematic effort by government or private groups to abridge these rights.

Section 19

The private actions of men which in no way offend public order or morality, nor injure a third party, are only reserved to God and are exempted from the authority of judges. No inhabitant of the Nation shall be obliged to perform what the law does not demand nor deprived of what it does not prohibit.

Article 42

The right to health services as a specific guarantee.

Section 75: 22

To approve or reject treaties concluded with other nations and international organizations, and concordats with the Holy See. Treaties and concordats have a higher hierarchy than laws.

The American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the American Convention on Human Rights; the International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Pact on Civil and Political Rights and its empowering Protocol; the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide; the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination; the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Woman; the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatments or

Punishments; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; in the full force of their provisions, they have constitutional hierarchy, do not repeal any section of the First Part of this Constitution and are to be understood as complementing the rights and guarantees recognized herein. They shall only be denounced, in such event, by the National Executive Power after the approval of two-thirds of all the members of each House.

In order to attain constitutional hierarchy, the other treaties and conventions on human rights shall require the vote of two-thirds of all the members of each House, after their approval by Congress.

National Penal Code

Article 91: Three to ten years in prison for damaging or removing sexual reproductive organs. This article makes it illegal for a doctor to perform sex change surgery on an individual without legal permission. (Se impondrá reclusión o prisión de tres a diez años, si la lesión produjere una enfermedad mental o corporal, cierta o probablemente incurable, la inutilidad permanente para el trabajo, la pérdida de un sentido, de un órgano, de un miembro, del uso de un órgano o miembro, de la palabra o de la capacidad de engendrar o concebir.)

International Pacts – Agreements

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 3.

Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 9.

No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 21.

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.

Article 23.

1. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.

Article 25.

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

America Convention of Human Rights (San Jose, Costa Rica, 11/22/69)

Article 3. Right to Juridical Personality

Every person has the right to recognition as a person before the law.

Article 4. Right to Life

1. Every person has the right to have his life respected. This right shall be protected by law and, in general, from the moment of conception. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

Article 7. Right to Personal Liberty

1. Every person has the right to personal liberty and security.
2. No one shall be deprived of his physical liberty except for the reasons and under the conditions established beforehand by the constitution of the State Party concerned or by a law established pursuant thereto.
3. No one shall be subject to arbitrary arrest or imprisonment.
4. Anyone who is detained shall be informed of the reasons for his detention and shall be promptly notified of the charge or charges against him.
5. Any person detained shall be brought promptly before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power and shall be entitled to trial within a reasonable time or to be released without prejudice to the continuation of the proceedings. His release may be subject to guarantees to assure his appearance for trial.

Article 11. Right to Privacy

1. Everyone has the right to have his honor respected and his dignity recognized.
2. No one may be the object of arbitrary or abusive interference with his private life, his family, his home, or his correspondence, or of unlawful attacks on his honor or reputation.
3. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 24. Right to Equal Protection

All persons are equal before the law. Consequently, they are entitled, without discrimination, to equal protection of the law.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

Article 6

1. Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.

Article 7

No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.

Article 9

1. Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest or detention. No one shall be deprived of his liberty except on such grounds and in accordance with such procedure as are established by law.
2. Anyone who is arrested shall be informed, at the time of arrest, of the reasons for his arrest and shall be promptly informed of any charges against him.

Article 17

1. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation.
2. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 26

All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this respect, the law shall prohibit any discrimination and guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Article 1

1. All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

Article 10

The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that:

3. Special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. Children and young persons should be protected from economic and social exploitation. Their employment in work harmful to their morals or health or dangerous to life or likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law. States should also set age limits below which the paid employment of child labour should be prohibited and punishable by law.

Article 11

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international co-operation, the measures, including specific programs, which are needed:

Article 12

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for:

(c) The prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases;

(d) The creation of conditions which would assure to all medical service and medical attention in the event of sickness.

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Interviews

Alba (*2 Interviews*)

- GTZ employee. University Student. Travesti.

Dora Barrancos

- University of Buenos Aires Professor. Former Legislature.

Vicky Barreda

- Grupo Tacones (High Heels Group), Director. AIDS Coordination for the Ministry of Health, Former Director.

Martin Engelman (*2 Interviews*)

- Comunidad Homosexual Argentina (Argentina's Homosexual Community). PhD student.

Dolores Fenoy

- Ministry of Health, Employee.

Josefina Fernandez

- Author of “Cuerpos Desobedientes: Travestismo e Identidad de Genero/Disobedient Bodies: Transvestism and Gender Identity” (2004). Co-compiler of “La Gesta del Nombre Propio” (2006). University of Buenos Aires’ Queer Studies Area, Member. Aji de Pollo (feminist group), Member. Degrees in Anthropology and Cultural Sociology.

Alejandro Freyre (*2 Interviews*)

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA (Buenos Aires AIDS Foundation), President.

Anita (*2 Interviews*)

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA, Volunteer. Travesti.

Luis

- Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA, Workshop Teacher for Travestis in FBAS’ Hair Salon Program.

Beatriz Giri

- Feminist doing an investigation on sex workers in Buenos Aires for the Ministry of Health and AMMAR.

Ana Gonzalez

- Secretary of Human Rights, Employee.

Carolina Grosse

- GTZ, Employee & Primary Liaison to Grupo Tacones (Victoria Barreda), which GTZ sponsored.

Monica Leon (*Written Interviews. Currently Resides in Paris.*)

- Asociación Civil Gondolin (Gondolin Civil Association), President.

Diana Maffia (*3 Interviews*)

- Defensoria del Pueblo (Buenos Aires Ombudsman)- Director of Human Rights and Gender Equality (1998-2003). “Sexualidades Migrantes: Genero y Transgenero / Migrant Sexualities: Gender and Transgender,” Compiler (2003). University of Buenos Aires, Philosophy Professor. Investigator for the Interdisciplinary Institute of Gender Studies in the University of Buenos Aires. *Feminist Magazine*, Editorial staff. Hannah Arendt Institute, Current Director. PhD in Philosophy.

Malu Moreno

- Buenos Aires Ombudsman Office, Assistant to Diana Maffia. PhD Student.

Flavio Rapisardi

- University of Buenos Aires, Professor & Queer Studies Area Coordinator.

Marcela Romero

- Asociación Travestis Transexuales Transgeneros Argentinas (ATTTA), Director.

Samantha

- ATTTA, Member. Colombian Travesti.

Julio Talavera

- Coordinación SIDA (AIDS Coordination) with the Ministry of Health, Director.

Angela Vanni (*Met at the Trans Conference. Corresponded via email*).

- Lawyer who has worked with ATTTA since its inception.

Paula (*Name changed to protect identity.*)

- Travesti in the situation of prostitution in Recoleta.

Rita Strauss

- Fundación Huesped, Employee.

Mario Pecheny

- Universidad de Buenos Aires, Professor.

Workshops**Trans Conference**

- Full day conference for trans people. Organized by ATTTA. Activities included educational workshops on health, discrimination, civil and legal rights, as well as music and food.
- I spoke with representatives of different groups here: Valeria, a travesti working with FBAS. Alba, a GTZ employee. Alejandro Freyre, FBAS President.

“La Gesta del Nombre Propio” Book Opening

- I went to an event held in honor of the publication of Josefina Fernandez & Lohana Berkin’s book. Speakers included several of Lohana Berkins and Diana Maffia, among others. Anita, with FBAS, accompanied me.

Fundación Buenos Aires SIDA: Travesti Workshop

- I observed an open workshop led by President of FBAS, Alejandro Freyre. Notices are posted around the neighborhood, promoting these informative meetings and any travesti can drop in. There they discuss a range of topics ranging from health to discrimination. Travestis can also pay one pesos (or \$0.30

USD) in exchange for 20 condoms and lubricant, often an incentive to get them to workshops.

FBAS Meeting with Government Officials

- President of FBAS, Alejandro Freyre, invited me to join him when he met with 3 government employees to discuss the travesti population. Freyre discussed health and discrimination challenges the population faces, made a complaint against a representative with the Ministry of Health, requested updated promotional sex education materials that incorporate a wider spectrum of sexual identities and genders, and discussed future plans and aspirations of FBAS. Upon leaving the meeting he mentioned that he's met with the same men many times, and while they are always interested and say they will follow up with Freyre's requests, they rarely do. They did, however, help Freyre finally accomplish his project of dropping a condom down the city's obliesk during World AIDS Day.