

A Search for Man's Meaning:
Examining Manhood from the Margins of Gender and Orientation

by

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ABSTRACT

While numerous studies have examined the nature of masculinity, scholars seldom seek to determine the meaning of manhood or to explore which types of individuals are culturally permitted to call themselves men. One scholarly approach suggests that the meaning of a cultural category can best be illuminated through examining marginalized examples within that category. Based on this assumption, this project illuminates cultural understandings of manhood in the United States by examining the experience of men within two marginalized categories--gay and transsexual--who have often found themselves fighting for the right to call themselves men at a time when hegemonic assumptions about manhood have required that one had been designated male at birth, claims a heterosexual orientation, and exhibits characteristics that are stereotypically masculine. For gay men who were born male, social marginalization could result from one's gay orientation as well as from a perceived lack of masculine traits. For some transsexual gay men, all three of the traditional markers of manhood may be absent or deemed insufficient. This scenario calls into question what it is that all men have in common if the concept of manhood is to be associated with any stable definition.

Within rhetorical analysis, the concept of textual fragmentation suggests that a rhetorical critic performs an analysis of a text by examining dense textual fragments; the critic's audience members then produce what they perceive to be a finished discourse in their own minds. Along these lines, this project illuminates the concept of manhood by examining dense textual fragments found within mass media representations and personal narratives, and concludes that one's manhood is determined based on the degree to which one identifies with others who call themselves men. Therefore, manhood can best be framed, not as a specific identity with a stable definition, but as a body of intersecting identifications specific to a particular cultural location and time period. As such, it is linked to cultural systems of power and oppression, illustrating that the claim to manhood as an identity is a rhetorical act that is not free from controversy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
CHAPTER	
1 PROJECT OVERVIEW	1
Scholarly Significance.....	2
Rhetorical Significance	7
Research Questions	14
Methodological Overview.....	15
Significance of Media Text Analysis.....	16
Significance of Interview Analysis	18
Research Approaches and Concepts	19
Preview of Chapters	26
2 LITERATURE REVIEW	32
Recognition and Identification.....	33
Corporeal Rhetoric and Personal Narrative.....	38
Media Representation.....	41
Social Movement and Counterpublic Theories	47
The Concept of Man.....	55
3 MASS MEDIA TEXTS	61
Marginalized Men	62
Representations of Transmen.....	68
Newspaper Columns and Published Essays	69
The Work of Louis Graydon Sullivan	85
Representations of Gay Transmen	87
Online Personal Advertisements.....	92
Television and Film.....	94

CHAPTER

Autobiographical Essay: Nick and Mark.....	102
Summary.....	105
4 PERSONAL INTERVIEWS	108
Overview of Interview Subjects.....	108
Recruitment of Interview Subjects.....	110
Question Development.....	110
The Interview Process	114
The Transcription Process.....	115
Analytical Themes.....	115
Theme 1	116
Theme 2	150
Theme 3	162
Summary.....	189
5 CONCLUSION.....	193
Scholarly Contribution	200
Limitations of This Study.....	205
The Potential for Future Research	208
Final Thoughts.....	212
FOOTNOTES	214
REFERENCES	216
APPENDIX	
A IRB APPROVAL LETTER	225
B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: NATAL MALE GAY MEN	227
C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TRANSSEXUAL GAY MEN	230

PREFACE

Gradually, I became aware of physical reality—the warmth of my bed, the weight of sheets and blankets, the morning light from a window. Panic. I remained very still, eyes closed. (“Please don’t make me go back. Let me stay. Maybe if I just remain perfectly still, keep my breath slow and shallow”) But the light became brighter, thoughts became clearer, and I awoke from what should have been reality. I was back in the reality that should have been a nightmare. What to do now, but remember? If I can’t go back to the world of my dream, at least I can capture the vividness of memory. I remain motionless, my eyes still closed, and I place my consciousness back in that other reality before it completely drifts away.

In this dream world, I feel . . . what do I feel? Relief. A serene sense of relief. In this world, I don’t need to worry anymore. No more countless visits to doctors and surgeons. No need to inject myself with a needle every week. No need to spend thousands of dollars that other men need not spend. And no need to assure myself that I enjoy living alone—that I will be perfectly content without a partner, if need be, for the rest of my life. In this world, my body does not embarrass or betray me. It isn’t radically different from any other guy’s. I can look down at myself and, with a sigh, whisper, “Everything’s fine. There’s nothing I need to do. I can just live my life now.” What might another man call it? There are so many names, but one is particularly telling: his *manhood*. In this world, my manhood is both psychological and visible, not only to a partner, but also to myself. I can actually reach down and grasp—grasp with my entire hand. Other guys—natal male guys—they all take this for granted, don’t they? Just a routine aspect of daily life. And in this ephemeral world, it actually could be routine for me as well. If only I could stay here.

In these few waking moments, I can remember what this world was like. I can remember what I saw when I looked down at myself. I can remember how my hand felt. I can remember thinking that a huge burden had been lifted from my life. I can remember normal.

Chapter 1

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Conceptualizing the male body presents little controversy for most people, as this would appear to be a simple matter of biology. Some might insist, for example, that a particular set of internal organs, external genitalia, chromosomal patterns, and hormone levels are either present and detectable in a body or they are not. Far more contested is the conceptualization of *man*, for even though this term is generally associated with the male body, it also brings us into the realm of behavioral expectations within particular cultures.

This project explores how the term *man* has been conceived within U.S. culture during the 20th and 21st centuries, and how these conceptions have impacted the lives of marginalized men, particularly transsexual men who also identify as gay. In analyzing this term in conjunction with this particular social identity, I am making two primary claims. First, I argue that when any man's manhood is questioned or challenged, the root cause is an assumed correspondence between physical sex, gender identity, and gender expression. Among the predominant meanings associated with the term *man*, it is the conflation of these concepts that most profoundly determines which particular individuals are able to identify successfully as men within U.S. culture, and which are more likely to face derision, discrimination, or outright rejection of their claims to manhood. Because the assumption that a man must be male is so profoundly entrenched within U.S. society, some members of this culture resist any persuasive attempts to dislodge it. Second, I argue that the term *man* should be conceptualized, not as a set of social expectations for those born with conventionally male bodies, but as a contextual set of intersecting personal and social identifications, having no essential correspondence with the socially designated "maleness" of particular bodily structures or substances. In keeping with Burke's (1969) conceptualization of identification, I am recognizing the relationship between identification and persuasion. Just as any man might be persuaded that he, himself, is a man because he identifies with others who identify as men, he might also attempt to persuade others to see him as a man by enacting rhetorical strategies that produce a similar feeling of identification in others. Consequently, the marginalized

man will meet with the least resistance to his claims to manhood the more he is perceived to be similar to other individuals who identify as men. Among transmen, this strategy can be used to varying degrees. For those who attempt to keep their trans status hidden from others—a lifestyle choice known as “stealth” within the transsexual community—this rhetorical strategy could be described as assimilationist because it involves no attempt to alter the culture’s conception of manhood; rather, the transman is endeavoring to accentuate personal characteristics that align with those considered to be indicative of manhood in his culture while de-emphasizing characteristics that would be considered out of alignment. For those who *do* acknowledge their trans status in some contexts, or even publicly on a broader scale, the strategy to create identification by emphasizing aspects of appearance and behavior typical of men exists in tension with the fact that others are aware that he was born into a body designated female at birth. As a result, these two groups of transmen face slightly different challenges. Those who prefer to keep their trans status hidden may find this to be a near impossibility in a culture of digital record-keeping, while those more inclined to acknowledge their trans status, sometimes for activist or political purposes, may have more difficulty persuading others to perceive them as men.

The effort to create a sense of identification in others is further complicated by the fact that the meanings associated with the term *man* can vary by culture and across time. In other words, the most effective rhetorical strategies in the 21st century United States might be less productive in another part of the globe, just as they might have been less productive during an earlier time period in the United States. While my analysis in this project is synchronic rather than diachronic, I acknowledge that linguistic meanings and cultural expectations associated with gender are never static, and this project makes some historical references in this regard. As a set of intersecting identifications, then, the concept of *man*, itself, is not only synchronic and diachronic, but also subjective rather than objective.

Scholarly Significance

Historically, theories of gender identity development have tended to assume a correspondence between physical sex and psychological gender. These theories may have varied

in terms of how they described the *process* of gender identity development in young children, but they shared the implication that “genitals are the criteria for gender attribution.” Consequently, for these theories, “there is no question about the objective facticity of gender” (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 99). Within this framework, defining a term such as *man* could be perceived as little more than an exercise in semantics; while the word *man* does connote more social implications than the more clinical term *male*, there is no obvious problem to be solved through the extensive deconstruction of terms. The problem arises when the transsexual man is taken into consideration. The very existence of transsexual men serves to problematize a common term such as *man*, which would otherwise escape excessive scrutiny.

It is safe to assume that most adult male-bodied people identify as men, and that most adult female-bodied people identify as women. However, increasing scholarly attention in the areas of sex, gender, and transgender studies, particularly since the 1990s, has been acknowledging the existence of other configurations such as males who identify as other than men, females who identify as other than women, and those with intersex bodies whose gender identifications may be *man*, *woman*, or some other gendered category (e.g., Kessler, 1998; Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998). Increased attention to the existence of intersex bodies has also prompted some scholars to emphasize the instability of sexed categories such as *male* and *female* (e.g., Callahan, 2009; Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Perhaps the greatest emphasis has been placed on socially constructed gender roles and cultural expectations for behaviors associated with male-bodied and female-bodied people. For example, there have been numerous studies on subjects such as masculinity and femininity, some of which acknowledge the masculinity expressed by females and the femininity expressed by males (e.g., Bristow, 1995; Devor, 1989; Halberstam, 1998; Sinfield, 1994). Prior to the advent of transgender studies, however, it was generally assumed by most scholars that the terms *man* and *woman* would correspond to male and female bodies, and that the issues worthy of further study concerned the socially constructed meanings that had been attached to these terms, as well as the gendered roles and behaviors that had become expectations for male and female persons.

It should be noted that Butler's (1990/1999) celebrated work on performativity undermined these assumptions, suggesting that "'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender" (p. 10). However, it was not her intention to define specific gendered terms such as *man* and *woman*, but to theorize the nature of both gender and sex as repeated cultural performances. In this project, I examine cultural meanings associated with the term *man* in an effort to determine its inclusionary and exclusionary properties, and I am suggesting that the common conflation of sex and gender has been the most prominent means of excluding transsexual men from this category. In making this point, I shall cite Butler's (2004) later work on the recognition of an individual's humanity, particularly as she relates this concept to the lived experience of transgender people.

Even though scholars such as Butler were making the distinction between sex and gender before transgender studies became prominent, it was the lived experiences of transgender people that caused the terms *man* and *woman* to become significantly disentangled from discussions of males and females. The fact that a male-bodied person could identify as a woman and a female-bodied person could identify as a man made the distinction between sex and gender particularly salient, yet the gendered concepts of *man* and *woman* have never been clearly defined; it has always been assumed that they relate to social roles and gendered expressions that are culturally associated with sexed bodies. In other words, it has been assumed that if a male-bodied person identifies as a woman, it must mean that she sees herself enacting feminine social roles and/or behaviors, or possessing feminine characteristics to some degree. Likewise, if a female-bodied person identifies as a man, it must mean that he sees himself enacting masculine social roles and/or behaviors, or possessing masculine characteristics.

This project's more pointed interrogation of the word *man* really proceeds from the relatively recent cultural awareness that transpeople exist. Without this awareness, a distinction between the concepts of *sex* and *gender* might have been theorized only for the purpose of interrogating gender roles and expectations. This would have been a distinction, more specifically, between sex and gender *expression*, e.g., between *male* and *masculine*, or between *female* and *feminine* for the purpose of pointing out that males and females can express varying

degrees of masculinity and femininity. Meanwhile, the assumption that men inhabit male bodies and women inhabit female bodies would have remained largely unquestioned. The existence of transpeople, therefore, has had a dramatic deconstructive effect on labeling practices associated with the distinctions among various identities, as the following rationale demonstrates.

Central to my claim that the term *man* can only be conceived as a set of identifications is the foundational assumption that the term has no stable definition. As a means of undergirding this assumption, I shall review some of the most common attempts to define the term in order to demonstrate their lack of consistency and stability. For example, when people are asked to define *man*, their responses generally follow two lines of thinking. The essentialist response is to state categorically that a man is a person with a male body. In other words, *man* and *male* are synonymous terms. The constructionist response will typically provide a list of masculine characteristics, i.e., men are courageous, strong, athletic, successful, etc. The list is considered constructionist because these characteristics are not exclusive to men; their predominant association with men has been constructed by particular societies in particular time periods—in the case of this project, U.S. American culture in the 20th and 21st centuries.

If these two frames produce the most common definitions for *man*, one might be tempted to simplify matters by combining them. Perhaps *man* should be defined as a male-bodied person possessing masculine characteristics. However, this solution is problematic in at least two ways. First, not all people who identify as men are male-bodied. Transsexual men were born into bodies which had been designated female at birth, and there are also men who were born with intersex bodies. The second problem with combining these two definitional frames is the fact that so-called masculine characteristics are neither exclusive to men, nor exclusive to male-bodied people.

In composing a definition for a particular term or concept, one is ultimately seeking to discover the essence of the thing. In other words, one cannot define *man* unless and until one is able to determine what all men have in common. If it has already been established that neither a particular anatomy nor a socially designated set of behavioral norms can be associated with all men, where does one locate the essence of this thing we call *man*? One method might be to ask

those individuals who identify as men to explain what it is about themselves which places them in this category. Again, however, many responses would fall into the same essentialist and constructionist frames. Natal males might state that they are men because they are male, or they might provide a list of masculine characteristics. In less direct terms, they might also explain that they are men because they are not female, not feminine, or not women. Unfortunately, this use of contrast is not really helpful. First, transgender theory as well as the personal narratives of transsexual men suggest that some female-bodied people *are* men; second, some male-bodied men do exhibit characteristics which society deems feminine; and third, the term *woman* lacks definition to the same degree as the term *man*. Ultimately, all natal males, even those whose manhood is sometimes questioned if they are gay or come across as feminine, have one recourse in common: They are all able to cite their male bodies as markers of manhood in a culture which accepts the sexed body as evidence of gender. Consequently, interviews with natal males could establish the extent to which this conflation is relied upon when individuals are asked to explain or defend their identification as men.

Clearly, the only way to circumvent this reliance upon the sexed body when defining manhood would be to interview transsexual men. Again, the response might be a list of masculine characteristics; however, these particular men would not be able to claim the identity of *man* based on a male body in the conventional sense. Some of these men might suggest that there is a biological cause for their self-identification as men (most likely situated in the brain), but this possible cause would be outside the defining characteristics of maleness which are currently known and applied, e.g., chromosomes, internal and external reproductive organs, etc. Therefore, aside from this debatable claim to maleness which only some transmen would offer, how would most transmen describe their identification as men? Some would undoubtedly offer a list of masculine characteristics, but many would also make a vague epistemological claim along the lines of “I just know” or “I’ve always known.” When pressed, natal males would likely make similar statements. In fact, interviews with numerous men might yield a wide variety of succinct definitions, yet only one enigmatic response that is common to all: “I just know.”

While this lack of specificity might appear to be a dead end in one's search for a definition, I believe that it holds the key to one way in which we might conceptualize gender identities such as *man*. If I claim that I "just know" something about my identity, I am making a purely subjective statement; my statement is obviously made in a social context, based on my existence within a society in which particular meanings predominate, but the statement, itself, is subjective. Consequently, if we can find no definition that is common among all men, it is reasonable to conclude that the term can only be used in a purely subjective manner. As I shall demonstrate, my conversations with both natal male and transsexual men, as well as my review of media texts that include representations of gay transmen, have led, collectively, to the concept of identification as the only common denominator among men. On the one hand, these texts hint at various and sometimes contradictory descriptions of what a man can or should be, creating a major challenge if one's goal is to locate a clear-cut definition that can be applied to all men. On the other hand, however, it is ultimately the personal narratives—the stories told by these men about how they came to see themselves as men in the first place, and how they continue to do so—that lead inexorably to the conclusion that men identify *as* men because they identify *with* other men, and sometimes because they do not identify with women. The reasons for these feelings of identification vary among individuals, but it is the feeling of identification that serves as the common attribute among men.

Rhetorical Significance

Scholars have often interrogated masculinity, but they have seldom asked what a man actually is or, more pointedly, who gets to call himself one. In fact, given the ubiquitous social conflation of sex and gender, the agency to name one's gender out of accord with one's birth sex becomes highly contested and, as such, highly rhetorical.

Elsewhere (Booth, 2007) I have explored the rhetorical strategies employed by transsexual men as they navigate medical protocols in an effort to alter their physical appearance. However, once these medical goals are achieved—i.e., once transmen "look male" in a social context—what rhetorical challenges have they still to face? One might suppose that transition

represents the quintessential “happy ending,” particularly if, in addition to a male appearance, the transman has received any surgeries he had desired. However, there are some respects in which a transition is never complete. For example, job applications frequently ask applicants to list any previous legal names. Failing to do so would be considered a lie of omission—reason enough not to hire the applicant, or to fire him once the omission became known. However, if a transman indicates that he was once known by a female-sounding name, he “outs” himself as a transman to his prospective employer. Most transmen will encounter this type of dilemma throughout their lives unless they are able to find positions where trans status is not considered a disadvantage.

Other examples of perpetual transition are related to the appearance of the transman’s body when it may be unclothed in the presence of others. As there is currently no surgical option for a transman which produces genitalia visually or functionally identical to that of a natal male, an unexpected trip to an emergency room can reveal his trans status in a context where he is particularly vulnerable due to illness or injury. Some transmen have reported interpersonal treatment by medical professionals ranging from disrespectful to abusive in such situations. Another context typically involving various states of undress is sexual intimacy. While it is possible for a transman to hide particular parts of his body in certain sexual scenarios, this would clearly be an impractical strategy in an ongoing relationship. Consequently, if “outing” oneself becomes a requirement, the *when*, *where*, and *how* of that outing become rhetorical decisions.

Whatever the context, a transman who wishes to be accepted as a man is ultimately fighting a battle for agency in the face of enduring cultural assumptions about sex and gender. Most people rarely find themselves interrogating who is or is not allowed to call himself a man. Although jokes about the qualities of “real men” are common, beneath this constructionist speculation, the concepts of *man* and *male* remain unquestionably fused for those who have not been exposed to gender theory. Consequently, the transman’s relative ability to identify as a man affects his life with respect to his interactions with others, his economic and material well-being, his legal rights, and even the way he conceives of himself on a daily basis. The multiple implications of this project, therefore, are interpersonal, economic, material, political, and

intrapersonal. Just as the cultural meanings attached to the word *man* affect the lives of transmen, the rhetorical strategies enacted by transmen may serve to alter those cultural meanings, thus affecting all men.

While this project considers the lives of transmen in order to examine cultural understandings associated with the concept of *man*, it also has a particular focus on the experiences of transmen who are gay, including the challenges they face when interacting with natal male gay men, because the manhood of gay men has also been questioned. In his work on patriarchy, Johnson (1997) explains this further: “As defined in most Western cultures, ‘real’ women and men are exclusively heterosexual. The definition of a ‘man’ is so bound up with being heterosexual that gay men are routinely accused of not being men at all” (p. 149).

Clatterbaugh’s (1990) research examined the concept of masculinity rather than manhood. Citing the work of Carrigan, Connell, and Lee, he offered the following explanation as to why the concept of *masculinity* might best be studied by focusing on marginalized men rather than those who are more privileged:

Because homosexual men are oppressed and because their lives are beyond the limits of accepted heterosexual masculinity, some theorists argue that the history of homosexual masculinity is “the most valuable starting point we have for constructing a historical perspective on masculinity at large. . . . The history of homosexuality obliges us to think of masculinity . . . as being constantly constructed within the history of an evolving social structure, a structure of sexual power relations.” (p. 134)

Setting aside the implication that all gay men are uniformly oppressed, despite their differences, the overarching argument presented here is that a concept such as *masculinity* can best be understood by examining the perspectives of those to whom the concept has been applied only tenuously by those with the greatest social privilege to name and define others. On this basis, I am suggesting that the concept of *man* has likewise evolved within cultural power structures, and that the nature of these structures can best be revealed through a consideration of the positionality of men whose manhood cannot be linked to the hegemonic requirements of maleness and

heterosexuality. Of course, men may be marginalized for various reasons other than transsexualism or a non-heterosexual orientation. For example, a project similar to this one concentrating on the experiences of Black or Asian men in the United States would provide additional insight into the ways in which manhood is conceptualized in U.S. society. However, given the constraints of time and space, I have chosen to focus on two particular categories of marginalized men—transsexual men and gay men—because the ways in which they intersect with one another provide even greater insight into this topic. While gay males and transmen are, at times, discussed separately in this project, the interaction between gay males and gay transmen is framed as particularly illuminating because it foregrounds how one marginalized group can, in turn, marginalize a faction of its own membership—a phenomenon that Orbe (1998) refers to as co-cultural oppression. This is evident when gay males, who are often told by others that they are not “real men,” state that they are, in fact, real men, while transmen are not. This experience places the gay transman in the position of having to defend his identity as a man, not only to an audience of more privileged (non-transsexual, heterosexual) individuals, but also to an audience of men who are marginalized in one way (because they are gay) and not in another (because they are natal males).

While predominant definitions of *man* have prompted transmen to enact various rhetorical strategies in order to be perceived as men, it is important to note that these strategies can change over time. The fact that this discussion is focused on the 20th and 21st centuries is, therefore, not insignificant given that this time period coincides with the development of medical technologies which allow for physical transition. Prior to this time, I would argue, transmen were still men, but their rhetorical strategies were, by necessity, somewhat different. While the absence of some technologies—particularly synthesized testosterone—was a disadvantage, transmen could potentially benefit from the *lack* of particular technologies. For example, the paper trail cataloging one’s birth, sex designation, legal name, marriage, etc. was less ubiquitous and more easily skirted than the interconnected digital trail of contemporary life. Further, since clothing and hair styles were more rigidly gendered prior to the 20th century, the male sex of an individual presenting as a

man was less likely to be in doubt. In other words, if one's presentation was clearly other than *woman*, one was assumed to be a man.

Technology, then, has maintained an unintended sort of balance for transmen; while advances in record-keeping have increased the surveillance over transmen's lives, advances in medical treatment have introduced the possibility of rendering the transman's body more visibly male, and related governmental decisions have allowed for changes in legal sex designation. It should be noted, however, that many such advances have had classist implications, since medical treatments and changes to legal records are almost always associated with financial cost. While most transmen are able to obtain relatively inexpensive hormone treatments, many are unable to afford the genital surgeries which are required for a legal change of sex designation at the national level in the United States. Indeed, there are many transmen who do not even desire such surgeries. Consequently, they must retain the designation of "female" with the U.S. government—a status with profound effects on one's ability to obtain and maintain employment, secure medical insurance, travel abroad, etc. This restriction also prevents heterosexual transmen from marrying female partners in most states although, ironically, it does not prevent gay transmen from marrying male partners.

Ultimately, transmen have had no control over the increase in digital surveillance of their lives, and only some transmen have had access to the funds necessary for choosing advanced medical technologies. Fortunately, however, the vast majority of transmen do exhibit a degree of agency over various aspects of personal appearance, behavior, and language use. Regardless of their legal or surgical status, they are able to influence others rhetorically in presenting themselves as men. The relative success of these rhetorical strategies, then, has the potential to expand cultural conceptions of manhood to include men whose bodies are not conventionally male, whose orientation is not heterosexual, and whose appearance and manner are not fully in accord with cultural expectations of hegemonic masculinity. This expansion of meaning for the concept of *manhood* may, in turn, affect the interpersonal, economic, material, political, and intrapersonal aspects of transmen's lives.

Ultimately, despite all of the challenges they face, transmen struggle to be perceived as men because the term has tremendous emotional significance for them. If the term *man* had no additional meaning other than male-bodiedness or masculine behavior, transmen might conclude that, since they can never be “fully male” (which would require a chromosomal change, among other things), they could simply express their masculinity and live as masculine women. Indeed, this suggestion is often made by friends and family members who cannot understand their loved one’s need to transition. In an effort to explain this need, many transmen find themselves at a loss for words because the only word they have—*man*—is not understood to mean anything other than maleness or masculinity, hence the phrase “I just know.” A greater emphasis on the concept of identification in conjunction with the study of sex, gender, and sexuality will provide more expansive conceptual language tools for those attempting to articulate gender identity more precisely. Even among those scholars who have researched gender theory with a progressive attitude toward transgender people, there has been a tendency to assume a hegemonic link between the concepts of *man* and *masculinity* in a way that does not allow the concept of manhood to stand on its own. For example, a contemporary scholar might acknowledge that an individual who identifies as a man need not have been designated male at birth; at the same time, however, this scholar might also take for granted that such a person would attempt to achieve a relatively male appearance and behave in accord with masculine norms because a natural inclination toward masculinity, and away from femininity, is seen as the very reason for that individual’s self-perception as a man. As a result, the transsexual man who expresses some degree of culturally-defined masculinity will be acknowledged as a man. However, what if this same individual exhibits a gendered appearance and behaviors that could be described as androgynous? While it is not likely that he will be judged negatively by most contemporary gender scholars, he will be more likely to be seen as gender variant or genderqueer, rather than as a man. In other words, it is assumed that a person designated female at birth who does not identify as a woman, but whose appearance and behaviors express a noticeable degree of femininity, would claim some type of *transgender* identity such as genderqueer rather than a binary *transsexual* construct such as *man*.

However, this type of assumption is not made for individuals whose physical sex and gender identity are congruent. A natal male can be feminine and still identify as a man. Because he is male-bodied he has an a priori claim to the term *man*, while the transsexual man must bolster his claim with masculinity. This project aims to disrupt such assumptions by making clear that one's self perception as a man is distinct from one's self perception as masculine, just as it is distinct from the designated sex of one's body. Transmen, like natal males, may exhibit feminine characteristics and still identify as men because masculinity is not an essential defining characteristic of manhood. This forms the basis of my argument that identification with other men is the only common denominator among all men. In this sense, *man* could be viewed as a social construct and, as a result, there are those who would suggest that the concepts of *man* and *woman* have outlived their usefulness. In other words, if *man* is "only" a social construct, it must be an anachronism and we, as human beings, should acknowledge that we have evolved beyond its restrictions. Along these lines, the field of gender studies has increasingly moved away from the binary construction of transsexualism toward the fluidity of transgenderism. However, there are other scholars who defend the binary distinction of *man* and *woman*.

Namaste (2000) states that "the term 'transgender' . . . erases transsexual specificity." In calling for greater scholarly attention to "transsexuals who refuse to call themselves 'transgendered'" (p. 62), she asks, "What does it mean if we only hear the voices of people who call themselves 'transgendered' while ignoring individuals who have changed sex and who call themselves 'men' or 'women'?" (p. 63). In defending the continued use of the term *man* as a relatively stable¹ identity construct, this project swims against the poststructural tide of queer theory which embraces fluidity and questions all forms of stability. In effect, queer theory is asking whether or not a concept such as *man* should even exist (Gamson, 1995, p. 390). From a subjective perspective, transmen would argue that the existence of *man* continues to matter to them because they must make so much effort to achieve it as a social identity, often feeling invisible for many years before they are able to begin transitioning. The threat posed by queer theory, then, is analogous to running a long race only to find that the finish line has been erased

just before you arrive, and your insistence that the finish line should remain in place is dismissed as a quaint and old-fashioned notion.

Research Questions

The two central arguments I am making in this project can be framed as responses to the following two research questions: 1) When the manhood of transsexual gay men is questioned or challenged, is there one single ideological construct consistently underlying these challenges?, and 2) What consistent definition or meaning can be applied to the term *man* if the concept of *man* is assumed to include transsexual men? While I am focusing these questions on this one particular population, they clearly suggest broader implications—interpersonal, economic, material, political, and intrapersonal—that impact the lives of all men.

There is no doubt that many different types of men experience marginalization *as men* by having their manhood called into question. While various groups of men may face discrimination for a variety of reasons such as their race or orientation, to have one's manhood challenged is a phenomenon distinct from prejudices such as racism or homophobia, although it is clear that any of these experiences can and often do occur in conjunction with one another. In order to determine why manhood is being challenged, however, one must take into account what the term *man* actually means, or what it is perceived to mean. In considering this question, I suggested earlier that none of the conventional definitions for the term *man* could be considered consistent for all men. This reasoning, combined with the research conducted for this project, has led me to the conclusion that there is no objective definition for the term; rather, it is a subjective concept particular to each man's unique set of identifications. However, this view is not common across U.S. culture. As my research demonstrates, the cultural conflation of sex, gender identity, and gender expression is the most frequent basis for questioning an individual's manhood; in other words, most people tend to think of a *man* as one who was born into a male body, identifies as a man, and expresses his manhood in culturally conventional masculine ways. For some, the expression of manhood also requires a heterosexual orientation, as does the expression of womanhood. For the transman, then, the fact that his body was designated female at birth serves

to undermine his manhood. For the gay man who is not transsexual (i.e., the natal male), the fact that he is gay serves to undermine his gender expression for those who believe that the expression of manhood requires attraction to women. Consequently, the gay transman faces a double challenge in that he must insist, not only that a body designated female at birth can be inhabited by a man, but also that his attraction to men does not make him a woman.

Methodological Overview

As a rhetorical study, this project examines the concept of *man* by considering the rhetorical challenges and strategies of transsexual gay men who wish to be perceived as men in social and intimate contexts. For the individual transman, this presentation of social identity encompasses a wide variety of expressions including personal narrative, physical appearance, posture, gesture, and other forms of corporeal rhetoric. The strategic choices he makes in all of these areas reflect his understanding of how *man* is conceptualized in his social environment. In other words, his use of the term *man* has been influenced by the ways in which others have used the term throughout his lifetime. The meanings he personally ascribes to it result from the evolving cultural meanings it has acquired, in combination with the meanings that resonate most strongly with his own feelings of identification. The same is true for his understanding of the term *gay*. As McGee (1990) has argued, “all of culture is implicated in every instance of discourse” (p. 281). In fact, he goes so far as to say that, given the complexity of context, it is not possible for a whole and complete text to exist. Instead, we have “nothing but *discursive fragments of context*” available for analysis (p. 287). In this way, the terms *man* and *gay* exist as fragments within a much larger cultural context and have no meaning without reference to that context. If this is the case, no rhetorical critic (or critical rhetor) is ever able to provide anything like a complete analysis of any phenomenon: “The only way to ‘say it all’ in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to produce a finished discourse in their minds” (p. 288).

My goal, then, was to gather and assess dense fragments of discourse regarding the concept of *man*. In this effort, I utilized two data sets. First, I used selected theoretical concepts

to examine a variety of mass media texts produced by or about transsexual gay men. The analysis of these texts constitutes Chapter 3 of this project. However, because little published material exists on the subject of interaction between natal gay males and gay transmen, I found that I needed to “create” texts in which gay males and gay transmen comment on one another. To this end, I conducted and digitally recorded nine phenomenological interviews with gay men. Five of these were with natal males, and four were with transmen. Once these interviews were transcribed, I examined them for emergent themes relevant to the conceptualization of *man*, with a particular focus on the social status of men who are gay and/or transsexual. The analysis of these interview texts constitutes Chapter 4 of this project. In what follows, I provide an extended rationale for using both media texts and personal interview data.

Significance of Media Text Analysis

Most U.S. Americans are not personally familiar with the particulars of transsexualism, let alone the subjectivity of gay transmen. For example, therapist Cherie Hiser, writing in a 2002 publication, explained that while her colleagues in the psychology field were familiar with transwomen, they often reacted to the concept of transmen by exclaiming, “I’ve never even heard of that!” (p. xiv). If one assumes that psychologists would be more likely than the general public to possess understanding or even awareness of transsexual subjectivities, this quotation suggests that transmen remain very much an enigma. Consequently, widespread media representations can have a tremendous impact on the degree to which transmen are read as men, or even as conceivable human beings. As Gross (1994) explains,

The contributions of the mass media are likely to be especially powerful in cultivating images of groups and phenomena about which there is little firsthand opportunity for learning, particularly when such images are not contradicted by other established beliefs and ideologies. (p. 144)

The media’s power to shape the public image of a particular group is also a double-edged sword in that the harm resulting from a negative or stereotypical image may be more or less equal to the harm resulting from a total *lack* of representation. As Gross points out, “those who are at the

bottom of the various power hierarchies will be kept in their place in part through their relative invisibility; this is a form of symbolic annihilation” (p. 143). Consequently, this dilemma can come down to a choice between invisibility (allowing the general public to remain ignorant on the subject) or media representation (which is often inaccurate, stereotypical, or disparaging, and therefore inclined to reinforce ignorance).

Professor Susan Stryker (2008) explains that while transgender media representation has become “more frequent and less prejudicial” in the 21st century (p. 147), the public has also been witness to “a lot of exploitative or sensationalistic mass media representation—the vast majority of which focus on the triumphs and tribulations of particular individuals” (pp. 1-2). For example, Gamson (1998b) describes the evolution of television talk shows which tend to feature “transgendered people as display objects” (p. 21). He asserts that, increasingly, the producers of such programs are recruiting “those with little connection to middle-class gay, transgender, bisexual, or lesbian organizing, with little interest or experience in the politics of representation” (p. 13). Consequently, “using the low-risk strategy of class voyeurism, many shows select guests from the bottom of the social barrel. Nearly anyone can feel superior watching people whose speech, dress, bodies, relationships, and accents mark them as ‘trash’” (p. 16). Arune (2006) believes that television news coverage also “has tended toward the sensational” (p. 122). In her critique of news reporting, she points out that journalists “seemingly feel free to casually marginalize and ridicule any transsexual in their coverage”—for example, “the anchor who smiles and changes voice when a report of transsexuality comes to the fore” (pp. 123-124). In addition to fostering negative representations, increased visibility can also affect the transman’s ability to live as a man without being read as a transsexual. Rachlin (2002) explains that “educating the public is not without its costs” in that one cannot perceive others as transmen if one is unaware of their existence: “As more people become educated they will know what the scars of a radial forearm flap phalloplasty look like, or the scars of bilateral mastectomy and male chest reconstruction.” Such ease of identification will complicate transmen’s ability to “control personal information

about their history and their bodies” (p. 6), producing social knowledge which can have a profound effect on the individual transman’s daily life.

These comments can be related to the multiple implications of this project, as noted earlier. The degree to which transmen are visible in society impacts the degree to which they are understood, and this understanding, in turn, impacts the interpersonal, economic, material, political, and intrapersonal aspects of their lives.

Significance of Interview Analysis

While media texts are related to the visibility of transmen on a cultural scale, personal interviews allow for the interrogation of personal feelings such as identification with others, as well as perceptions of meaning associated with particular terms and concepts. As noted earlier, an attempt to ascertain the meaning of a term like *man* can be approached in various ways, but it is only through the interview of transmen that the conflation of sex and gender can be avoided because these are the only men whose identity as men cannot be linked to male-bodiedness.

Based on the work of Kvale (1983), phenomenological interviewing, at the most basic level, asks the participants to describe personal life experiences which relate to the phenomenon under study. They are asked to describe what happened and how they felt at the time, but they are not asked to attempt to explain why the experience occurred or why they felt as they did. The interviewer remains attentive to the participant’s facial expressions, vocal tone, posture, gestures, etc., as well as to the interviewer’s own preconceived assumptions and biases. Once the interviews are completed, the interviewer transcribes them and looks for emerging themes.

For my own interviews, I began by asking participants about the concept of *man*. For example, I asked them what the concept meant to them, when they recalled first learning its meaning, when they first thought of themselves as men, and what “manly” characteristics they believed themselves to possess. I also asked if they used any other gendered terms to describe themselves. In the next section of the interviews, I asked both groups of men about gay identity, experience, and terminology. Finally, my questions addressed the significance of interaction between natal males and transmen. For example, natal males were asked to describe their

perceptions of transmen as men, thus prompting them to reflect on their own conceptions of manhood. Likewise, transsexual men were asked to describe their interactions with natal males, thus prompting them to explore feelings of rejection in conjunction with their own conceptualizations of manhood.

While I consider myself a rhetorician rather than a phenomenologist, I am in accord with much of the theory underlying phenomenology. For example, I recognize that the personal experiences described by my interview subjects took place at particular places and times, and that their manner of telling the stories—word choice, tone, emotional expression, etc.—were specific to the time and place of our interviews, implicated by my own presence in the conversations. I further acknowledge that my interpretation of transcribed interview content cannot be divorced from: (a) my own sense of identity as a (transsexual) gay man, (b) the meanings which I ascribe to particular terms, and (c) the degree to which I personally value particular terms and identity constructs. However, I do not analyze these interviews with rigid adherence to the full complexity of phenomenological methods, i.e., with respect to concepts such as *reduction*. Rather, I am borrowing the phenomenological interviewing process in order to acquire a specialized set of data which I could not otherwise locate. Once these interviews were transcribed, this data was available for rhetorical analysis.

Research Approaches and Concepts

I believe that using a wide variety of data sources is appropriate for this project, given the broad significance of the topic. Personal interviews and other autobiographical materials provide a degree of access into the process through which individuals ascribe particular meanings to the term *man*. Published or recorded media texts representing or analyzing the subjectivity of gay transmen, as well as their interactions with natal gay males, offer insight as to how *man* is understood on a broader cultural scale. The theoretical concepts through which I shall examine these texts, then, are those which seem best situated to articulate how the meanings associated with *man* intersect with the rhetorical strategies of self-identified men. For example, the concepts of *recognition* and *identification* are closely related in that identification among human beings

allows for the recognition of others as fellow humans. As I shall also make clear, the rhetorical strategies of *personal narrative* and *corporeal rhetoric* often operate in tandem when an individual is attempting to create feelings of identification in others. Finally, I examine the concepts of *man* and *masculinity* as they are commonly understood in U.S. society.

As I noted earlier, part of the rhetorical challenge for gay transmen is cultural resistance to the idea that this particular social identity can even exist. Butler (2004) addresses this dilemma in her discussion of recognition: “On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level” (p. 25). In other words, society develops normalized conceptualizations that dictate which social identities qualify as human. Since men inhabiting bodies designated female at birth fall outside these normative parameters, they also fall outside the parameters of *man* and *human*. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the transman to claim his identity rhetorically. Butler suggests, however, that it is not sufficient to simply declare oneself:

It is not the simple presentation of a subject for another that facilitates the recognition of that self-presenting subject by the Other. It is, rather, a process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another. . . . as structured psychically in ways that are shared. (pp. 131-132)

Burke (1969) refers to this mutual reflection as *identification*, noting that for human beings there is a natural connection between identification and persuasion: “It is so clearly a matter of rhetoric to persuade a man by identifying your cause with his interests” (p. 24).² He adds, however, that a single instance of identification may not prove sufficient for persuasion: “Often we must think of rhetoric not in terms of some one particular address, but as a general *body of identifications* that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull daily reënforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill” (p. 26). This reference to repetition suggests another link with Butler, in this case to performativity, since a cultural concept such as *man* is performed repeatedly on a daily basis. Therefore, the repetition of characteristics and behaviors associated with manhood

creates identification with other men, which then contributes to persuading others that one is also a man. Thus, the concept of man is relatively stable within an individual's lifetime.

This daily reinforcement or performance can take place at the social as well as the individual interpersonal level. However, given that most people do not know, or are not aware of knowing, any transmen personally, media representations often serve as the most common form of reinforcement at the social level. At the interpersonal level, gay transmen face rhetorical challenges which vary in relation to others' perceptions of their appearance and behavior. In most social situations, if a transman is perceived as a man, he need not reveal his trans status to others. However, if he is early in his transition, or if years on testosterone have not rendered his appearance convincingly male, he may compensate for this by devoting greater attention to other aspects of his presentation, i.e., his behavior, his word choice, the cadence of his speech, his manner of gesticulation, and the way he carries himself. As a means of persuading others that he is a man (or implying that he is male), these presentation strategies are inherently rhetorical. In situations which essentially require that others know of his trans status, his rhetorical choices may be very similar, although his ability to persuade may face a greater challenge due to the social conflation of sex and gender.

My previous work regarding gay transmen in a medical context (Booth, 2007) argued that personal narrative and corporeal rhetoric constitute a dual rhetorical strategy in the effort to secure access to medical technologies which allow for physical transition. The same strategies are relevant once these technologies have been implemented. In everyday social situations which do not require that one's trans status be known, corporeal rhetoric is emphasized because a personal narrative is not only unnecessary, but also potentially deleterious. However, in a context such as a medical emergency or an increasingly serious romantic relationship, these two strategies will likely be used simultaneously because the transman will need to *articulate* a manhood which, in the minds of his audience, is undermined by the appearance of his unclothed body.

Prosser (1998) framed narrative as the transsexual's "second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that this body may be 'read'" (p. 101). In

claiming *man* as his identity, the transman is weaving the constructed skin of *man* around, and above, a biological skin which may read, to some degree, as female. As a means of clarifying this physical ambiguity, while also combating negative media representations on a broader scale, personal narrative is a proactive rhetorical tool—what Prosser refers to as “our keenest weapon in these skirmishes over transsexual representation. . . . a reflection, above all, of our capacity to represent ourselves” (p. 134).

Corporeal rhetoric is used in virtually every social context to influence how one is perceived by others. As Hauser (1999) reminds us, the body is “used as a form of signification,” even though its message is often “ambiguous” (p. 2). Arguably, however, that ambiguity is reduced as the body takes deliberate actions to define itself. In other words, the mere presence of a body—that is, a visible but inactive body—is likely to convey greater ambiguity than a body which is conscious of, or even vigilant with respect to, its own goal-oriented presentation. A body that carries itself in a manner similar to that exhibited by most men is more likely to be perceived as the body of a man, even in cases where the unclothed body appears female, and particularly when accompanied by personal narrative. This reframing of a body designated female at birth furthers an effort to sever the conflation of sex and gender in the minds of those observing or interacting with a transman, thereby stretching the conventional definition of *man* to include transmen and reducing their marginalization.

Many marginalized groups have been described as counterpublics because, as Warner (2002) explains, they are “defined by their tension with a larger public. Their participants are marked off from persons or citizens in general” (p. 56). This reference to personhood can be compared to Butler’s (2004) discussion of recognition and dehumanization, as noted earlier. Based on Warner’s (2002) definition, transmen would constitute a counterpublic in that they are aware of their “subordinate status” relative to the broader public. In addition, counterpublic participants for whom the body is particularly salient are not able to transcend that body in order to rely upon verbal rhetoric alone. As Warner states, “the ability to abstract oneself in public discussion has always been an unequally available resource” in that individuals “are not simply

rendered bodiless by exercising reason” (p. 165). Rather, there is an increased reliance upon what Warner calls “corporeal expressivity” (p. 115) if one cannot lay claim to the privileged and unmarked identities which are considered normal: the male, the White, and the middle-class (p. 167). With respect to verbal rhetoric, however, the members of counterpublics make “different assumptions about what can be said or what goes without saying” (p. 56). For instance, unlike most of those within the larger public, transmen do not believe it goes without saying that a man must have been born into a body designated male at birth. As such, transmen often dialogue amongst themselves regarding the visual and behavioral aspects of personal presentation which would be most or least advantageous in a public context. For example, a man who is beginning the process of transition might solicit information or suggestions from a man who is further along in the process. Meanwhile, those willing to address the subject publicly must determine the best rhetorical strategies, both verbal and physical, for conveying their identities as men in the public sphere. Within public/counterpublic sphere theory, these alternating forms of interaction have been described as “oscillation” between “protected enclaves” and “more hostile but also broader surroundings” (Mansbridge, 1996, p. 57). In her own work, Felski (1989) sees the feminist public sphere as oscillating between an internal function “grounded in a consciousness of community and solidarity among women,” and an external function that “seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims” (p. 168). Similarly, transmen retreat to the protected enclaves of support group meetings and small conferences in order to speak amongst themselves. This inwardly-directed speech includes advice at the individual level, but it also provides space for crafting public rhetorical strategies.

These public strategies often take the form of social movements, including a transgender rights movement which is not always accepted or understood by gay, lesbian, or bisexual movements. In fact, the transgender movement itself experiences divisions between transsexuals (i.e., transmen and transwomen) and other non-binary forms of transgenderism (i.e., gendered self-identifications other than *man* and *woman*). Gamson (1995) has examined the tension between identity-based movements—those assuming the stability of concepts such as *man*, *woman*, *gay*,

lesbian, etc.—and queer theory, which “shakes the ground on which gay and lesbian politics has been built” (p. 390). This poststructural insistence upon fluidity appears to disrupt the very boundaries which allow an identity-based movement to evolve. Smith and Windes (2007) have considered this tension as well, suggesting that identity-based movements are not simply built upon pre-existing identities, but also help to shore up those identities for movement participants. In other words, for a transsexual man within the transgender movement, the “shared group experiences arising out of common struggle” (p. 45) may help to solidify the experienced stability of his manhood, particularly if his participation tends to be restricted to groups of transsexual men as opposed to groups which include transwomen, genderqueers, etc. Likewise, a group specific to gay transmen (or natal gay males) might have a similar effect on the experienced stability of one’s gayness.

Regardless of his affiliations, however, the transman who identifies unequivocally as a man is faced with an unavoidable rhetorical challenge due to the conflation of manhood and maleness. This type of hegemonic thinking about men and, indeed, about gender in general, has at times been challenged, but not always as comprehensively as it could have been. For example, when most academic works on the subject of men and masculinity make distinctions among the terms *male*, *man*, and *masculine*, they do not generally consider the subject of transmen, but focus on the pressures of hegemonic masculinity which are placed upon male-bodied people. Anthropologist David Gilmore (1990) suggests that manhood is a social construction which must be achieved by men and boys:

There is a constantly recurring notion that real manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness, that it is not a natural condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds. (p. 11)

He goes on to explain that while women’s femininity might also be judged, “it is rare that their very status as *woman* forms part of the evaluation.” Rather, women may be seen as “unladylike,” but “rarely is their right to a gender identity questioned in the same public, dramatic way that it is

for men” (p. 11). Gilmore is referencing neither transmen nor transwomen in making these assessments. As a result, while he makes a distinction between maleness and manhood, he does not directly state that maleness is typically considered a *requirement* for manhood because it goes without saying. This illustrates the hegemonic nature of the conflation of sex and gender.

It is uncommon to find a male author attacking both maleness and manhood as cultural constructions which serve to privilege those people known as *men* over those people known as *women*. However, John Stoltenberg (1989), author of the book *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*, considers maleness to be just as arbitrary a category as manhood:

We are sorted into one category or another at birth based solely on a visual inspection of our groins, and the only question that’s asked is whether there’s enough elongated tissue around your urethra so you can pee standing up. (p. 31)

In keeping with this view of maleness, he sees manhood as a “cultural decision, a baseless belief, a false front, a house of cards” (p. 29). From this perspective, which is not shared by most men, the significance of a male body is irrelevant, partly because it does not actually exist, but largely because the concept of *man* is equally irrelevant.

As a transman, author Jamison Green (2005) conducted an informal study to explore how transmen perceive masculinity. Not surprisingly, all of these men stated that maleness and masculinity were different concepts with different meanings. His own response to this finding was a critique of the literature on masculinity, claiming that most of this scholarship “is not sufficiently subtle or specific in its use of terminology. In other words, I think most of the literature makes an assumption that only male bodies express masculinity” (p. 295). This common assumption about masculinity was most clearly refuted by Judith Halberstam (1998), whose book compares the experiences of masculine lesbians to the experiences of transmen: “Female masculinity has been blatantly ignored both in the culture at large and within academic studies of masculinity” (p. 2).

Other authors have examined manhood with respect to particular social identities. For example, Durgadas (1998) has described the ways in which fat gay men are feminized by a culture

which considers them “suspiciously womanish” (p. 368). Here, the concept of *man* is linked to a particular feature of the body, but it is not a feature which is specific to conventional definitions of the male sex, such as genitals. Instead, Durgadas frames an otherwise sex-neutral physical feature, body fat, as *gendered*. However, not all gay men make a conscious connection between body fat and femininity. Sociologist Peter Hennen (2005), in his ethnographic study of the Bear community, finds that gay men who identify as Bears tend to reverse this perception:

Bears define their masculinity not only against the feminine but more specifically against the feminized, hairless, and gym-toned body of the dominant ideal of gay masculinity—“the twink,” as he is dismissively known in Bear culture. (p. 33)

Hennen sees Bear ideology as reproducing “the hierarchical assumptions of hegemonic masculinity” in that they “assign lower status to bodies perceived as feminized” (p. 34). They accomplish this by positioning themselves against “hairless” and “gym-toned” men, and declaring this “other” to be feminine in comparison. In this way, they are able to “collectively reinterpret and eroticize the very physical attributes stigmatized by the larger gay community (extra weight, body hair)” (p. 28).

The above research approaches and concepts will help to shed light on the concept of *man* in contemporary U.S. culture, on the motivations of those who refuse to acknowledge the manhood of transmen, and on the rhetorical strategies used by those who wish to be perceived as men.

Preview of Chapters

Following a review of literature, this project first examines a variety of mass media texts which illustrate how the concept of *man* has been conceptualized with respect to transsexual gay men, and then proceeds to analyze the content of interviews with self-identified gay transmen and natal male gay men.

Chapter 2—Literature review.

In examining the concept of *man*, I have utilized various theoretical concepts that are reviewed in this section. These concepts and bodies of theory include *conceptually oriented*

criticism (Jasinski, 2001), *textual fragments* (McGee, 1990), *recognition* (Butler, 2004; Fraser, 1997), *identification* (Burke, 1969; Woodward, 2003), *corporeal rhetoric* (Hauser, 1999; Shilling, 2005), *personal narrative* (Prosser, 1998), *media representation* (Gamson, 1998a, 1998b; Gross, 1994), *social movement theory* (Cathcart, 1978; Gamson, 1995; Gregg, 1971; Simons, 1970; Smith & Windes, 1975, 2007; Valocchi, 2010), *counterpublic theory* (Asen & Brouwer, 2001; Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1992; Mansbridge, 1996), and *co-cultural theory* (Orbe, 1998). In addition, I also examine studies on men and masculinity as they relate to the concept of *man* (Candib & Schmitt, 1996; Gilmore, 1990; Hopkins, 1996; Kimmel, 1994; Kinsman, 1987; Pronger, 1990; Reeser, 2010; Rotundo, 1993; Whitehead, 2008). The concept of *textual fragments*, described earlier, is discussed in conjunction with conceptually oriented criticism in order to explain the methodological basis for this project. As noted earlier, the concepts of *recognition* and *identification* are also closely related in that one's recognition of another individual as a human being is dependent upon one's ability to identify with that person to some degree. Personal narrative and corporeal rhetoric are both rhetorical strategies used to encourage feelings of identification in others. These concepts, combined with cultural descriptions of *man* and *masculinity*, provide a basis for my analysis of media texts and personal interviews.

In discussing these concepts as they relate to the rejection of gay transmen's identity claims, as well as to the meaning of manhood itself, I consider the rhetorical strategies available to gay transmen, as well as the degree of agency present in particular contexts. While an individual transman may utilize personal narrative and corporeal rhetoric in attempting to convey his identity to other individuals interpersonally, the attempt to alter or expand the cultural definition of a commonplace identity term such as *man* is far more complex.

Chapter 3—Mass media texts illustrating themes.

Texts illustrating cultural impressions of transmen, and particularly gay transmen, are analyzed in this section. As McGee (1990) argued, we must analyze "discursive fragments of culture" since whole, completed texts cannot exist (p. 287). These fragments, when combined, serve to initiate a discourse which then continues in the reader's mind. Sillars (2001) made a

similar point, explaining that “there are an infinite number of acts that may be put together in an infinite number of combinations,” allowing the critic to foreground some and not others based on what stands out in the critic’s mind (p. 120). The materials I am foregrounding help to illustrate how gay transmen are perceived based on cultural understandings of the term *man*. These texts include printed material such as news articles and editorial columns that feature discussions about transmen (Alvear, 2003; Burnett, 2009; Christensen, 2008; Drabinski, 2010; Fertig, 1995; Savage, 2005a, 2005b; Szymanski, 2006), autobiographies of transmen (Green, 2004; Kailey, 2005), published essays and book chapters written by and about transmen (Califia, 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Currah, 2008; Green, 1998; Hale, 1998; Kailey, 2003; Laird, 2008; Lieberman, 2003; Murphy, 2007; Stuart, 1991; Yeadon-Lee, 2010), and online forum posts concerning transmen. I also examine filmed and televised material (Hines, 2009; Hunt & Baus, 2008; Sloan, 2008) as well as online personal advertisements composed by natal gay males and gay transmen.

My analysis of this wide variety of material examines the ways in which transmen have been described and depicted by others, as well as the rhetorical strategies used by transmen to self-identify as men, but I focus my discussion primarily on the lives of transmen who identify as gay, with a particular emphasis on their interactions with natal male gay men. For example, in Kailey’s (2005) autobiography he discusses how, in his experience, gay males are often reluctant to date gay transmen, and editorial columns written by gay males have included derogatory comments about gay transmen. Such comments reflect some of the ways in which the meanings associated with manhood can affect the daily lives of marginalized men. The language used in these examples serves to illustrate how *manhood* is frequently defined by natal male gay men, despite the fact that they might find their own manhood questioned due to their non-heterosexual orientation. On the other hand, I also examine texts that feature supportive comments from gay males who have chosen to define manhood in ways that are able to incorporate transmen. My analysis finds that when this positive editorializing does occur, it is often related to the natal male author’s ability to identify with transmen as fellow men. This demonstrates a kind of correlation between marginalization and a lack of identification.

Chapter 4—Interviews illustrating themes.

I conducted nine phenomenological interviews with natal male and transsexual gay men. As I noted earlier, I first asked these men to describe the various meanings they attached to the term *man*, and particularly to the label *gay man*, and then proceeded to discuss transsexualism more specifically. These interviews were necessary because there are few media representations of transmen who are gay, but the interview process was also helpful in that it allowed me to ask questions specific to this project, and also allowed for follow-up questions and further clarification on responses to previous questions. With respect to my research question regarding the meaning or definition of *man*, I was able to ask nine men this question directly and then consider the similarities and differences among their varied responses. I also asked interview questions that helped to elicit responses related to my research question regarding the reasons why manhood is sometimes challenged. For example, I asked both sets of men if there were any characteristics typical of men that they felt they lacked, and whether or not they had ever compared themselves to other men. Both natal male and transsexual men referenced various forms of gender expression as well as aspects of anatomy associated with the male sex, thus suggesting that any perceived lack regarding gender expression or physical sex might underlie any challenges to their manhood.

Chapter 5—Conclusion.

Chapters 3 and 4 both address the interpersonal, economic, material, political, and intrapersonal implications of applying particular meanings to the term *man*, in that these meanings can be restricting for many men. The concluding chapter summarizes these implications in order to make clear that the ways in which the term is used in society have significant consequences for men's everyday lives—not only for gay transmen, but for all men. This project proceeds from the more narrow and specific observation that transmen have often been told that they cannot be men. This observation quite naturally leads to broader questions such as “What is a man?” and “Why does this challenge to manhood occur?” My arguments suggest that the underlying reason for this challenge affects not only transmen, but any men who are said to be other than men. To suggest that the challenge to a transman's manhood results from his lack of male anatomy at birth is hardly

surprising, but these essentialist beliefs about the sex of his body are not so much the problem as essentialist beliefs about the assumed requirement that there be *correspondence* between his body and his gender identity. I am suggesting that a similar phenomenon occurs with some natal males, in that others may perceive in them a lack of correspondence between gender identity and cultural expectations for gender expression. The more rigid these cultural expectations, the more likely it is that all men must police their own gender expression for fear of marginalization. Further, any discussion of challenges to manhood requires an understanding of the meanings associated with the term *man*. If marginalized men proceed to defend their identities as men, persuasion and rhetorical strategy become central in this discussion as well. If one accepts Burke's (1969) proposition that persuasion involves identification, it is reasonable to suggest that identification is a necessary element of rhetorical strategy for marginalized men. Given that the term *man* appears to have no stable definition, I have come to the conclusion that this concept does not simply *involve* identification, but exists on that basis alone.

While the concept of identification was never completely absent from scholarly discussions of gender and communication, I am suggesting that this reframing of *man* provides conceptual language that frees discussions of gender from essentialist connections to anatomical sex and/or cultural constructions of masculinity. A man's identification with other men might well make reference to these elements, but they are no longer perceived as definitional. However, the continued rhetorical strategies enacted by transmen in order to assure their own social identities as men can also serve to stretch the culture's common understandings of this term as people gradually learn to accept gender identity as a matter of identification.

This project's emphasis on the salience of terms such as *man* also calls for a renewed balance between poststructural concepts such as queer theory and more structural concepts such as binary gender terminology, not because such binaries are theoretically sound, but because they are psychologically meaningful for individuals in their daily interactions with their fellow human beings. In other words, the belief that the concept of *man* is social constructed rather than essential and concrete is not grounds for its dismissal; the term remains significant because its use

within society remains ubiquitous, and because those who claim it for themselves feel an emotional attachment to it. For example, men such as those interviewed for this project have stated that they came to think of themselves as boys, and then as men, based on the influence and education provided by older male relatives such as fathers, grandfathers, and uncles. Clearly this renders the term both culturally and personally significant, despite its lack of precise definition. The term *man* can be particularly meaningful for transmen, whose ability to achieve socially acknowledged manhood represents a kind of challenge not faced by natal males, as well as a degree of achievement not necessary for natal males. If, as Gilmore (1990) suggests, manhood is a “precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds” (p. 11), the odds are greater for transmen, and even more so for those who are gay. However, if U.S. culture comes to think of manhood as identification among men, rather than a type of sexed body or a specific set of masculine characteristics, the odds against one’s ability to identify as a man become less potent, gendered terms become less restrictive, and all individuals have greater freedom in describing and positioning themselves within society.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this project, I explore two research questions—one concerning the meaning of the term *man* and the other seeking to explain the marginalization of particular categories of men—by applying a set of theoretical concepts to the texts I have chosen to examine. This method, known as conceptually oriented criticism, foregrounds both the concepts and the texts on the assumption that each will bring greater understanding to the other.

Jasinski (2001) defined “conceptually oriented criticism” as a “back and forth tacking movement between text and the concept or concepts that are being investigated simultaneously.” As differentiated from method-driven criticism, concept criticism enhances the critic’s interpretation of the text, but it also “thickens” the critic’s understanding of those concepts being used because it motivates the critic to continually reflect upon conceptual meanings as they are applied to a particular text (p. 256).

The process of concept criticism may be better understood in conjunction with McGee’s (1990) theory of textual fragmentation, which suggests that the analysis of a text is really the analysis of context. That which appears to be a singular text is really a selection of information fragments, analyzed collectively, and the “structural integrity” that creates the impression of singularity is supplied by the analyst (p. 287). In other words, the apparent wholeness or completeness of a text is in the eye of the beholder. Consequently, the critic’s duty is to “provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to produce a finished discourse in their minds” (p. 288).

This project attempts to expand the cultural understanding of one concept, *man*, by applying various other concepts to a variety of texts. McGee’s theory suggests that none of these texts—namely, editorial columns, news articles, books, essays, documentaries, television programs, online posts, personal narratives, etc.—could be considered whole or complete; rather, each is itself a discursive fragment composed of discursive fragments. However, the investigation of these fragments through a variety of selected concepts produces a more nuanced understanding

of both the fragments (texts) and the concepts themselves. Likewise, the concept of *man*, seemingly rudimentary, can be perceived with greater complexity—“thicker” understanding—in the context of 21st century U.S. culture. This chapter provides an overview of the concepts I have selected for this project and briefly examines how they have been understood.

Recognition and Identification

I discuss these concepts jointly because, at a basic level, they are mutually dependent. For example, one cannot identify with another person unless one recognizes the other *as* a person. Conversely, one cannot recognize the other as a human person without some degree of identification. However, the terms are not synonymous. One might, for instance, recognize Adolph Hitler as a biological human while feeling no conscious identification beyond this level. Others, utilizing a more cultural definition for the term *human*, may classify Hitler as “less human” or even non-human, insisting that no sense of conscious identification is possible. As Butler (2004) explains, “the terms by which we are recognized as human are socially articulated and changeable” (p. 2). Humans, therefore, have collectively determined who may or may not share the category they perceive themselves to exemplify. As a result, “the very terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status” (p. 2). For instance, if the dominant majority of people in a society believe that “humanity” is restricted to those they call “White,” it becomes a discursive impossibility for those they perceive as non-White to achieve the status of human. It is interesting to note, however, that the refusal to recognize the humanity of a particular group of individuals requires that the group be *named* in some way, and this naming is a form of recognition. This conscious refusal to grant official recognition frames the act of recognition as a political tool: “It becomes a way of shoring up a normative fantasy of the human over and against dissonant versions of itself” (p. 113). Consequently, while those who have not been granted recognition under the prevailing social norms may consciously reject those norms, these individuals may continue to require some form of recognition in order to navigate the society in which they live. In fact, it is not really possible to recognize *oneself* as human without reference to the social norms

that precede one's existence (p. 32). One's only recourse, then, is an attempt to "create a social transformation of the very meaning of personhood" (pp. 32-33). The personal, in this respect, is necessarily political, and some form of social movement may be necessary to alter social perceptions on a broad scale. With reference to the example used above, those who have not been perceived as White, and therefore as human, must either seek inclusion within the category of White or else seek a cultural redefinition of humanity to include non-Whites.

This dilemma is reflected in cultural perceptions of *man* in that those inhabiting marginalized forms of manhood must enact rhetorical strategies that ultimately confer the recognition of humanity. Hopkins (1996) suggests that "because personal identity . . . is so heavily gendered, any threat to sex/gender categories is derivatively (though primarily non-consciously) interpreted as a threat to personal identity." Therefore, any question about one's claim to manhood "is a threat to personhood" (p. 98). If a culture recognizes *man* as human, but defines *man* as necessarily heterosexual, gay men (both natal male and transsexual) must make one of two possible arguments: Either gay men are men and are therefore human, or else gay men, while not men, are still human. Transsexual men (whether gay or not) face a similar challenge if their trans status is known: Either transmen are men and are therefore human, or else transmen, while not men, are still human. Clearly, gay transmen feel this challenge more acutely. While the strategy for some is to relinquish the term *man* in favor of *transman*, others insist that they are men, regardless of their status as both transsexual and gay, and their greatest obstacle in this regard is the physical body. Since many people find it incomprehensible that a person could identify as a man if his body was designated female at birth, the topic is not so much debated as simply dismissed. Butler (2004) explains:

To be oppressed one must first become intelligible. To find that one is fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find one to be an impossibility) is to find that one has not yet achieved access to the human. (p. 218)

In other words, the transman is not oppressed *as* a transman because this category cannot exist within the classification of *human*. He cannot even claim the status of *oppressed* until he is able to

achieve recognition as a human being. Therefore, he has two options: He can convince others to broaden their definition of *man* to include him, or he can convince others that transmen, while not men, are nevertheless human, thus creating a category of humanity outside the conventional binary of *man* and *woman*. From a social movement perspective, one might incorporate the former strategy within assimilationist identity politics, while viewing the latter strategy as poststructural or queer. Clearly the first strategy, utilizing the culturally familiar concept of *man*, would be more expedient for those transmen who identify as men, and whose appearance and behavior comports with that of many other men. It would be less effective for those whose appearance or behavior were more androgynous, or who preferred to identify publicly as transsexual.

Given the interconnectedness of recognition and identification, one might attempt to achieve one by way of the other. Citing the work of Benjamin, Butler (2004) describes recognition as “a process that is engaged when the subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another” (p. 131). In other words, recognition begins once mutual identification has occurred. Recognition is therefore a step beyond identification, although they occur almost simultaneously: First, I become aware of some similarity between myself and another individual (identification). Second, I am able to acknowledge the humanity of this individual (recognition). Consequently, being misidentified is not the same experience as being misrecognized. If, for example, a man is seen from behind and misidentified as a woman because he has long hair, this does not imply that his humanity has not been recognized. As Fraser (1997) explains, the concept of recognition, or misrecognition, is related to the perception of another individual as positioned inside or outside socially constructed boundaries of humanity:

To be misrecognized, in my view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others’ conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a *full partner* in social interaction and prevented from *participating as a peer* in social life . . . as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of interpretation and evaluation that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. (p. 280)

One can further distinguish recognition from identification by considering the language used in a formal business meeting. When the chair sees that Mr. Smith has raised his hand to speak, she might say, “The chair recognizes Mr. Smith,” meaning that his existence as a human being, worthy of respect, has been recognized. She would be unlikely to say, “The chair identifies Mr. Smith,” since this clearly would not have the same meaning. This statement implies that Smith’s identity is in question or in need of clarification. To identify him by name is to imply that the recognition of his humanity has already taken place. One cannot *identify* another unless one has first identified *with* that individual and recognized that person’s humanity.

In defining identification, Burke (1969) introduced the term *consubstantiality*, explaining that when identification takes place, one person is “substantially one,” or consubstantial, with another person, even though they remain unique individuals. That uniqueness represents each person’s individual identity (p. 21). Simply put, any two individuals are unique in some ways and substantially the same in others. In order to receive recognition, then, one must make clear to the other that there is some way in which they are substantially the same, and this is a rhetorical process.

Given Burke’s (1969) belief that people may be consubstantial in terms of “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, [or] attitudes” (p. 21), Woodward (2003) considers it significant to note that identification “moves beyond the ‘externals’ of similarity to deeper levels of unity” (p. 8). In other words, consubstantiality is not merely superficial, such as having the same eye color, but emotional and psychological. He offers one basic definition of identification as “the conscious alignment of oneself with the experiences, ideas, and expressions of others: a heightened awareness that a message or gesture is revisiting a feeling or state of mind we already ‘know’” (p. 5). As a rhetorical strategy, then, identification involves the attempt to produce the recollection of a previous emotional state. Clearly, this can be compared to an appeal to pathos, one of Aristotle’s artistic proofs: “Persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs the emotions” (Aristotle, trans. 1924, 1356a). Woodward (2003) echoes this comparison in referencing “the rhetoric of public life”:

The words of advocates can sometimes replay memories of an experience that represent the essence of what an audience believes or feels. Identification is thus a cherished effect of communication: a rhetorical form of superconductivity that permits a total transfer of emotional energy from one being to another. (p. x)

While Woodward's description of a "total transfer of emotional energy" may be somewhat exaggerated, he is making clear that identification can have a strong emotional component. Burke (1969) writes with less overt enthusiasm, however, when he points out that persuasion often requires "trivial repetition and dull daily reënforcement" in order to create a "body of identifications" (p. 26). For the purposes of the present study, this suggests that a transman who is known to be transsexual must engage in continuing rhetorical strategy in order to trigger an emotional state in his fellow men, rooted in their conscious or unconscious remembrances of camaraderie among men, and allowing them to frame the transman as "one of us." Conversely, when a transman interacts with women, he might hope that they will compare and contrast this experience with their memories of previous interactions, causing them to frame the transman as "not one of us" because this interaction feels similar to previous encounters with men, but it lacks the camaraderie they have experienced with women. This is not to say that women would be incapable of identifying with the transman in any way at all—since any human being can identify with another in some respect—but rather that he would not wish them to perceive of him as sufficiently similar to themselves that they would view him as another woman.

Whether he is interacting with men or women, the transman might make a conscious effort to appear and behave "like other men" while avoiding anything in his appearance or behavior that could be perceived as "womanly," with the overall goal of compensating for the fact that his body at birth had been designated female. In other words, the success of this rhetorical strategy is dependent upon pathos overriding logoi. For many people, logic appears to dictate that a female body must be inhabited by a woman. Therefore, the emotional state inherent in identification cannot be accessed through reason alone. This explains why personal narrative can

prove so crucial to the transman's rhetorical strategy if he is known to be transsexual, and why corporeal rhetoric takes precedence if he is not.

Corporeal Rhetoric and Personal Narrative

The gay transman who appears outwardly male, behaves in accordance with the cultural norms for men, and keeps his trans status private is in a social position not unlike that of the natal male gay man. In both cases, the appearance of maleness and normative behavior lead others to assume that these men had been born in male bodies with male genitals—what Kessler and McKenna (1978) refer to as “cultural genitals” because they are “assumed to exist” and therefore exist “in a cultural sense” (p. 154). While their gay orientation may position them as “less manly” in the eyes of some, their maleness will not be questioned. However, for the transman whose trans status *is* known, it is likely that his sex will be considered female and his manhood will be suspect.

In his struggle to be perceived as a man, the gay transman faces rhetorical challenges that gay natal males do not. Because each transman lacks standard male anatomy to some degree, his public presentation as a man requires more careful consideration than that of the natal male. Gay men who were born male may find that some people question their manhood in the vernacular sense, i.e., as a “real man,” but the fact that they are male is rarely in doubt. Consequently, if they choose to be public as gay men, they experience greater latitude in terms of appearance and behavior without the likelihood that they will ever have to worry that they will be perceived as female. Transmen, however, sometimes fear that their birth sex will be apparent due to their short stature, soft skin, wide hips, etc. In this respect, the rhetoric of the body becomes paramount. If other men are to identify with them and read them as men, transmen must be conscious in their efforts to manage their appearance and behavior. As Hauser (1999) explains, “insofar as a body may make a public statement, it requires a context and significant symbols. . . . Claim making, in short, requires *framing* for a body to appeal in ways that may, at the very least, produce identification” (p. 5). The transman's body is framed as male when its attributes, both physical and behavioral, are read as symbols of maleness in a cultural context. In terms of the physical, he might take great care in selecting his clothing and hairstyle, disguising his hips by wearing shirts

that hang over his belt, for example. He might wear vertical stripes and avoid the horizontal in hopes of appearing taller. Behaviorally, he might consciously speak within the lower pitch range of his voice, avoiding terminology that might be construed as “feminine.” He might pay close attention to his manner of walking, sitting, or carrying objects. In these ways, he attempts to assure that he is not only read as a man, but also as male.

It is worth noting that these types of rhetorical strategies, clearly binary in nature, are more common to transsexuals than to those who experience other forms of transgenderism. For this reason, some gender variant individuals have accused transsexuals of perpetuating the lifestyle restrictions imposed by gender normative and heteronormative social systems. It is these very systems—attempting to box all people into rigid constructs of *feminine woman* and *masculine man*—that queer theory and other postmodern endeavors seek to destabilize. As Shilling (2005) states, “the social reproduction of society also involves the *social reproduction of appropriate bodies*” (p. 109), and this seeming adherence to an oppressive power structure can seem troubling.

Dr. Jay Prosser (1998), a professor who is also a transsexual man, recognizes this tension between transsexualism and queerness:

In the case of transsexuality there are substantive features that its trajectory often seeks out that queer has made its purpose to renounce: that is, not only reconciliation between sexed materiality and gendered identification but also assimilation, belonging in the body and in the world. . . . There is much about transsexuality that must remain irreconcilable to queer. (p. 59)

In his examination of transsexual body narratives, Prosser considers the rhetorical significance of telling one’s own story in various contexts, the medical context being that most demanding of binary language and stable self-identification. While some counselors have relaxed the requirement that one identify clearly as a man or woman to receive hormones and surgeries, many continue to follow antiquated standards of care adhering to cultural expectations of binary gender. However, Prosser also examines the public autobiographies of transsexuals, noting that some choose to publicly identify as transsexual or transgender—perhaps calling themselves *transmen*

and *transwomen* rather than *men* and *women*—yet many others continue to insist that they are simply men or women and no longer transsexual once the transition process feels complete. This binary identification is not coerced by medical gatekeeping but motivated by a conscious desire to be interpellated correctly, i.e., in the same way that one perceives oneself. Among those transsexuals who identify within the gender binary, some will proclaim their trans status publicly and others will attempt to keep this information private, blending into the world with other men and women. Prosser feels that those who do speak publicly—often through the publication of autobiography—may be motivated by a political desire to produce public subjectivities outside the traditional categories for the sake of an effective transgender movement:

If transsexual has been conceived conventionally as a transitional phase to pass through once the transsexual can pass and assimilate as nontranssexual—one begins as female, one becomes a transsexual, one is a man—under the aegis of transgender, transsexuals, now refusing to pass *through* transsexuality, are speaking en masse as transsexuals, forming activist groups. (p. 11)

This effort may have political advantages, but it poses something of a dilemma for those transsexuals who wish to be perceived as men and women: “While coming out is necessary for establishing subjectivity, for transsexuals the act is intrinsically ambivalent. For in coming out and staking a claim to representation, the transsexual undoes the realness that is the conventional goal of this transition” (p. 11). In other words, the transsexual endures physical alteration and financial hardship in order to be perceived as an “ordinary” man or woman—i.e., non-transsexual—and the autobiography undermines that effort by revealing the individual’s trans status. For those few transsexuals who follow this path, the larger political goal may override the personal one because the education of the larger society might ultimately lead to greater public understanding of these issues, thus easing many of the medical, legal, and social challenges currently being faced. However, while autobiography can serve to remedy the society’s *lack* of information, the need for public education is most keenly felt in the struggle against *inaccurate* information. Given that various media outlets introduce transgender-related topics for the sake of

profit, the drift toward sensationalism often misrepresents the transsexual experience. This is why Prosser declares personal narrative to be “our keenest weapon in these skirmishes over transsexual representation. Narrative is a reflection, above all, of our capacity to represent ourselves” (p. 134).

Media Representation

In considering the size of the United States, as well as the international reach of cultural influence, Gross (1994) states that “the mass media provide the broadest common background of assumptions about what things are, how they work (or should work), and why” (p. 143). This implies that media are able to provide the same images, definitions, and ideologies to people throughout the U.S., regardless of region or ethnic heritage. As such, they have the ability to influence cultural understandings of terms such as *man* and *gay*. Today, representations of gay men can be found in all forms of mass media, but the same cannot be said of gay transmen. As Ames (2005) explains, transmen “are often in the shadow, publicity-wise anyway, of their male-to-female counterparts,” and he speculates as to why this has occurred:

The evolution from masculinity to femininity—to perhaps beauty itself—is perceived, I believe, as sexier and more glamorous and perhaps, too, more of an affront to nature than the blunting of female characteristics to achieve a male appearance. The act of going from male to female seems to cry out: Look at me! And the other seems to say: I want to live my life quietly and strongly as a male—stop looking at me! (p. xv)

While some U.S. Americans are not even aware that transmen exist, others encounter them only in specific media forms, primarily the television talk show and the documentary, where they are almost always depicted as heterosexual, bisexual, or some other descriptor such as “queer,” but rarely as gay. This renders gay transmen virtually invisible in the mass media.

One of the most accessible forms of media, the television talk show, provides representations of marginalized identities that reflect a tension among various constituencies whose differing agendas for programming often conflict. As Gamson (1998b) points out, “bisexuals, lesbians, transgendered people, and gay men are actively invited to participate, to ‘play

themselves' rather than be portrayed by others, to refute stereotypes rather than simply watch them on the screen" (p. 13). However, this visibility comes at a price because "it is taking place through commerce" (p. 12). Therefore, the various people involved in the production of a talk show do not share the same goal for particular talk show appearances. Guests who appear in order to represent themselves and educate the public about the marginalized groups to which they belong sometimes fail to realize that, despite the opportunity to speak for themselves, they are not in exclusive control of the message being conveyed by the program as a whole. In other words, as MacKenzie (1994) explains, the talk show format offers only "the illusion of an open forum, a bastion of democracy, where all opinions are heard" (p. 110). The representation of marginalized identities is manipulated and, according to Gross (1994), "the manner of that representation will itself reflect the biases and interests of those elites who define the public agenda" (p. 143). Television networks, syndication companies, and local stations are all focused on profit, which is dependent upon ratings. This means that the producers of the actual programs, no matter how well-intentioned they may be, must also take measures to achieve high ratings in order to assure that these shows remain on the air.

In providing a history of U.S. television talk shows, Gamson (1998a) explains that "the talk show genre has always operated as an oddball combination of middle-class coffee-klatch propriety and rationality and working-class irreverence and emotional directness" (p. 30). Early on, programs such as *Donahue* "shared a basic model of middle-class public talk as the rational, deliberate, often formalized exchange of ideas" (p. 33), and Phil Donahue succeeded precisely because he was able to combine the rationality of the public sphere with the personal concerns of the private sphere. He was, in short, "both tough-political guy and sensitive-listener guy" (p. 44). For the GLBT³ movement of the time, his show was a valuable educational tool because he enforced a code of respectful interpersonal behavior. Audience members were free to disagree with, or even disapprove of, the guests on the stage, but ad hominem attacks were held back by Donahue's gentle chidings. As a result, the personal narratives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender guests were never drowned out by a raucous crowd. Gamson sees the *Donahue* show

as “remarkably consonant with the predominantly white and middle-class gay movement’s agenda” (p. 49) because its producers sought out guests by contacting GLBT organizations, and these were largely “run by and serving white, educated, middle-class people, predominantly male people” (p. 52). Unlike many contemporary talk shows, *Donahue* sought ratings by appealing to the intelligent viewer:

Donahue’s was meant to be a smart show, and one that took up social issues: get people who can speak well, and if possible, get the leaders. . . . Producers wanted viewers to identify with and respect guests. . . . Donahue had a genuine commitment to bashing stereotypes: when looking for guests from stigmatized groups, get the ones who seem the most normal. (p. 53)

Gamson refers to *Donahue* as “the father of American middle-class gay media visibility” (p. 47) because, with a pro-gay strategy based on viewer identification, the show helped to improve the social image of gay men and lesbians who were White and middle-class while neglecting those who were lower class and/or non-White. The show did not, however, avoid the topics of bisexuality and transgenderism. Gamson quotes one gender activist who praises the program’s efforts: “Those early shows that Donahue did on transgender issues, those were sensitively done, and they were informative and educational” (p. 48).

Oprah Winfrey, who began competing with Donahue in 1986, encouraged a similar atmosphere on her show: it was intelligent and respectful, but also more personal than political. As a producer told Gamson (1998a), “People watch Phil to think . . . and they watch Oprah to feel” (p. 31). When *Sally Jessy Raphael* came along soon after Winfrey, the tone was very similar, with both programs exhibiting the talk show trend toward “confession and therapy” (p. 54). The popularity of these three programs, coupled with the low cost of production, prompted the proliferation of talk shows, and it was then that the political became dwarfed by the personal.

For the GLBT community, the personal became sensationalized, as Gamson (1998a) explains: “Rather than the normal-as-can-be spokesmodel types of *Donahue* years, many shows, using outrageousness to attract audiences, have simply reinstated over-the-top flamboyance of

various kinds, playing up old stereotypes of gender reversal and hypersexuality, and conflating homosexuality and gender-crossing” (p. 63). This was not only a threat to accuracy—a return to the “gay men are feminine because they want to be women” assumptions—but it also functioned to separate the GL from the BT by positioning bisexual and transgender people as outside the category of marginalized groups fighting for their rights. Gamson reports that 96 percent of the politically-themed shows in his sample were focused on gay men and lesbians, while other programs with bisexual and transgender guests were more focused on bodily display, family conflicts, and less-than-civil behavior (pp. 133-134). In keeping with Butler’s discussion of recognition and the framing of some individuals as less than human, Gamson makes clear that contemporary talk shows contribute to this problem for those who transgress gender norms in some way:

Programming strategies tend to channel them into nooks that exclude political discussion, and emphasize either their laughable difference from other humans or their conflict-causing difference from their families of origin. A nonconforming gender status largely puts transgendered people outside the moral and political realms, implying that gender conformity is a condition for *entry* to a place where freedom and acceptance might, on a good day, even be possible. (p. 134)

In other words, gender conformity is a prerequisite if one is to be recognized as human. Consequently, transgender guests are restricted to “a program niche that almost entirely shuts down any question of their similarity to those who never ‘cross’ traditional gender lines” (p. 133). In this way, both identification and recognition are precluded for transgender guests, leaving audience members and viewers to see them as either harmless objects of ridicule or as disturbing threats to society. Having examined dozens of U.S. talk shows featuring transgender guests, MacKenzie (1994) reports that “the majority of televised audience members . . . exhibited varying degrees of discomfort and anxiety. Without exception, each program featured at least one audience member or call-in viewer who responded as if their personal identity were under severe attack” (pp. 109-110). Meanwhile, gay men and lesbians are framed as different from the average

viewer, but still human. The representation of bisexuals, I would argue, falls somewhere in-between: less human than gay men and lesbians, but more human than the various forms of transgenderism. If the audience can accept both heterosexual and gay relationships, the bisexual might be seen as confused, immature, or a little rebellious. Likewise, the feminine gay man and the masculine lesbian can be accepted, particularly when they are presented as entertainment. However, as Gamson explains, transsexuals are viewed as extreme versions of these categories:

Despite the repetition that gender and sexual identities are distinct, many shows return to the claim that a transsexual may just be a gay man gone too far. This framing of transgender as an extension of homosexuality has the peculiar, backward result of supporting lesbian and gay statuses by treating them as the sane, unassailable stopping point before a crazy, butchering gender change. *No need to go that far. Just be gay.* (pp. 163-164)

In other words, transsexuals are not simply confused, but sick. They are not just a little rebellious, but extremely threatening to the system. According to Gamson (1998b), this framing becomes even more pronounced when individual talk show guests appear rude and uncivil:

They emphasize, deliberately and not, a queer *difference* from the mainstream, and not a terribly appealing one, since on these talk shows it is conflated with ‘lower class’, which is equated with various sorts of ugliness, which do not make the best case for tolerance, acceptance, freedom, and rights. (p. 17)

Another reason why transsexuals have difficulty making the argument that they should be treated respectfully is the fact that these shows are repeatedly structured in ways that position them as deceitful:

Transgendered people are typically programmed in ways that emphasize anatomy as the only *true* gender marker, and thus any dissonance between genital status and gender identity as a sign of inauthenticity. Transsexualism, for instance, is often framed as a monstrous secret to be revealed to nontranssexuals—what would you do if you found out

your girlfriend was a man?—and transsexuals not so much as gender-crossers but as *gender-liars*. (Gamson, 1998a, p. 97)

More specifically, the apparent deception is not simply the failure to reveal one's trans status to one's acquaintances; "it is the transgender status itself . . . that appears as deception" because "the host and the audience insist that current (or sometimes even prior) genital status outranks all others, and that to operate otherwise is to lie." In short, "to be transsexual is to *be* dishonest" (p. 98).

Were these programs not designed to foreground outrageous behavior, the more mature and articulate transsexual guests would be able to provide both personal narrative and factual information in order to correct these false assumptions. However, heavy-handed production methods virtually assure that more reasoned arguments are rarely heard. Gamson (1998a) describes these tactics as "classic bait-and-switch con jobs." For example, a potential guest is "taken in by an apparently sympathetic producer's claim that this would be an opportunity to educate" (p. 86). Then, when this guest arrives to tape the program, various techniques are used to maintain the show's carnival atmosphere. For example, in relating his own experience, author Jamison Green states that the producers of one talk show had misled him, insisting that the program's theme would be "the truth about surgical sex reassignment." However, just as he was about to take the stage, he learned that the topic was "transsexuals with regrets." Later, during commercial breaks, a staff member crouched behind his chair and urged him to fight with the other guests (p. 85). As this example indicates, entertainment and ratings are a clear priority over education and accuracy, preventing transsexuals, as well as bisexuals, from representing themselves in a meaningful way.

This predicament affects not only the social image of transsexuals and bisexuals, but also the relationship between the "GL" and "BT" facets of the GLBT community. Since gay and lesbian people are made to look ordinary by comparison, they quickly learn to consider "a tempting option: distance yourself from bisexuals and transgendered people, keep your sex and gender practices conservative, and you will be rewarded with acceptance" (Gamson, 1998b, p. 21).

The result is intensified “animosities between the populations . . . making up the larger movement. Tolerance of visible gayness, put simply, is bought largely through the further stigmatization of bisexuality and gender nonconformity” (p. 14).

This tension between assimilation and transgression, between stable identity and queerness, is a “long-standing strategic dispute in sex and gender politics, as it is in most social movements” (Gamson, 1998b, p. 20). As Gamson points out, talk shows intensify the struggle to determine who has the right to represent the community, “making it nearly impossible for legitimacy-seeking activists *not* to close ranks, disrespecting and disowning their own” (p. 20).

Social Movement and Counterpublic Theories

The GLBT movement is really a collection of more specific movements, having in common the broad topic area of marginalized sexualities and gender expressions. For example, there are movements focused on marriage equality, child custody and adoption, military service, religious inclusion, employment and housing discrimination, security procedures at airports, identity documentation, chromosomal testing of athletes, etc.

While many groups tackle multiple goals, it would be difficult for any one organization to effectively address every concern under the GLBT umbrella. However, an organization is not the same thing as a movement. Smith and Windes (1975) suggest that the goal of social change must be united with three additional factors in order to constitute a movement: 1) collective action, 2) the use of rhetoric, and 3) political behavior (p. 143). This framework does not require the presence of formal organizations, although they are often created and utilized in order to gain media attention that an individual may not receive. However, an individual can participate in the collective action of a social movement without ever joining a structured group. As Valocchi (2010) points out, “progressive values, progressive people, progressive agendas sometimes do not mesh well with a hierarchically structured form for getting people recruited, agendas developed, work accomplished, and action taken” (p. 94). Different groups and individuals within a movement may disagree with one another regarding both goals and strategy and, depending upon how one is defining the concept of *social movement*, one might argue that these differences

indicate the presence of distinct movements rather than variations within one generalized movement. Based on the framework offered by Smith and Windes, one might make this distinction by determining whether these differing strategies or goals for social change are mutually exclusive or compatible to some degree.

During the 1970s, when social movement theory was particularly robust, a number of communication scholars examined the nature of social movements, offering definitions and suggesting how differences in rhetorical strategy might be framed. For example, Simons (1970) positioned different types of movements on a “continuum from the sweet and reasonable to the violently revolutionary” (p. 7). He describes calm, rational persuasion as the strategy of the *moderates*—those who neither raise their voices nor resort to ad hominem attacks. At the opposite extreme, the *militants* express hostility both verbally and physically in their attempts to “delegitimize the established order” (p. 8). The *intermediates*, then, are those who use both moderate and militant strategies, “while still avoiding their respective disadvantages” (p. 8). Simons’ model is clearly more focused on strategy and tone than it is on the desired outcome of the movement.

In a more goal-oriented analysis, Smith and Windes (1975) offered two categories for movements, explaining that the *establishment-conflict* movement seeks to overhaul the values, perceptions, and social structure of a society, while the *innovational* movement “acts with the expectation that the changes it demands will not disturb the symbols and constraints of existing values or modify the social hierarchy” (p. 143). This division is similar to that offered by Cathcart (1978), who began his analysis of movements by distinguishing between confrontational and managerial rhetoric. The *confrontational*, he argued, would “reject the system, its hierarchy and its values,” but only under “special and limited circumstances, such as periods of societal breakdown.” Conversely, *managerial* rhetoric served to “uphold and re-enforce the established order or system” and keep it “viable” (pp. 237-238). However, Cathcart differs from Smith and Windes in insisting that confrontational rhetoric must be present if collective action can be said to constitute a movement. This position suggests that the innovational movement of Smith and

Windes, as well as the moderate movement described by Simons, are not really social movements because they are not sufficiently confrontational. Citing the works of Leland Griffin and Kenneth Burke, Cathcart explains that those collective actions which work within the prevailing system, wishing only to reform it rather than overturn it, are operating on the basis of identification and consubstantiality, in that there is some degree of identification between the collective actors and their audience within the larger public (p. 239). In other words, this is not a revolution by rebels who hold to a completely different paradigm, but a reformation by loyal citizens who believe that the current paradigm can be improved. According to Cathcart:

What most so-called reform movements have in common is the basic acceptance of the system as *the* system, along with its moral imperatives and ethical code. The rhetorical form produced by such groups is characterized by consubstantiating motives which are ground for the strategies for improving or perfecting the order. (p. 240)

Transmen, for example, are not undermining or dismissing the traditional concept of *man*, but reifying and expanding it through their rhetorical efforts to be included within its purview. To the extent that their appearance and behavior reflect that of natal males, they will trigger feelings of identification in other men. Of course, the fact that transmen self-identify as men does not preclude their ability to acknowledge the non-binary gender identities of others, but it does support the maintenance of *man* as a social identity construct. In this way, their rhetoric could be construed as managerial in comparison to that of those who wish to destroy the gender binary; from this perspective, collective action for the benefit of transmen might be considered insufficiently confrontational to qualify for social movement status by Cathcart's definition. However, there are other elements of the transman's discourse that do undermine the prevailing system, essentially demanding a social paradigm shift in order to revise the meanings commonly associated with the term *man*. The insistence that a man can occupy a body designated female at birth constitutes "a threat to the very existence of the established order" and is, therefore, confrontational (p. 239).

Cathcart's (1978) distinction between managerial (collective reform efforts) and confrontational (social movements) is less perspicuous than it might at first appear, simply because one person's reform is another person's paradigm shift. Any change to the status quo could be perceived as a minor revision by some, but as a major overhaul by others, depending upon one's ideology, experience, or social location. It would seem then, that the difference between managerial and confrontational rhetoric has less to do with the degree of proposed change than with the degree of audience identification; the greater the identification between rhetor and audience, the more managerial the effort and the less need there is for confrontation.

The relationship between identification and social movements is also evident in Gregg's (1971) concept of ego-function. In arguing that "the primary appeal of the rhetoric of protest is to the protestors themselves," Gregg is foregrounding the identification among social movement members rather than the attempt to create identification with members of the general public. If this "self-directed" rhetoric promotes "psychological refurbishing and affirmation" within the movement itself (p. 74), it also contributes to the construction of viable social identities which, in turn, undergird the existence of a movement in support of collective identities.

More recent social movement theory explores the notion of collective identity with respect to the nature of its formation as well as its significance as a basis for collective action. According to Valocchi (2010):

Collective identity comprises three important components: the incorporation of the ideas of the movement into the social psychology of the individual; the sense of group membership that exists among these similarly thinking individuals; and an in-group/out-group dynamic whereby the in-group pursues interests and understandings in opposition to other groups. (p. 142)

With respect to the GLBT community specifically, Gamson (1995) describes the "public collective identity" of gay men and lesbians as a "quasi-ethnicity" based on the claim to a "fixed, natural essence" of the self. He explains that a movement formed around shared oppression tends to see collective identity as "necessary for successful resistance and political gain" (p. 391). This

type of movement, foundational to gay and lesbian political organizing, stands in contrast to “queer activism” which considers gender and orientation binaries to be the source of oppression because the categories within such binaries do not reflect innate characteristics, but “historical and social products.” Therefore, “disrupting those categories, refusing rather than embracing ethnic minority status, is the key to liberation” (p. 391). As Gamson makes clear, these are “two different political impulses, and two different forms of organizing” that are reacting to one ironic dilemma: “Fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power” (p. 391). Consequently, for those invested in identity politics, queer activism “threatens to turn identity to nonsense, messing with the idea that identities (man, woman, gay, straight) are fixed, natural, core phenomena, and therefore solid political ground” (p. 399). Of course, there are some queer activists who would not object to this charge because they do, in fact, wish to denaturalize the concept of identity and turn it to nonsense. In response, the supporters of stable identity would likely ask how queer social activism would function effectively in a culture so rooted in hegemonic binary concepts of identity.

The transman’s identity may rest somewhere between these extremes; he might claim a stable identity as a man while allowing for the malleability of his body and his social presentation. Some transmen may even view sexual orientation as a fluid concept while others will see it as fixed and stable. Consequently, as individuals, transmen may differ in their inclinations to side with the collective identity or queer activist models. A gay transman might, for instance, prefer the identity politics of natal male gay men to the queer politics of the gender variant because “the presence of visibly transgendered people, people who do not quite fit, potentially subverts the notion of two naturally fixed genders” (Gamson, 1995, p. 399). For the transsexual man, subverting the notion of fixed gender can actually undermine his desire to be perceived as a man on a daily basis.

The transman’s choice to foreground either fixed or fluid identity models in different contexts can be framed as strategic essentialism. Citing the work of Gayatri Spivak, Smith and Windes (2007) define strategic essentialism as the “strategic use of multiple identities in which

one chooses to emphasize one identity over another as the rhetorical situation demands” (p. 62). This option recognizes that both essentialism and constructionism may prove strategically valuable, making a restriction to one or the other politically unwise. The basic tension is left unresolved, but there is another problem that remains unstated here. The concept of strategic essentialism seems to imply that rhetorical strategy is implemented in a vacuum. In other words, if one directs different or even contradictory messages to different audiences, one is assuming that only those target audiences will receive those messages. Clearly, however, this is not the case, particularly in a mass-mediated culture. An individual or a movement delivering essentialist rhetoric to one audience and constructionist rhetoric to another cannot be confident that these audiences will never communicate with one another, or that some of the same individuals will not be present in both audiences. It is perhaps ironic that strategic essentialism would have fit well with Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric—“the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, trans. 1924, 1355b)—in that he is treating each case as a distinct rhetorical situation with a distinct audience for whom the available means of persuasion are also distinct. Aristotle surely recognized the possibility that particular individuals might be present in multiple audiences, or that a rhetor’s words might be repeated to those who had not been present, but he likely did not anticipate radio, television, or the Internet. A consideration of multiple audiences must also include the difference between the internal and the external audience. As Gregg (1971) noted in his discussion of ego-function, a movement’s “self-directed” rhetoric is used to promote “psychological refurbishing and affirmation” (p. 74), while its outwardly-directed rhetoric aims for social change. Clearly, one would not speak to one’s fellow protestors with the same tone or content as one would speak to the general public.

In counterpublic theory, this “oscillation between protected enclaves . . . and more hostile but also broader surroundings” is considered a valuable practice for marginalized groups (Mansbridge, 1996, p. 57). As Asen and Brouwer (2001) explain, “counterpublics derive their ‘counter’ status in significant respects from varying degrees of exclusion from prominent channels of political discourse and a corresponding lack of political power” (pp. 2-3). Consequently, the

members of marginalized groups require time and space in which they can both discuss rhetorical strategy and offer mutual support. In her analysis of deliberative democracy, Mansbridge (1996) lists the following goals for a counterpublic's self-directed rhetoric:

Understanding themselves better, forging bonds of solidarity, preserving the memories of past injustices, interpreting and reinterpreting the meanings of those injustices, working out alternative conceptions of self, of community, of justice, and of universality, trying to make sense of both the privileges they wield and the oppressions they face, understanding the strategic configurations for and against their desired ends, deciding what alliances to make both emotionally and strategically, deliberating on ends and means, and deciding how to act, individually and collectively. (p. 58)

She warns, however, that a total absence of outwardly-directed rhetoric can lead to various drawbacks: "When members of any group speak only to one another . . . they encourage one another not to hear anyone else. They do not learn how to put what they want to say in words that others can hear and understand" (p. 58). This form of counterpublic groupthink frames established power structures, if not the whole of the broader public sphere, as the enemy. In other words, the members of a counterpublic sometimes dehumanize those in power, just as those in power had dehumanized them, particularly if the counterpublic is socially marginalized. Therefore, if counterpublics do not engage in the practice of addressing dominant publics, rhetorical strategy becomes irrelevant and the goal of persuasion through audience identification is clearly undermined. As Fraser (1992) notes, counterpublics have a "dual character" in that they "function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment" but also "function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (p. 124). Consequently, the oscillation between inwardly-directed and outwardly-directed rhetoric becomes crucial.

While audience identification is one goal of outwardly-directed rhetoric, identification *among* counterpublic members is significant for internal communication. The spaces that Mansbridge (1996) calls "protected enclaves" (p. 57) are meant to be restricted to members of the counterpublic who, by virtue of their membership, are assumed to identify with one another.

However, as Felski (1989) points out, “the ideal of a free discursive space that equalizes all participants is an enabling fiction which engenders a sense of collective identity but is achieved only by obscuring actual material inequalities and political antagonisms among its participants” (p. 168). To illustrate this tension, she describes the women’s movement or the feminist public sphere:

Feminism . . . oscillates between its appeal to an ideal of a unified collective subject drawn from the primary distinction of male versus female and the actual activities and self-understanding of women, in which gender-based divisions frequently conflict with a whole range of other alliances, such as those based on race or class, and work against any unproblematic notion of harmonious consensus.” (p. 169)

In other words, while women may share the experience of oppression due to gender, they do not all share the experience of discrimination based on race, class, sexual orientation, etc. Therefore, because the degree of identification among them is partial, it is wise for participants to take this into consideration during inwardly-directed communication. Fraser (1992) takes this a step further in noting that some counterpublics engage in hierarchical practices that create internal discrimination: “Some of them, alas, are explicitly antidemocratic and antiegalitarian, and even those with democratic and egalitarian intentions are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization” (p. 124).

This phenomenon could also be analyzed using Orbe’s (1998) theory of co-cultural oppression, although the concept of *co-culture* does not necessarily imply the oppositionality of a counterpublic. Orbe explains that, within a large diverse culture such as the United States, the term *co-culture* refers to particular cultural groupings of people who share a commonality such as race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. Like Fraser, Orbe recognizes that an individual is not restricted to only one of these identities; rather, “societal positions consist of simultaneous memberships within a multitude of co-cultural groups.” Therefore, a co-culture can be “multileveled” in that it might be marginalized by a more dominant social group while, at the same time, some of its members also marginalize other members. He offers the term *co-cultural*

oppression to describe this (p. 51). Since many co-cultures are often marginalized by the larger culture, they can be compared to the counterpublics that are marginalized by larger dominant publics.

With respect to the current project, the GLBT community could be described as both a co-culture and a counterpublic. Framed as a co-culture within the broader U.S. culture, its members share the commonality of marginalized sexualities and gender expressions; as a counterpublic, they are often excluded from positions of power and influence. However, given the wide variety of identities and expressions reflected in this community, the level of exclusion experienced by any one individual is highly contextual. Those expressing non-standard gender identities often experience greater oppression by the dominant public than those gay men and lesbians who are perceived as relatively “ordinary” men and women, and this has much to do with the dominant public’s ability to identify with them as fellow human beings.

Within the GLBT community, a similar phenomenon occurs. Many gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals feel unable to identify with transgender identities—particularly those transsexuals who physically transition—with some stating that they don’t perceive transsexual individuals as members of the community. Ironically, some transsexuals have made similar comments, stating that they are not gay and do not perceive themselves as members of the “gay community.” Co-cultural oppression occurs when transgender individuals are rejected by the community despite their own identification with it. Natal male gay men refusing to acknowledge gay transmen is one example of this. Of course, the rejection of gay transmen within the transgender community would also be a form of co-cultural oppression, although this is less commonly seen.

The Concept of *Man*

The Complete Dictionary of Sexology points out that while the term *man* can be used as “a synonym for person or humanity in general” (Francoeur, Cornog, Perper, & Scherzer, 1995, p. 369), its primary use refers to a human being who is both adult and male. However, no distinction is made between sex and gender. A man is defined as a person of the “male sex” or “masculine . . . gender” as contrasted with a “woman” (p. 365). The entry goes on to explain that, in the United

States, the definition of *man* really comes down to having a “potentially reproductive relationship with women” regardless of one’s reproductive desires or sexual orientation:

A gay man, who considers himself as sexually uninterested in women and therefore as not having a potentially reproductive relationship with them, will still be treated by society at large and by women in particular as a potentially able sexual partner for women. Therefore, even if his socially ascribed manhood is defined symbolically, the fact that he is called a man arises directly from the sexual fact that men are defined in the United States as socially and sexually mature males erotically and reproductively related to women. (p. 367)

In other words, the concept of *man* in the United States is inherently both biological and heteronormative because it requires a reproductive capacity in association with women. Where does this definition leave the manhood of the transsexual gay man, since he is neither biologically capable of fathering a woman’s child nor interested in having a sexual relationship with a woman? The authors do not address this issue, although they do appear to differentiate sex and gender in explaining transsexualism, which they define as “experiencing a persistent and profound sense of discomfort and inappropriateness” about one’s “anatomical sex” and “feeling compelled to have that anatomy altered in order to live biologically and socially as a member of the other sex. Behaviorally transsexualism is the act of living and passing socially as a member of the opposite gender” (pp. 668-669). Here, the progression from sex to gender suggests that a discomfort with one’s sexed anatomy leads to a discomfort with the corresponding gendered social identity, but no attempt is made to intersect the definition of *transsexualism* with the definitions for *man* and *woman*. Significantly, however, the authors later acknowledge that transsexuals “may be oriented to partners of one or the other sex or to both sexes” (p. 669), allowing for the possibility that there are some transsexuals who identify as men and also feel attraction towards men.

Many scholars have addressed the subject of manhood, but most tend to frame it as inexorably linked to the normative male body and/or to masculinity. For example, in linking manhood to the body, Candib and Schmitt (1996) state that “a functioning penis is central to the

self-definition of manhood, and the possibility of its loss questions the very core of what it means to be a man” (pp. 211-212). Reeser (2010) expands on this by explaining why this particular body part has been granted such significance:

Every man has a body, but the meaning accorded to that body is far from objective. . . . Even if most every male body has a penis, there is no natural or ontological meaning contained in that organ. It is the meaning of the penis . . . that is constructed and not natural. . . . By making the body open to less variation and by normalizing it, cultural discourses may better control how it is understood, and signs on the body can be assumed to contain a preexistent meaning to be understood in a given way. (pp. 91-93)

In other words, a culture assigns meanings to specific types of bodies in order to maintain control over what those bodies may do or be in that culture. Put simplistically, if people whose bodies include penises wish to be perceived in a particular way or to obtain power or status in their society, they engage in discourse that associates the penis with other valued personal characteristics (e.g., courage, wisdom). As Reeser states, they “normalize” these associations by assuming a “preexistent meaning” for a “sign” that is present on their bodies, but not on all bodies. Over time, the culture comes to accept this preexistent meaning and it achieves hegemonic status.

Other scholars have made similar arguments about the social construction of *man* as a category. Rotundo (1993) states that “manliness is a human invention. . . . Each culture constructs its own version of what men and women are—and ought to be” (p. 1). In U.S. culture, it is generally assumed that a man ought to be masculine. Whitehead (2002) argues that masculinity “is indivisible from the category man. One sustains the other; masculinity being the discursive framework that man inhabits and from which he subjectively engages the world.” He adds that man “can only be made real through discursive expression and through engaging in the cultural practices that suggest manhood” (p. 215). In this sense, one can be physically male without qualifying as a man, based on the way in which the culture has constructed its expectations of masculinity. Gilmore (1990) refers to this “constantly recurring notion” that “manhood is different from simple anatomical maleness” as an “artificial state that boys must win

against powerful odds” (p. 11). He is emphasizing, here, that one does not reach adulthood and then decide to enact cultural constructions of masculinity; rather, a male child must learn to perform these constructions early in life, and then sustain this performance consistently.

In addition, it is often noted that the performance of masculinity, and the corresponding categorization of one as a man, function through the use of contrast. As Hopkins (1996) explains, “For a ‘man’ to qualify as a man, he must possess a certain (or worse, uncertain) number of demonstrable characteristics that make it clear that he is not a woman. . . . These characteristics are, of course, culturally relative” (p. 98). The presence of the penis is one such characteristic, but this is combined with non-physical aspects of personality and behavior that have become hegemonically associated with bodies that include penises. Pronger (1990) takes this concept of contrast and makes a further claim about sexuality: “The essence of manhood lies in its difference from womanhood; the eroticization of gender affinity violates the preeminence of difference and therefore manhood” (p. 71). Pronger is pointing out that heterosexuality serves to underscore the contrast between men and women, whereas relationships between men or between women tend to undermine it. In other words, if manhood is partially defined by what it is not, the absence of women from a gay male relationship provides no contrast with which to confirm the manhood of those men. As Kinsman (1987) put it, “‘Real’ men are intrinsically heterosexual; gay men, therefore, are not real men” (p. 104).

Given the necessity of this oppositional construct, it also becomes imperative that the categories of *man* and *woman* remain stable. Reeser (2010) provides one example:

Without what are considered necessary aspects of masculinity (penis, testicles, or other corporal markers), women are unable to have masculinity fully. . . . Physical traits like the penis turn into proof, or reassurance, that the woman is unable to profit from masculinity in its fullness or totality. (p. 138)

Just as masculinity has been seen as a requirement for manhood, the male body is presented here as a requirement for masculinity. Taken together, these associations preclude the possibility that a person whose body was designated female at birth can be a man. Consequently, the transman

represents a threat to some male-bodied men because his existence blurs the clear dividing line between men and women that accords higher status to one group than to the other. Reeser points out the risk faced by transmen once their trans status becomes known:

A female-to-male (FTM) who passes as male, but is then found not to be a man, may evoke a negative or hostile reaction precisely because of an anxiety that masculinity can be taken on or assumed by someone who is not a man, and that man and masculinity are not stable referents. (p. 140)

This particular construction of manhood is fragile in the sense that it can be undermined by the existence of any other gender construction that contradicts it; transmen, masculine women, gay men, and feminine men all have the potential to destabilize *man* and *masculinity* as referents.

I conclude this section with an analysis from sociologist Michael Kimmel (1994). After outlining how U.S. culture tends to conceptualize manhood—as innate to all biological males—he offers the following:

Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. . . . Manhood means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of “others”—racial minorities, sexual minorities, and, above all, women. (p. 120)

It is significant that Kimmel expands the oppositional nature of manhood to include, not only women and sexual minorities such as gay men, but also racial minorities, suggesting that non-White men are not perceived as “real” men, at least not by some White men. He continues this analysis by pointing out that the men who qualify as men (male, masculine, White, and heterosexual) are most inclined to insist upon the entrenchment of this construct when they are confronted by possible exceptions to these rules:

The search for a transcendent, timeless definition of manhood is itself a sociological phenomenon—we tend to search for the timeless and eternal during moments of crisis,

those points of transition when old definitions no longer work and new definitions are yet to be firmly established. (p. 120)

For some, confronting the existence of transmen, transwomen, and non-binary gender identifications represents this “moment of crisis” and triggers an increased motivation to defend traditional definitions. Meanwhile, those who do not fit into the old construct are also seeking new definitions in order to secure their own inclusion.

Cultural understandings of the term *man*, combined with the other concepts described in this chapter, will be used to examine Chapters 3 and 4. This analysis will help to clarify the rhetorical strategies of gay transmen at both social and interpersonal/intrapersonal levels of interaction. Socially, media representations of gay transmen serve to define these men for the general public in the United States. Chapter 3 will address how transmen affect, and are affected by, these representations, while Chapter 4 will explore the meaning of *man* at the interpersonal/intrapersonal level by examining personal interviews.

Chapter 3

MASS MEDIA TEXTS

Because the manhood of gay transmen has been questioned in U.S. society, an examination of media representations of these men can shed some light on the reasons for this marginalization. In other words, the things that are being said about transmen can help to reveal any ideological constructs underlying the belief that transmen are not men. In this chapter I shall utilize a number of media texts to demonstrate that the assumed correspondence between sex, gender, and gender expression constitutes this type of ideological construct. The descriptions of transmen in these texts often conflict with one another, thus creating a social ambiguity that transmen and their allies attempt to remedy. Some transmen do this by representing themselves through their own writing (i.e., personal narrative) or by appearing before the cameras in various media projects (relating to corporeal rhetoric), but many media representations are beyond their personal control. This suggests a tension between the ways in which transmen represent themselves and the ways in which they are represented by others.

While it would take little effort to locate texts examining the marginalization of natal male gay men in contemporary U.S. culture, there are far fewer such texts on the subject of transmen, and those specific to gay transmen are sparse. This chapter examines various forms of mass media addressing transsexual men and gay transmen in particular. Those numerous texts addressing natal male gay men are not emphasized here, not only because there are far too many from which to choose, but also because this project attempts to elucidate the concept of *man* by focusing on a particular form of marginalization which involves both anatomy and sexual orientation in ways that are not considered normative for men in U.S. culture. As I noted in Chapter 1, scholars have suggested that a study of masculinity might be best served by examining marginalized masculinities rather than those that are more privileged (Clatterbaugh, 1990); therefore, a study of the concept of *man* might likewise profit from an examination of marginalized groups of men. However, because men of various social identities may be marginalized for reasons other than sexual orientation and transsexual status, I shall begin this

chapter with a few comments on other categories of marginalization, citing the experiences of a few specific men who are quoted in various media sources. While these texts focus primarily on the social status of men who are fat or non-White, some of these men are also transsexual and/or non-heterosexual. The remainder of this chapter, then, will examine texts that address the lives of transmen, with a particular focus on gay transmen.

The texts used in this chapter were located in a number of ways. I first examined published autobiographies of transmen, specifically seeking those men who identified as gay or discussed attraction to other men. I also included published articles written by or about gay transmen. In many cases, these books and articles were in my possession prior to this project. Given my personal history as a gay transman, I am also familiar with the names of transmen who are particularly well known in the community of transmen in the United States. Another means of locating material was the review of bibliographies and index lists from published books about transsexualism. For this chapter's brief section on personal advertisements, I selected Craigslist (2011) based on my general understanding that this has been a popular venue for personal ads in recent years, and also because I am citing a scholar (Farr, 2010) who had analyzed Craigslist. This site is also generic in that it is not specific to gay men; therefore, the individuals who manage the site must determine how to categorize various types of people in terms of gender and sexual orientation, and they must also determine how to label particular sections of the site in terms of appropriate acronyms (e.g., "MSM" as an acronym for "men seeking men"). Selecting a site that was not restricted to gay men allowed me to analyze, not only the ads themselves, but also the structure of the site and the implications suggested by the categories used for different groups. The texts addressing the marginalization of men for reasons other than sexual orientation and trans status were taken from various books on men, masculinity, and male body image, as well as from a website dedicated to the publication of a book about transmen (Marcus, n.d.).

Marginalized Men

Sociologist Michael Kimmel (1994) reminds us that "manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance" (p. 128). In summarizing how

manhood has been constructed in the United States, he explains that “within the dominant culture, the masculinity that defines white, middle class, early middle-aged, heterosexual men is the masculinity that sets the standards for other men, against which other men are measured and, more often than not, found wanting” (pp. 124-125). Ultimately, these dominant men most often disparage the manhood of other men by questioning their masculinity and/or categorizing them as feminine in some way. In cases where this strategy proves more difficult, they often frame the other man’s masculinity as dangerous or excessive:

These very groups that have historically been cast as less than manly were also, often simultaneously, cast as hypermasculine, as sexually aggressive, violent rapacious beasts, against whom “civilized” men must take a decisive stand and thereby rescue civilization. Thus black men were depicted as rampaging sexual beasts, women as carnivorously carnal, gay men as sexually insatiable, southern European men as sexually predatory and voracious, and Asian men as vicious and cruel torturers who were immorally disinterested in life itself. (p. 135)

By framing all “other” men as either feminine, inhumanly violent, or both, the dominant men in power were able to position themselves as occupying a masculine yet civilized middle ground. Consequently, they chose this particular set of characteristics as the criteria for manhood.

One marginalized group not mentioned in Kimmel’s list consists of men who are feminized by other men based on appearance alone. According to Durgadas (1998), whose essay appears in a book on GLBT body image, fat men are framed as having a “physically questionable male status” because they are “visibly, palpably soft and round, neither lean and lithe, nor robustly muscular.” As a consequence, the fat man’s “male status is revoked” in that he is either ignored or not taken seriously because he is perceived as a “surrogate female” (p. 369) with “womanlike weakness” (p. 370). Durgadas, who identifies as bisexual, believes that “fatness is equitable to feminization for a man, for heterosexual men, but even more so for gay and bisexual men” because many of the predominant “types” of male bodies in the gay community require a man to be either svelte or muscular, but not fat (p. 369).⁴ Similarly, John Stoltenberg (1998), whose essay

appears in the same book on body image, states that he “grew up a fat kid” (p. 393) and came to associate the fat male body with a lack of masculinity:

I grew up deathly ashamed of being fat, never feeling like a real enough boy, never feeling like a virile enough young man, never feeling like a potent enough husband—and now desperately trying to pass as a butch enough gay man. . . . Food could fill me . . . but it made me fat, which reminded me of my mother and filled me with self-loathing. . . .

[I]nside I was still a self-hating fatso. (p. 406)

This construction of maleness involves neither genitalia nor overt masculine behavior, but it does frame body fat as gendered in two ways—directly, in that he makes a comparison to his own mother’s body, but also indirectly in the sense that overeating represents a lack of control. As Johnson (1997) points out, patriarchal culture frames men as “cool-headed [and] in control of themselves” while women are seen as “emotionally expressive, weak, hysterical, erratic and lacking in self-control” (p. 61). Stoltenberg’s description of his young adulthood suggests that he was “self-loathing” and “self-hating” not simply because he was fat, but also because of his awareness that fat would be perceived as womanly or unmanly.

Asian men also have a less manly image in U.S. culture. In a forthcoming book, *Transfigurations*, featuring photos of transsexual men, a transman named Ken (n.d.) explains how the expectations associated with the Asian male image can actually be a benefit to transmen:

Asian men in American culture are seen as emasculated, non-sexual, effeminate beings; not “men.” Since the bar is set so low for Asian men, all those secondary male characteristics were not expected of me when I transitioned, and it was easier to pass.

Fung (2004), whose essay appears in a book about men’s lives, agrees that Asians have been portrayed in the U.S. as “undersexed,” but he points out that this assumption has not been made of all Asians:

In North America, stereotyping has focused almost exclusively on what recent colonial language designates as “Orientals”—that is East and southeast Asian peoples—as opposed to the “Orientalism” discussed by Edward Said, which concerns the Middle East.

. . . Within the totalizing stereotype of the “Oriental,” there are competing and sometimes contradictory sexual associations based on nationality. So, for example, a person could be seen as Japanese and somewhat kinky, or Filipino and “available.” The very same person could also be seen as “Oriental” and therefore sexless. (p. 544)

With respect to gender-specific images, Fung explains that an Asian man is typically seen as either an “egghead/wimp” or as a “kung fu master/ninja/samurai.” In other words, “he is sometimes dangerous, sometimes friendly, but almost always characterized by a desexualized Zen asceticism” (p. 544). He compares this image to that of the Black man who has been perceived in the U.S. as possessing a “threatening hypersexuality” (p. 544).

In his essay, “Confessions of a Nice Negro, or Why I Shaved My Head,” Robin Kelley (2004) considers this stereotype of Black masculinity. He explains, “It’s an established fact that our culture links manhood to terror and power, and that black men are frequently imaged as the ultimate in hypermasculinity” (p. 337), but in his own case, he found that he had not been perceived this way:

The older I got, the more ensconced I became in the world of academia, the less threatening I seemed. . . . Being a “nice Negro” has a lot to do with gender, and my peculiar form of “left-feminist-funny-guy” masculinity . . . is regarded as less threatening than that of most other black men. (p. 337)

After he shaved his head, however, people reacted very differently: “The new style accomplished what years of evil stares and carefully crafted sartorial statements could not: I began to scare people. The effect was immediate and dramatic. Passing strangers avoided me and smiled less frequently” (p. 338). Ultimately, Kelley believes that the fear of Black men is related to the culture’s association of manhood with violence:

If our society . . . could dispense with rigid, archaic notions of appropriate masculine and feminine behavior, perhaps we might create a world that nurtures, encourages, and even rewards nice guys. If violence were not so central to American culture—to the way manhood is defined, to the way in which the state keeps African-American men in check,

to the way men interact with women, to the way oppressed peoples interact with one another—perhaps we might see the withering away of white fears of black men. (pp. 340-341)

His comments suggest that a Black man who does not come across as frightening or violent is framed as less masculine or less than manly. While African Americans are marginalized *as* African Americans in U.S. culture, Kelley is not suggesting that all Black men are marginalized as men. Rather, they are seen as less than manly if they fail to perform the extreme forms of masculinity and hypersexuality that are not required of White men.

Describing himself as “a shy, smart black kid raised in the white suburbs,” Keith Boykin (1996, p. 11) explains in his own book that he also did not fit the stereotype of hypersexuality. For example, during his junior year of college, his “sexual activity had not advanced beyond masturbation” even though “family and societal pressures had pushed me into dating” (p. 10). Part of his education about manhood and masculinity came from his uncle who warned him not to move his hips like a woman when he walked. Consequently, as a young man Boykin did not believe that he was gay because he had been taught that all gay men were feminine: “Since I was not particularly effeminate and had never desired to dress in women’s clothes, I thought I could not possibly be gay. I identified homosexuality not by sexual behavior but primarily by failure to conform to gender roles” (p. 12). As a man, Boykin is positioning himself between the African American stereotype of hypersexuality/masculinity and the gay stereotype of effeminacy, with particular attention to normative gender roles.

Black transmen have also addressed the juxtaposition of race and gender roles in the U.S. In the forthcoming book, *Transfigurations*, Dex (n.d.) describes how living as a Black man has been different from living in the role of a Black woman:

I used to be a black woman who always spoke my mind, and people would either ignore me or shake their heads and move on. Now, if I speak my mind as a black man, I see fear in peoples’ eyes. I see them step back from me. I’m an officer with the LAPD. When I’m in uniform people don’t see the color of my skin, they see the color of authority. Out

of uniform I'm now seen as the "scary black man" who is just one step away from a 9-1-1 call.

Louis Mitchell, who is quoted in a national news magazine on race and politics, also found himself under suspicion, explaining, "I am a Black man, and therefore if something is stolen while I am in the neighborhood, then I am a suspect" (Hernández, 2008, para. 23). He reports that shortly after he transitioned from living in the role of a Black woman to living as a Black man, discriminatory treatment increased: "I got pulled over 300 percent more than I had in the previous 23 years of driving, almost immediately. It was astounding" (para. 2). Like Dex, Louis found that his experience living in the role of a woman and then in the role of a man has allowed him to conclude that discrimination can be worse for Black men than for Black women in certain contexts.

Drew (2002), whose comments appear in *Body Alchemy: Female to Male Transsexuals*, a photography book about transmen by Loren Cameron, addresses not only the public image of Black men, but also the difficulty some Black transmen experience in finding a sense of community:

It's hard being treated like I'm an evil black man who's just waiting to commit a crime. White people will never truly understand what it's like being black, and I can't find any comfort in a black community that does not accept me for being transsexual. (pp. 77-78)

This experience of rejection from two marginalized communities can be compared to the experience of Black men who are also gay, in that some members of the Black community do not accept gayness and some members of the gay community are racist. As Boykin (1996) explains:

All white people, whether they be gay or straight, are indoctrinated early on by a racist society that promotes conformity to a narrow norm. Similarly, all black people are indoctrinated in this same racist, homophobic system. To suggest that white gay people are not racist is as ludicrous as suggesting that blacks are not homophobic. Blacks are homophobic and white gays are racist *because* they all develop and live in the same homophobic, racist society. (p. 234)

Similarly, all transgender people are indoctrinated into the same system which is also transphobic. As a result, transmen such as Drew may face rejection from both Black and transgender communities.

Finally, Lyle (n.d.), also quoted in *Transfigurations*, has had a particularly difficult time negotiating his change in social status from Black woman to Black man because he does not identify with many cultural images of Black men, yet at the same time he also lacks identification with Black men who grew up as male:

The caricatures and stereotypes in the media are a large part of my internalized racism and self-hatred. I don't know how to be a black man. I find myself without the coping skills to survive in the world that you learn when growing up with other black men. (slide 10)

In Lyle's case, the media images that have affected the public's view of Black men in the U.S. have also affected his personal sense of identity. As a transman, he identifies as a man, but not with the stereotypical image of a Black man in U.S. culture.

Representations of Transmen

Marginalized groups have always had a love-hate relationship with media because, as suggested in Chapter 1, negative or inaccurate media representations of these groups can sometimes do more harm than an absence of representation. While members of these groups may take offense, at times refusing to consume particular media, their lives are unavoidably affected by widespread texts and images. As Gross (1991) explains, "some of us can personally secede from the mass mediated mainstream, or sample from it with great care and selectivity" but "we cannot thereby counter its effect on our fellow citizens" (p. 34). Consequently, marginalized groups of men such as fat, Asian, and Black men, cannot prevent media representations from having negative effects on their social image, although they can attempt to mitigate those effects through their own rhetorical efforts. This is also true for gay and transsexual men.

The remainder of this chapter will examine representations of transmen, particularly gay transmen, in various forms of media such as editorial columns, essays, books, and documentaries,

with some additional comments about online personal advertisements. Some of the written material was authored by transmen themselves while other material was written about them by others.

Newspaper Columns and Published Essays

Those writing about transmen in various forms of print media demonstrate a broad spectrum of attitudes on the subject, from enthusiastic and supportive to harshly critical and dismissive. If a lack of knowledge about transsexualism is assumed to be a primary explanation for this wide range of opinion, the content of media representations clearly has an impact on public perceptions. One early article focusing on transmen was written in 1995 for the *San Francisco Bay Times* (2011), which today sports a banner describing the publication as “The Gay/Lesbian/Bi/Trans Newspaper & Events Calendar for the Bay Area.” The author of the the article, Jack Fertig (1995), described himself as a “genetic male” (para. 18) acting as a “gay observer writing to a largely gay audience” (para. 18). Mr. Fertig had attended what he called “the world’s first conference of female-to-male transsexuals” (para. 4) featuring a speech by Jamison Green, who was then the director of FTM International. In Green’s 2004 autobiography, he refers to this conference as “the first ‘All-FTM Conference of the Americas’” and explains that the title was chosen to acknowledge the fact that “national conferences of FTMs had previously taken place in other countries.” Therefore, on behalf of FTM International he “did not want to dismiss those events by claiming ours as the first National FTM Conference, or the first International FTM Conference” (p. 85).

Fertig (1995) strikes a decidedly positive tone in this article, describing “FTMs” as “some of the sexiest men on the planet” and arguing that they are “real men as no other men are” because they “have had to construct their masculinity from the ground up, to overcome everything around them just to be men” (para. 9). It is notable that he is using the terms *masculinity* and *man* almost synonymously here. This not only implies that all men are masculine, but also suggests that it is imperative for transmen to exhibit masculinity rather than femininity if they are to be perceived as men. He goes on to relate transmen’s personal identity construction to U.S. conceptions of

manhood: “Our mythos of masculinity tells us that this is what a ‘real man’ is—self-creative, independent, willing to stand up to convention to be himself, to live a life of honest responsibility.” Here, Fertig is defining the concept of *man* as he believes it is constructed in U.S. culture. This construction is focused on behavior and character with no mention of male anatomy, allowing him to frame some transmen as paragons of manhood. He then contrasts this image of idealized manhood with his perception of most heterosexual men who, he feels, tend to “take their masculinity for granted, acting out scripts without questioning” (para. 9). In other words, men who perform their manhood by simply copying the behavior of other men are not enacting creativity or independence, and they are not standing up to convention.

Throughout the article, Fertig (1995) educates his readers with information about hormones and surgeries, but his main focus is the conference and its participants. He exclaims, for example, that “there was considerable discussion of transphobia in the gay community!” and he cites the following comments made by various transmen:

“Gay men are not accepting. They’re assholes.” “I’d get to meet guys for a one time blow job, but if I tried to get to know them they’d cut me off.” A friend says, “Yeah, that’s the gay world.” “I hung out with the gay group in college and they made it clear that I was welcome to be with them, but I wasn’t one of them.” (para. 29)

In Fertig’s initial reaction to these remarks, he begins to discipline his own community of gay men about their treatment of transmen:

Queers should know better, but we don’t necessarily. Clearly a lot of the guys felt very shut out, alienated, and angry. One reported that some of the gay men he works with still call him “she” and make other rude remarks. (para 30)

In an attempt to explain the behavior of his fellow gay men, Fertig noted the common belief that “transsexuals are merely homosexuals who have so internalized their homophobia that they identify as ‘the opposite sex’ rather than own their homosexuality.” To this he replies “Pish-tosh!” and explains:

A number of these guys had been living and functioning as ‘Lesbians,’ but when they started taking testosterone their sexualities changed as radically as their bodies. Now they’re Gay. There was less internalized homophobia here than I normally see walking through the Castro. Much less!” (para. 24)

This is a significant point, although it does tend to imply that all gay transmen had previously lived as lesbians. This implication is underscored by the fact that he then proceeds to quote three conference attendees who all reference previous relationships with women. It may be that he never encountered a transman who had previously lived in the role of a heterosexual woman, but the fact that he never mentions this possibility suggests that it may not have occurred to him.

Taking a more philosophical turn, Fertig (1995) speculates that one reason for the behavior of natal male gay men may be that they feel somewhat threatened by the apparent instability of personal identity that transsexual transition suggests:

For those of us who are largely defined by our sexuality—and have fought for positive identification and definitions—it can be a bit frightening to see how fluid sexuality and gender can be. . . . What does this tell homosexuals? That our own sexuality is mutable? That we can be “cured” with hormones? (para. 32-33)

It seems reasonable to suggest that the apparent evidence of a change in sexual orientation might unnerve some gay and lesbian people. However, it is unlikely that gay men react to this information by anticipating that others will attempt to alter their sexuality with hormones since additional testosterone will not render a gay man heterosexual. If this were the case, it would already be a common means of “treatment.”

Finally, Fertig (1995) concludes that gay transmen should be accepted as members of the gay male community, but he also allows for the fact that some gay males may not find a transman’s anatomy appealing:

We can embrace gay FTMs as friends and as brothers without threatening anything more than our own preconceived notions. We can embrace other FTMs as fellow queers. Embracing gay and bi FTMs as lovers may be more challenging. . . . Generally speaking,

Faggots are very phallogentric, and the bedroom is no place to be PC. Nobody has the right to tell anyone else who they should have sex with, but a lot of these men are pretty hot! (para 34-35)

While this comment may come across as negative, Fertig is actually framing transmen as no different from other gay men in the sense that various aspects of appearance and anatomy will be attractive or unattractive to different people. He is making the point that a natal male gay man can “embrace gay FTMs as friends and brothers” without being attracted to them, just as he makes friends with other natal males to whom he is not attracted. Fertig then concludes his comment by suggesting that natal males may be surprised to find that they are, in fact, attracted to some transmen.

This example of a natal male gay man writing positively, and publicly, about gay transmen was the exception rather than the rule in the mid-1990s. Patrick Califia (1997/2003b), now a bisexual transman, addressed the subject of relationships between natal males and gay transmen in 1997 when he was still living in the role of a woman. At that time, he speculated that “gay male misogyny and fear of women’s genitals . . . play an important role in that community’s attitude toward the growing number of transsexual men who identify as bisexual or gay.” He recognized that “vulvaphobia is by no means universal among homosexual men,” but based on his own observations, “many gay men seem to harbor a surprising amount of hatred and resentment toward women” (p. 157). Califia saw this particular segment of the gay male community as enacting a form of “gay male separatism”:

Thus, we have a certain segment of the gay male community that views its erotic activities as a sort of boys’ club, from which it is important to exclude women, who are assumed to be inferior and unattractive. One of the artifacts of gay male separatism is the variety of man-to-man porn that features weird misogynist asides, as if deriding women’s bodies were a form of foreplay. (p. 157)

Califia added that “the masculine secondary sexual characteristics” of a male partner are important to this type of man because they “blot out, preempt, and otherwise insure the absence of feminine

physicality.” Therefore, “FTMs have little hope of being accepted by men whose enjoyment of another man’s body depends on this dynamic” (p. 157). On the other hand, Califia also noted that some gay men “are able to read an FTM’s body as male and attractive if certain signifiers, which vary with the individual, are present. These could include baldness, a furry chest, a stout or muscular physique, [or] a boyish appearance” (p. 157). In other words, a sufficient number of physical characteristics that read as male could compensate for the lack of normative male genitalia. Unfortunately, however, Califia did not frame this apparent acceptance as entirely positive:

A fetish for FTMs is being developed. A sexual encounter with a transsexual man has become a badge of courage, outrageousness, and novelty in some quarters. A gay man who views himself as a sexual outlaw or an explorer of the wild frontiers of pleasure is more likely to view a transsexual man’s body as a fascinating opportunity to experience something new. (p. 157)

Collectively, Califia’s comments from 1997 create a rather pessimistic scenario: If you are a transman, natal gay males will either reject you for not being male at birth, or they will use you sexually in order to prove their masculine courage. In retrospect, knowing that Califia would soon transition himself, one might be tempted to wonder whether or not his personal concerns had been impacting his outlook at the time this was written.

In a different essay from the same year, Califia (1997/2003b) suggested that another obstacle to relationships between natal males and transmen was the natal male’s fear that his gay male friends would “ridicule or reject him” if they discovered that his partner was a transman: “To the extent that he is perceived as bisexual for having a transsexual male partner (who is not accepted as male), this rejection will consist of intertwined biphobia and transphobia” (p. 217). In this scenario, the fact that some gay males decline to recognize transmen as men has a domino effect in that the framing of transmen as women also reframes their gay male partners as bisexual. Consequently, these male friends of the transman’s male partner lose their ability to identify with the man they now see as bisexual; while they continue to view him as a man, they no longer

recognize the friend they thought they knew. Califia's reference to "intertwined biphobia and transphobia" describes a fear and rejection of otherness that both the transman and his male partner now trigger.

In a 1999 essay, Califia (2002) also addressed the fact that gay men are often stereotyped as effeminate, and he suggested that this public image might affect how natal gay males interpret the concept of *man*:

It's been hard for gay men to welcome the sudden influx of gay or bisexual FTMs. After fighting hard for the right to relate sexually to other men's cocks and defending themselves from a culture that sees homosexual men as emasculated, most gay men can't expand their definition of "manhood" to include people who weren't born male. (p. 29)

Put simply, if gay men have been fighting a feminine stereotype, the acceptance of transmen as gay men is perceived as a step backward in that the female aspects of a transman's body appear to justify the stereotype because female anatomy is assumed to correspond with femininity.

Later, during the early stages of his transition, Califia's (2002) expectations concerning natal males did not appear to have changed. Writing in 2000, he speculated, "Even when I have facial hair and a flat chest, there will be many xy gay men who will not want to accord me the courtesy of male pronouns. There's a lot of fear and loathing of female anatomy among Kinsey 6 fags."⁵ He attributed this to the idea that many gay men "base their common identity on having a dick" (p. 132). Writing again in 2002, his comments were more introspective: "The bottom line, so to speak, in our culture is: Men have penises. I wanted a penis when I was three years old and, goddammit, I still want to know where the hell it is" (p. xx). While having normative male genitalia is not important to all transmen, this perceived lack is a source of distress for some, suggesting that the conflation of manhood with physical maleness is not restricted to natal males. While some natal males may reject transmen on this basis, the transman's own self-rejection can also serve as an obstacle to relationships if his body never feels adequate.

Finally, in 2001 Califia (2002) wrote, "It is hard to claim the word 'man,' easier to simply define as FTM (female-to-male) or transgendered. I had accumulated forty-five years of

history operating in the world as a woman” (p. 393). Then, the following year, he wrote the following: “I don’t know—and may never know—what it’s like to be a man. I will probably always be a female-to-male transsexual who passes”⁶ (Califia, 2003a, p. xiii). These comments are not addressing a lack of physical maleness, but an absence of enculturation, suggesting that one aspect of being a man is the experience of being raised to be a man, and then living as one within the culture. Most transmen were not raised to be men, and the amount of time that they are able to live as men varies considerably. Those transmen who state that they cannot call themselves men for this reason are constructing a definition of *man* that requires consistent interpellation of men *as men* throughout their lives—a definition that would apply to precious few transmen. Those who also conflate manhood with physical maleness are constructing an added burden which effectively shuts out transmen entirely.

As texts available for public consumption, Califia’s published essays (compiled into the books cited above) have a potential impact on public perceptions of transmen, and the fact that he now identifies as a transman himself adds credibility to his comments, including those written prior to his transition. However, given Califia’s notoriety within the GLBTQ community, his relationship to media has also included interviews conducted with him and statements made about him by others.

In the case of columnist Michael Alvear, whose national newspaper column has likely attracted more readers than Califia’s published books, one could argue that the public image of transmen has taken a step backward. In a 2003 review of Califia’s book, *Speaking Sex to Power: The Politics of Queer Sex*, Alvear offered a decidedly sarcastic portrayal of Califia, who had transitioned by that time. In his first paragraph, he refers to Califia as “Patty. Or rather Pat. I mean, Patrick.” He then proceeds as follows:

Patrick Califia used to be a woman. The kind of woman that liked other women. But now she’s a man. The kind that likes other men. Basically, what we have here is a carpet-licking lesbian who turned into a cock-sucking queer. It just doesn’t get any weirder than that. (para. 2)

While Alvear allows that “Califia has a lot to say about gender identity that’s worth hearing” (para. 6), the sarcastic asides are relentless:

There’s something a little annoying about Califia’s demand to be called whatever he feels like being called, regardless of his anatomy. He’s like a bush resenting the grass for not calling it a tree. Well, if you’ve got a bush and no trunk are you really a tree? (para. 7)

Alvear’s association of manhood with physical maleness is unmistakable here, and his sarcastic tone suggests that this association is beyond question among rational human beings. As a result, his attitude toward Califia encourages his readers to view, not only Califia, but all transmen with similar disdain.

In 2009, Califia was interviewed by online columnist Richard Burnett who indicated that he had previously interviewed Califia “before she transitioned from a lesbian woman into a bisexual trans man” (para. 1). Not unlike Jack Fertig, who chided gay men for their insensitive treatment of transmen, Burnett muses, “You’d think the gay community would be more disposed to supporting trans rights than straight people, because we’re both battling the heterosexual establishment” (para. 4). On the subject of trans inclusion in the gay and lesbian rights movement, he provides a comment made by Califia during their interview:

Every minority group that wins a little bit of power uses that power to step on somebody else. I’ve never seen this pattern change. Human beings continue to be prejudiced and afraid of the “Other,” even if they are an “Other” to somebody else. (para. 5)

What Califia is describing here could be framed as a counterpublic (gay men) discriminating against another internal counterpublic (transmen)—what Fraser (1992) refers to as “informal exclusion and marginalization” (p. 124). However, it might best be framed as what Orbe (1998) has termed co-cultural oppression, or the scenario in which a co-cultural group that is marginalized by a more dominant social group is simultaneously marginalizing some of its own members (p. 51). In this case, Califia is suggesting that the gay and lesbian segment of the GLBT community sometimes “wins a little bit of power” within the larger society, but then “uses that power to step on” the transgender members of its own population.

Some of Califia's comments in this more recent interview appear to indicate that his view of natal gay males has not altered over the years:

As far as most men of all sexual orientations are concerned, it is the presence or absence of a penis that determines your gender. Many gay men are afraid of and hate women, sad to say. If they perceive a transman as having female genitals, that means he is icky and ruins the erotic tone of an all-male gathering. (Burnett, 2009, para. 8)

Again, he does not attribute this attitude to all natal gay males, but to "many." However, his view of men in general is not universally positive:

Nobody should be a man—the world won't be okay until men stop existing. . . . It was actually pretty hard for me to transition on days when I felt like I was going to join the people who spit on the sidewalk and look up women's skirts every chance they get. But one of the exciting things about being an FTM is the possibility of creating new forms of masculinity. (para. 3)

By stereotyping "man" as one who engages in behaviors he finds offensive, while simultaneously arguing for multiple forms of masculinity, Califia appears to be defining the term *man* as having a stable (if unpleasant) social meaning. He suggests that transmen have the "possibility of creating new forms of masculinity," yet he does not make the same argument about new forms of manhood. The resulting implication is that masculinity is socially constructed and therefore fluid, while the term *man* cannot be stretched to include "new forms" beyond that associated with the natal male body.

This view is apparently shared by some members of the gay male leather community. In 2006 an article in San Francisco's *Bay Area Reporter* described an ongoing controversy over the exclusion of transmen from the International LeatherSIR/Leatherboy (ILL) competition. The author, Zak Szymanski, explained that this particular contest had a "worldwide policy" requiring that contestants be "born male" (para. 2), even though other local and national men's leather clubs did not, and he quoted local leathersmen who were refusing to associate with ILL in protest of this policy. In his analysis of the controversy, Szymanski described three contributing factors: 1)

Transmen do not “present with anatomy” that is normatively male; 2) transmen had not been “adequately indoctrinated into their gender’s culture”; and 3) the acceptance of transmen and genderqueer individuals at “women’s events” has made it more difficult for transmen to be “taken seriously as men” (Gender Divide section, para. 1-2). He also pointed out that some transmen were rejecting the acronym “FTM” due to its increasing association with the women’s community (Gender Divide section, para. 3). On this subject, Szymanski quoted Marcus Arana, a “discrimination investigator with San Francisco’s Human Rights Commission,” who suggested that “there is this funny idea that an FTM is somehow a frog to a butch lesbian pollywog” (Gender Divide section, para. 7). In other words, some people make the assumption that lesbians and transmen are on the same continuum, with transmen positioned as the more extreme version. Arana refuted this, however: “I know lots of gay male FTMs who were never lesbians. Their queer identity is tied up in being men. So to suddenly tell this gay man he can’t participate because his penis is two-inches long is a bit ironic” (Gender Divide section, para. 11).

There is another interesting twist to the ILL story. Szymanski (2006) noted that the “born male” rule had allowed a transwoman to hold a LeatherSIR/Leatherboy title because she stated her identity as a woman when there were only six weeks of her title remaining. A contest official explained that this individual “was male identified when he entered the contest,” so the title was not being stripped from her. However, had she stated her identity as a woman on the application, “it would have been a whole different story” (Gray Area section, para. 9-10). In other words, even though she was legally male (and born male) when the contest began, an acknowledgement of her identity as a woman would have disqualified her. This makes clear that the central issue in the controversy over transmen was not whether or not one was born male, but the fact that one was a transsexual.

More recently, the status of transmen within the gay male leather community has taken a dramatic turn. As reported on the Website for *The Advocate*, a transman won the 2010 title of International Mr. Leather. The brief article describes the 32-year-old Tyler McCormick as “a female-to-male transgender man who uses a wheelchair” (“Trans Wheelchair User Wins IML

2010,” 2010, para. 2). The International Mr. Leather contest (which is a different event than International LeatherSIR/Leatherboy) does require that contestants be “male” and provide “government issued photo identification” to prove sex and age; however, it does not require that one was *born* male (“International Mr. Leather, Inc.,” 2011, para. 3).

While this turn of events could be viewed as a sign of progress for transmen within the gay male community, the numerous posts in response to this article suggest otherwise. Space considerations do not allow for extensive quotation from these posts, but I offer the following representative examples:

What a joke. IML used to be where hot men in leather hung out and did their thing. This year was more like an episode of Glee. . . . Everyone showing up in leather tuxedos like they were at a lesbian wedding. . . . The King of the Leather Men is now a trans “man” who won it as a feel-good booby prize. . . . He’s about as masculine as Mrs. Roper. If THAT is the “ideal” leather “man,” leave me out of it. The trans community is ruining everything. Have your own events. I’m so sick of having “men” with vaginas show up at our play parties and try to get the gay men to have sex with them, I’m sick of being told that we “need to be inclusive.” (BrianR, 2010, June 3)

This individual, whose screen name is BrianR, places the word *man* in quotation marks when speaking of a transman, also using female references such as “lesbian wedding” and “booby prize.” For him, the acceptance of transmen in this context is taking the concept of inclusiveness too far. In another post the following day he writes:

If you don’t have a penis, you’re not a man, leather or otherwise. . . . Last year we had a boring, unattractive deaf guy. . . . The way we’re going, next year it’ll be a blind 17-year-old vegan girl with Down’s Syndrome. . . . Few people have the guts to say it publicly. But everyone I’ve spoken to agrees that IML died this year. (BrianR, 2010, June 4)

This comparison between McCormick and a previous winner who was deaf makes clear that McCormick’s use of a wheelchair served to undermine his manhood for some. As Connell (2005)

explains, “the constitution of masculinity through bodily performance means that gender is vulnerable when the performance cannot be sustained—for instance, as a result of physical disability” (p. 54). If men like BrianR see the disabled as less than manly, this is particularly true for a disabled transman.

A posted comment by a man with the screen name Stephen Lane (2010, June 4) states that McCormick’s participation in the contest was damaging to the whole leather community because, Lane believed, fewer natal males were now attending these contests. He concludes his post by referring to McCormick as “Sarah Palin in leather.” The following day, “John in SF” (2010, June 5) made the following comparison:

The very same thing has happened at the local sauna. It has been invaded by trans “guys” and we are just supposed to pretend that we like it. The place is filled with “information pamphlets” aka propaganda, that tells us everything we want to know about sex with transmen. Sorry, I go to sex clubs to have sex with men, I want a dick. . . . Reality is that gay men want a penis. Sorry transguys, I totally believe that you can have your freedom, but that doesn’t mean that we lose our freedom to sleep with men with dicks. It really is that simple.

Again, quotation marks are used, this time for the term *guys*. This individual states directly that gay males are only attracted to men with normative penises, and the presence of transmen in a male space is framed as an “invasion,” implying that transmen are something other than men. It is interesting to note that one of the owners of the referenced “local sauna” subsequently posted that his business had “always been open to trans men” for the previous twenty years.

An individual in Los Angeles with the screen name “Ox” (2010, June 10) made comments about Mr. McCormick that would appear to verify the concerns previously expressed by Patrick Califia. He explains that the problem with McCormick’s participation is not simply that “she” lacked a penis, but also that McCormick “brings into the leather community something 99% of us avoid...something repulsive...pussy. . . . We wear leather to attract men, not pretenders with pussys [sic]...she should have known better.” As Califia had stated during his interview with

Richard Burnett (2009), “many gay men” perceive female genitals as “icky” (para. 8). In another post one week later, an individual in Los Angeles with the similar screen name “Ox from Oxballs” (possibly the same person, although this is not certain) appears to be insisting that manhood requires the “indoctrination” into manhood that had been referenced by Szymanski (2006, Gender Divide section, para. 1). Ox from Oxballs (2010, June 17) addresses his post to McCormick directly: “Why must IML, the largest event for leatherMEN, include your sorry pussy in our event? . . . It’s more than dick, or ‘looking male’, it’s what comes with the meat, a lifetime of exploring masculinity, exploring men...not pussy.” This comment seems to imply that a transman could not have spent a lifetime “exploring masculinity,” either because he was not male throughout his life or because he had not always lived as a man. Here, the male body is not only conflated with manhood, but also with masculinity. In addition, by stating that a contestant should have been “exploring men...not pussy,” Ox from Oxballs appears to assume that transmen all have had a sexual history with female-bodied partners.

Finally, this post from an individual with the screen name Rodney Moorecock (2010, June 24) attempts to summarize the complaints that had been posted by a number of gay men in response to the article about McCormick:

I just love how we are all Trans-phobic just because we want a man (with a cock and balls) to win International Mister Leather! Suddenly we are all horrible bigots for stating the obvious: 1. Tyler does not have a penis or balls and has never had them, so he’s not a man...yet. 2. Tyler is not even an attractive Trans-man, I’ve seen a few and he isn’t one of them, sorry. 3. Tyler doesn’t have a hot body; the wide female ass not to mention the vagina don’t scream Mr. IML. . . . IML shouldn’t be about letting the “fat chick” become the Prom Queen to show how progressive we all are, it should be about finding the Hottest Leatherman with the best personality...somebody you’d like to fuck, not have a benefit for.

In addition to reiterating that one cannot be a man without a penis, this statement's reference to having a "benefit" alludes to McCormick's use of a wheelchair, suggesting that the winner of this contest must be fully able-bodied.

The content in all of the above posts is grounded in the assumption that a man must be a natal male with no trace of female genitalia, and must have lived as a man throughout his life. More specifically, the winner of a leatherman contest must also be a fully able-bodied and attractive man; indeed, references to Tom of Finland drawings were common amongst these posts, suggesting that the winner of such a contest should be exceptionally muscular and well endowed, even more so than the average male. While supporters of McCormick's participation and success in the contest were also represented throughout the list of posted responses, the majority exhibited a degree of vitriol at the prospect of a transman identifying as a man in what is perceived to be male-only space. Applying the concept of identification to this scenario, one might speculate that while McCormick has no difficulty in identifying with other leathermen, natal males may find themselves unable, and unwilling, to identify with transmen such as McCormick. The frequent references to physical attractiveness and male anatomy in these posts suggest that the authors desire to see a contest winner who exhibits an idealized version of maleness and manhood to which they could personally aspire, and they are unable to place McCormick in this category.

The gay male leather community is, of course, a particular segment of a much larger social group. Dan Savage (2005a), a gay natal male who writes a syndicated advice column called "Savage Love," sometimes receives letters on the topic of intimacy between transmen and natal males. For example, in November of 2005, a natal male reader explained that he was having difficulty locating a "hypermasculine man with a vagina instead of a penis," and he signed his letter as "The Impossible Fantasy" (para. 1). Savage responded that he had been receiving "at least one sad letter a month" from gay transmen unable to find natal gay male partners "who can get past the man-with-a-vagina thing," so he asked the transmen among his readers to speculate as to why this particular natal male was having this problem (para 2).

A week later, Savage (2005b) printed some of the responses he had received. One transman, Alex, had a number of suggestions for the reader known as “The Impossible Fantasy.” First, he pointed out that “most transfags . . . do not consider themselves hypermasculine.” He then added that “there are definitely transfags into having sex ‘up front,’ as they say, but it’s not something that people like to advertise.” Finally, he speculated that many gay transmen had simply given up hope of finding natal male partners; they consider it “a lost cause and aren’t looking all that hard.” Consequently, he recommended that The Impossible Fantasy avoid groups and websites “geared toward sex and dating” in favor of “groups with political aims” or “support groups” (para. 3-7). Another transman, Paris, chided Savage for so frequently stating that “most gay guys don’t want anything to do with trannies, end of story.” Based on his own experience he claimed that “a lot of gay guys will give it a whirl if they’ve never been with a tranny before” (para. 16).

It is noteworthy that this conversation was initiated by a natal male who was searching for a transman since, as both Savage and Alex point out, it is more common to encounter transmen complaining of rejection by natal males. The initial comment from Alex, that most transmen do not identify as hypermasculine, is interesting in light of the fact that there are many transmen who enact stereotypically masculine behavior and attempt to achieve a distinctly masculine appearance, often as a means of compensating for aspects of their bodies that read more female than male. There are certainly many transmen who would not identify as hypermasculine, but there are also many who do. The suggestion that most transmen prefer not to “advertise” their desire for “up front” sex helps to support the contention that many transmen feel concerned that they will be perceived as women; hence, any public embrace of one’s female anatomy, particularly an acknowledgement of its use sexually, is considered counterproductive. As philosophy professor C. Jacob Hale (1998) explains, “transfags are more likely to be misrepresented as perversely phallic heterosexual women, especially if we derive sexual pleasure from penetration of that orifice into which a physician would insert a speculum to perform a pap smear” (p. 331).

On the whole, this collection of responses to *The Impossible Fantasy* offers a realistic portrait of the various tensions among transmen and natal males. Some transmen pursue male partners while others have become discouraged; meanwhile, some natal males completely reject transmen while others seek them out.

Five years later, Savage (2010) received a letter from a natal male who was dating a transman. In asking for advice about sex, this man stated that neither he nor his partner were comfortable with his partner's genitals: "What he does have down below doesn't interest either of us" (para. 1). Now more knowledgeable about trans issues than he had been in 2005, Savage offered the following advice:

I'm thinking there's a chance your FTM partner *is* comfortable with his body but he's painfully aware that *you* are not. Up to a certain point, that's understandable: You're a gay guy, not a bi guy, pussy isn't your thing, etc. But there's a point at which your aversion to pussy—*his* pussy—becomes unacceptable. . . . All fetuses start out as girls . . . until the process of sex differentiation kicks in and "masculinizing hormones," if they're present, turn little girl fetuses into little boy fetuses. . . . So you know what your FTM boyfriend has down there? *Pretty much all the same stuff you do*. His clit is analogous to the head of your cock, and his clit has a shaft just like your cock does. He has ovaries for balls and a clitoral hood for a foreskin. (para. 6-8)

Despite the vernacular language (i.e., "pussy") which some transmen would find offensive (myself included), Savage was providing accurate information seldom found in a newspaper column. His goal in pointing out that male and female bodies develop from the same tissue was to reduce this man's feelings of "aversion" to a genital construction that is really not so different from his own. Savage concluded this column by responding to a letter from a transman who had not yet dated a natal male and wanted to know what to expect from the gay male community:

The gay male community in a nutshell: There are some good guys out there, some okay guys, and lots and lots of assholes—pretty much the same as any other community—and there are definitely gay guys out there willing to go there with a cute FTM. (para. 24)

This comment marks a change in attitude for Savage. Five years earlier, the reader named Paris had criticized Savage for his cynicism about transman-natal male relationships, but now Savage was expressing greater optimism. Given the diverse readership of his column, which appears in numerous publications not specific to the GLBT community, these comments have likely served to educate a broad spectrum of the public, including natal male gay men, about the biology and psychology of transmen.

Thus far, I have cited the opinions of several natal gay males whose attitudes toward transmen have varied greatly. Jack Fertig (1995), who attended a conference for transmen, expressed admiration for the men he had encountered there, and he gently chided gay males for their rude behavior toward transmen by stating, “Queers should know better” (para 30). Richard Burnett (2009), who had interviewed Patrick Califia, struck a similar tone when he suggested, “You’d think the gay community would be more disposed to supporting trans rights” (para. 4). Conversely, Michael Alvear’s descriptions of Califia were completely dismissive, and the gay males posting comments about Tyler McCormick’s leatherman title were similarly negative. Because natal male gay men express a wide range of attitudes about transmen, it is reasonable to assume that their knowledge and understanding of transsexualism varies considerably. Consequently, the tone and accuracy of each media representation can have a tremendous impact.

The Work of Louis Graydon Sullivan

Those who know little or nothing about transsexualism are inclined to make their own assumptions. As Fertig (1995) noted in his article, many people assume that transsexualism is a form of “internalized homophobia” (para. 24). They also believe, as the discrimination investigator Marcus Arana pointed out, that transsexualism and homosexuality are on the same continuum, with transsexualism as the more extreme version. These assumptions not only position all transmen as lesbians, but also negate the possibility that gay transmen (as well as lesbian transwomen) even exist. For example, when Kim Elizabeth Stuart (1991) set out to interview transsexuals for her book, *The Uninvited Dilemma*, she “took it for granted” that transmen would be “exclusively interested in sexual relationships with women.” She explains:

It did not take me long to become disabused of that notion. When I first learned that some transsexuals had homosexual orientations in their chosen gender roles, I questioned whether they were really transsexuals at all and perhaps had sexual problems rather than gender discomfort. (p. 61)

When she interviewed a transman, however, she began to understand the issue:

I asked him . . . if he was attracted to men, why not just remain a woman and have relationships with men? This man, Andy, pointed out to me that relating to men as a woman and relating to men as a homosexual male are two quite different life experiences. (p. 62)

Once the issue of interpersonal communication was introduced, it became clear to Stuart that transsexualism “covers the entire spectrum of human activities” and “involves all aspects of living as defined by gender roles” (p. 58). In other words, it is neither a form of homosexuality nor a result of it. She consequently came to a definitive conclusion: “The fact that some transsexuals are homosexual in chosen gender roles clearly indicates that homosexuality and transsexualism are entirely separate issues” (p. 62).

The transman who put forth the greatest effort to refute false assumptions and affirm the existence of gay transmen was Louis Graydon Sullivan (1951-1991). Jamison Green (1998) provides a succinct description of Sullivan’s work in the late 1980s:

Perhaps Sullivan’s greatest contribution was his willingness to confront the medical/psychological establishment with the fact of his existence: Lou Sullivan identified himself as a gay man at a time when homosexual orientation was an automatic disqualification from transsexual diagnosis and treatment. Sullivan’s cogent arguments with several of the leading theoreticians and practitioners in the field led them to recant their previous ideology and to recognize that gender identity and sexual orientation are separate characteristics. (p. 146)

Indeed, gay transmen had been routinely rejected for transition-related treatment prior to Sullivan’s activism, and as a consequence, many such men began lying about their orientation. As

therapist Arlene Istar Lev (2004) explains, “It is unknown how many FTMs have hidden their gay identities from researchers and clinicians at gender clinics, who had already rendered gay transmen nonexistent” (p. 214). However, these clinicians were willing to listen to Sullivan. According to Green (2004), professionals “respected Sullivan because he was honest, intelligent, principled, and co-operative” (pp. 54-55). In addition to educating the medical establishment, Sullivan distributed an informational newsletter, corresponded with individuals who were contemplating transition, and founded a support group for transmen. This support group eventually became known as FTM International, which is still in existence today. Hale (1998) has referred to Sullivan as “the individual most responsible for ftm community formation in the United States” (p. 320).

Despite Sullivan’s work, however, some people continue to assume that all transmen see themselves as heterosexual men, and this is partly due to the fact that most media representations of transmen never acknowledge the existence of those who are gay. Either transmen are depicted in relationships with women, or else it is made clear that this is what they hope for in the future. In order to foreground the exceptions to this rule, I shall examine a sampling of representations that do acknowledge gay transmen, emphasizing any references to relationships between transmen and natal males.

Representations of Gay Transmen

Among transmen who are attracted to other men,⁷ some face rejection, some find relationships, and some fear rejection to the extent that they make no effort to seek relationships. In a recent academic publication, British scholar Tracey Yeadon-Lee (2010) quotes one of her interview subjects, a transman named Eric, who remains married to his natal male husband John after thirty years. Eric explains that while he identifies as a gay man and appears male to others, he allows friends and family to continue to refer to him as John’s “wife” because he is hesitant to leave the relationship:

I was thinking I could lose my sex life altogether. . . . The truth is that maybe nobody else would ever want me again . . . a straight man would find it difficult to be with me and a gay man . . . probably wouldn't want me because I don't have a willy. (p. 146)

Again, the assumption is made that a natal male gay man will reject a transman due to his genital configuration, so Eric has decided that "if what you've got's okay then you hang on to it" (p. 146).

This fear of rejection is confirmed by a transman named Nathan during an interview for *The Advocate*. When writer Tim Murphy (2007) spoke with a group of gay, lesbian, and transgender New Yorkers on the subject of transgender inclusion in the GLBT community, Nathan described the interactions he had had with gay males: "I'm attracted to gay men, and the treatment I get from them: 'Oh, you don't have a penis? You have a vagina? I don't want anything to do with that. You're really a woman.'" When a gay male participant, Kevin, was then asked if the lack of a penis would be a "deal-breaker" for him, he replied, "Unfortunately, it probably is, because I think a big part of being a gay man is liking cock." When Nathan was then asked if it was "OK for Kevin to say that," he responded, "Absolutely. You like what you like. But that's different from saying, 'You're not really a man'" (p. 46). Nathan makes a crucial distinction here. He can accept the rejection of his anatomy, but he refuses to accept the rejection of his identity. His membership in the social category of *man*, which affects his interpersonal communication with others on a daily basis, is essential to him in a way that sexual relationships are not.

Tucker Lieberman (2003) tells a more positive story in his autobiographical essay. Having begun testosterone during high school, and having completed male chest reconstruction surgery just before entering college, he found that being perceived as a man was a "most welcome normalcy." On the subject of relationships he writes, "I had assumed that after transition I would just date other gay men" (p. 105). As it turned out, this did not happen for him immediately, but a brief encounter around the time of his college graduation suggested an optimistic future:

I went to a personal growth workshop and was asked out by a gay man a little older than me. We turned out not to have much in common, so the relationship never grew past its infancy, and I never had to reveal what part of my body is missing. However, I hinted

about my transsexuality, and he affirmed that he was interested in me as a person and that I should trust him not to be shallow. Who knows, but if a gay man can find me attractive, maybe my case isn't so hopeless after all. (p. 114)

Lieberman was not rejected on the basis of anatomy, but his reference to disclosure of a "missing" body part reveals his concern that rejection was a distinct possibility. This memory is optimistic for him, however, not only because this man's interest confirmed Lieberman's outward attractiveness, but also because Lieberman's "hints" about his trans status did not lead to the rejection he feared.

Among those transmen who express an attraction to men rather than women, perhaps the best known (since the death of Lou Sullivan in 1991) is Matt Kailey, the author of an autobiography, published essays, and an online blog. I have not referred to Kailey as a "gay man" because of his particular history with this phrase. In a 2003 essay he wrote:

There are very few times when I actually consider myself a "gay man." I use the term socially because it seems easier for everyone to understand. But there are boundaries to "gayness," expectations of life experience that I have not had, expectations of certain behaviors into which I have not been socialized, and expectations of certain body parts that I do not possess. (p. 259)

His 2005 autobiography provides more detail on the history behind this decision:

I soon discovered that calling myself a gay man didn't go over very well with one particular population—gay men. Some gay men have become mightily offended when I've called myself a gay man. Ironically, the men who get the angriest with me when I mention that the "gay community" tends to be phallically oriented are the first to insist that I can't call myself a man because I don't have a penis. They go on to tell me that I'm not gay because I haven't had the "gay experience" in my life. (p. 87)

This construction of the term *man* is similar to that referenced by Patrick Califia, i.e., the belief that the term must be tied to both physical anatomy and social enculturation. For all practical purposes, however, Kailey recognized that as an individual who looked male and exhibited an

attraction to men, he would be defined by others as a gay man in social contexts, while intimate situations would prove more challenging:

Although I didn't transition to become a gay man, I knew that I would be perceived as such and that any potential partners would, at the very least, have to find male attributes attractive—but not all of them, only the ones that I possessed. (p. 64)

Here, Kailey is describing the irony faced by many gay transmen. Because he looks male, anyone who would be interested in him would have to be a person who is attracted to male attributes, e.g., facial and body hair, a flat chest, etc. Unfortunately, a majority of the people who are attracted to these attributes (gay males, heterosexual females) are also inclined to prefer that a normative male penis be present. On the other hand, a majority of those individuals who do *not* desire a partner with a normative male penis (heterosexual males, lesbian females) tend to reject other male attributes as well. There are, of course, many exceptions to this binary construction—individuals attracted to all manner of androgynous body types—but as they are not the majority, a transman such as Kailey might find that they are more difficult to locate.

In Kailey's (2005) experience, he has observed that women, more so than men, tend to be forgiving of a partner's non-normative anatomy:

It seems to be a little easier for transmen who desire female partners—many women don't rank a penis at the top of their list of necessary attributes in a man. For transmen who are attracted to men, and thus considered "gay" because of their male appearance, it can be more difficult. And, as luck would have it (my luck, at least), I am one of those guys. I even made up my own joke when I first started my transition: *Question: What do you call a gay man without a penis? Answer: Single.* (p. 62)

This predicament leaves transmen like Kailey in the position of meeting gay males who assume that he is also male until he tells them otherwise:

Coming out isn't just for gay people. As a transsexual, I had to come out *to* gay people. And any men who had shown an interest before my announcement vanished like quarters in a slot machine when they heard the news. (p. 66)

The question of when to come out to a potential partner is, consequently, a significant one for all transmen.

Kailey (2005) details one such experience in his own life. Somewhat reluctantly, he created an online profile, putting himself in the category of “gay man.” Despite his cynical assumption that online dating sites were filled with “hucksters and frauds,” he received a response from a man who seemed to be genuinely interested in him beyond the superficiality of appearance (p. 64). During their correspondence, Kailey revealed numerous facts about himself, but postponed mentioning his trans status: “We finally decided to meet, and I figured I would tell him then. I wanted him to *know* me first, I wanted him to *like me for me*” (p. 65). However, before the meeting could take place, he began to feel like a “fraud” himself:

I hadn’t exactly lied to him, but I certainly hadn’t been honest. I was a man, right? I was a gay man, right? Not really. At least not in the way that I had led him to believe. And the unfortunate truth was that I was not a man or a gay man in the way that I had led myself to believe, either. (p. 65)

Kailey finally decided to come out to this man prior to their meeting because “there was no way that he was going to like someone who was misleading him.” Subsequently, when he explained that he was a “female-to-male transsexual” in an instant message, the man was confused: “Does that mean your equipment doesn’t work?” Kailey replied, “No. It means I have no equipment.” After a pause, the man responded, “I wish you would have told me sooner. . . . I really like penises.” As a result, Kailey concludes, “that was the beginning of the end of my first and only Internet romance,” and he decided that he would come out to every potential partner from that point forward (p. 65).

Several years later, Kailey (2008) wrote an essay for 365 Gay, a website with news and opinion content for the GLBT community, in which he advocated that transmen come out to potential gay male partners “the-sooner-the-better.” His reasoning behind this was not so much the fear of rejection, but the concern for safety:

I have no desire to be in a strange apartment in a strange neighborhood with a strange (and maybe rather large and burly) guy who suddenly feels that I have “betrayed” him by not intimately discussing my physical configuration beforehand. (para. 7)

Kailey knows that his gay male readers will likely agree with this call for preemptive honesty from transmen, but he concludes with a direct plea to these readers: “We’re out there. You’ve met us, whether you know it or not. And we’re not trying to fool you—we’re just being ourselves, looking for the same things that you are” (para. 12).

Online Personal Advertisements

Kailey’s attempt at Internet dating led him to the conclusion that failing to divulge his trans status was misleading simply because most non-transgender individuals, including natal male gay men, tend to assume that anyone calling himself a man must have been born with a normative male body. Consequently, the very nature of the Internet as a virtual space where the body cannot be seen suggests a greater need for honesty (or proof of one’s claims, such as a photograph) than does face-to-face interaction. In an essay examining gay men in cultural spaces, Lambert (2006) suggests that online communities are able to function “only through the creating and sustaining of conjuncturally specific sets of protocols.” In the case of personals ads, such protocols involve a “descriptive exchange of measurements, physical attributes, and sexual tastes” (p. 63). Lambert explains how this required list of “stats” serves to reify a particular conceptualization of manhood that eschews diversity:

Although photographs are now routinely attached to profiles, the information required under the rubric of stats may include hair color, eye color, and race, but is more often connected to age, height, weight, and, most important, penis size (“cut” or “uncut” is also an important specific which one may be asked to clarify if it is not stated in the first response). Identities and bodies are summarized, sanitized, and modified to fit an immediate communal and environmental purpose. Rather than promoting difference in a political or individualistic sense, they are reduced to an easily reproduced code of manliness, the definition of what gay men should desire *to have* and desire *to be*. (p. 63)

Therefore, because the definition of *man* is more restricted in this space than it might be during face-to-face encounters, the expectation that transmen “out” themselves is greater, as is the likelihood of a negative reaction from natal males who feel that they have been deceived. Martino (2006) explains that some gay men routinely perform a “role of surveillance” because they are “differentially positioned in terms of appropriating regulatory power that enables them to crudely reduce and depersonalize another gay man on the basis of his penis size” (p. 53).

Depersonalization, in this case, reduces one’s manhood, and in some respects, his humanity, to the relative attractiveness and potency of one particular body part. As Butler (2004) stated, “the very terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status” (p. 2). If it is known that one is enacting a gender out of alignment with his birth sex and/or that he has altered his physical sex through hormones and surgery, he may not be recognized as a fellow human by some people. Consequently, a transman who lacks normative male genitalia may be recognized as neither man nor human.

In his analysis of transpeople placing personal ads on Craigslist, Farr (2010) found that “across all ads, the importance of being seen as a ‘real’ man or woman was clearly an important aspect of their identity construction and portrayal” (p. 93). As a means of persuading readers along these lines, transmen used “descriptors such as ‘strong,’ ‘big guy,’ and ‘hairy’ (facial hair was often specified) . . . to affirm a masculine interpretation” (p. 94). However, descriptions of genitals were “present only among those seeking casual encounters” in almost every case (p. 94).

As Farr (2010) notes, Craigslist provides a “T” category to allow advertisers to identify themselves as transgender, but “it is limiting in that this is only an option under casual encounters” (p. 95). I was able to confirm this in my own perusal of Craigslist (2011)⁸: I found no “T” categories in the section called “Men Seeking Men,” but the “Casual Encounters” section contained categories for men seeking transgender (“m4t”) and transgender seeking men (“t4m”), as well as the group combinations, man and woman seeking transgender (“mw4t”) and transgender seeking man and woman (“t4mw”). It is interesting to note that there were no categories that did not involve men, e.g., “w4t” or “t4w.” Given the lack of “T” categories in the “Men Seeking

Men” section, should this be interpreted to suggest that transmen would not be *interested* in seeking relationships beyond casual encounters, or that transmen would never be *desired* for anything other than casual encounters? In a cursory reading of the “Men Seeking Men” ads, using both “trans” and “FTM” as search terms, I found a greater number of transman-related ads under the term “FTM.” A search for “trans” ads located two natal males seeking transwomen, even though the section was titled “Men Seeking Men.” This suggests that the word *men* is perceived to be synonymous with *male*. In other words, a male seeking a transwoman might advertise within the “Men Seeking Men” section because he perceives a transwoman as a transgender male, not as a woman. Another ad from a natal male was titled “Seeking FtM/transman or T-gurl,” again anticipating that transwomen would be reading ads in the “Men Seeking Men” section. A search for “FTM” in this section found ads from natal males seeking casual encounters with transmen, as well as ads from transmen seeking everything from friendships to relationships to casual encounters with natal males. Only one ad seeking transmen mentioned friendship, but the identity category of the ad’s author was not stated. This sampling of ads was admittedly a small one, limited to one particular day, and is not in any way generalizable. However, it is interesting to note that those seeking transmen were only interested in casual encounters, while the ads written by transmen were more varied, also seeking friends and romantic partners. This calls to mind Patrick Califia’s (1997/2003b) suggestion that some natal male gay men are inclined to either reject transmen or simply engage in casual encounters as a “badge of courage, outrageousness, and novelty” (p. 157). Since Craigslist does not allow for posting responses to these ads, we do not know how transmen who read these ads reacted to the ways in which they were being described and to the requests that were being made of them. Future research similar to Farr’s, but focused on references to transmen, might provide greater insight.

Television and Film

The representation of transmen in online personal ads affects the public perception of transmen only to the extent that people enter these sites and read these ads. As such, the audience being influenced by these ads is relatively small. However, representations on television and in

film are more likely to be viewed by a wide variety of people. The documentary format is particularly influential because of the assumptions viewers make about the content of documentaries. Waugh (1997) notes that “the commonsense, layperson’s notion of documentary is that it is a window on an unscripted, undirected, unrehearsed, and unperformed reality.” These assumptions fail to recognize that a performative element cannot be avoided when a film crew is present. As Waugh explains, the “vast majority of documentary productions” focus on individuals who “have been aware, actively or passively, of the camera and, by extension, of the spectator” (p. 110). In other words, those filmed for documentaries are aware that their words will be heard and their behavior will be observed by a diverse audience, and this affects what they choose to say and do on camera. Waugh defines this type of performance as “self-expressive behavior carried out in awareness of the camera, with either explicit or tacit consent and/or in collaboration with the director” (p. 124). It should also be noted that directors and editors make choices concerning the content of the final product.

Given these parameters, I would like to address two documentaries that, while focused on natal male gay men, also contain representations of transmen. The first of these, *Bear Run*, is a documentary about the bear community, which is a co-culture within the gay community. Mann (2010) explains that “most GLBT folks” think of a bear as a “hairy, bearded, brawny-to-bulky gay man, usually displaying aspects of traditional masculinity.” He cites a 2007 survey indicating that “there are more than 1.4 million men in the U.S. who identify as bears” (p. 22). Sociologist Peter Hennen (2005) describes this community more specifically:

Bears reject the self-conscious, exaggerated masculinity of the gay leatherman in favor of a more “authentic” masculinity. This look includes (but is not limited to) jeans, baseball caps, T-shirts, flannel shirts, and beards. To the uninitiated, Bears seem above all to be striving for “regular guy” status. (p. 26)

Hennen further provides four reasons for the emergence of the bear community during the 1980s. He explains that this co-culture served as a “hedge against effeminacy,” as a co-optation of an earlier co-culture of heavy gay men known as “chubbies,” as an “eroticization” of these larger

bodies, and as a “reinterpretation” of larger bodies as indicators of “health, vigor, strength, and virility” in comparison to “AIDS-related wasting syndrome” (p. 29).

According to the Website “Bear Run The Movie” (n.d.), the film *Bear Run* follows the lives of three members of the community for one year, revealing the “contemporary rituals, language, values, and evolving aesthetic of bear culture.” The site describes bears as “a diverse community of men whose body types often defy the buff-gym-body-ideal seen plastered across mainstream gay culture. Bears embrace their body, their large and hairy physiques.” In providing a general overview of the film, the site also offers the following teaser: “One character tests the openness of bear culture about gender issues to see if it lives up to its values of acceptance and camaraderie. Can you guess who?” A viewing of the film provides the answer to this question when it becomes clear that one of the three men profiled, Mikhael, is a transman. The fact that the Website actually draws attention to this issue in the context of acceptance within the bear community suggests that the film’s creators consider the transman’s presence to be significant and perhaps even a sales attraction.

The film itself (Hunt & Baus, 2008)⁹ contains footage of Mikhael’s “life partner,” a woman named Sylvia, who is seen to be accepting of Mikhael’s upcoming trip to a bear event with a male friend. Mikhael describes himself as follows:

I identify as a queer bear that’s trans. I don’t tell a lot of bears that I am trans. . . . A lot of bears don’t know I’m trans. I don’t look trans. . . . Now I’m living as a straight man in a mainstream town and I’m actually a queer bear.

Mikhael and Sylvia had been in their relationship prior to his transition, and he may refer to himself as “queer” because of this history. While he is “living as a straight man” in terms of outward appearance, he does not think of himself as straight in the conventional sense. He also tells the story of a time when “word got out that I was trans, pre-surgery trans” within the bear community. Another bear had assured him, “Nobody’s gonna bother you,” but Mikhael felt uncertain as to how he would be treated. As it turned out, there was no problem: “I was a bear

and that was it. . . . They opened up their arms and just drug me into the group and, you know, here I am.” Another bear who was interviewed for the film said of Mikhael:

If his vision of himself is that he is a bear and a man, then that’s what he is regardless of, of anything else. I say good for her. No, not good for her, not good for her. Good for him.

This man explained that his pronoun slippage was partly due to the conversational style typically used by his group of bear friends:

When you’re not used to being in that situation, you know, you, you don’t think about it because when we’re all together, you know, we call each other bitch, she, he, whatever and, you know, we don’t think twice of it because there’s no reason for us to but, I mean, he seemed like he was fine with it but, you know, you don’t wanna be insensitive.

While there are no self-identified gay transmen depicted in *Bear Run*, it is significant that a transman is represented prominently in a film about a co-culture that is very predominantly populated by gay men. As Waugh noted, the participants in documentaries are aware of the camera, so it is certainly possible that the bears who were interviewed engaged in some degree of self-censorship in order to present themselves as unbiased, but as viewers we cannot know this for certain. In the case of this film, the message it delivers to its audience is perhaps more important than any hidden thoughts or feelings because it emphasizes that transmen are sometimes accepted within the gay male community.

The other documentary, *The Butch Factor*, begins by asking the question, “What does it mean to be gay and be a man?” (Hines, 2009).¹⁰ Most of the participants are natal male gay men who offer their own definitions for concepts like *man* and *masculinity*, and many of these descriptions are in accord with those often heard in general society. For example, Dan Cullinane, a writer, states simply, “when you say that someone is not masculine, you are essentially saying that they are not a man.” For him, masculinity is a requirement of manhood. Lt. Vincent Calvarese, a deputy sheriff, offers that “a man is someone who looks adversity straight in the face and faces it head on with courage and fortitude,” suggesting that manhood is not simply

masculinity, but more specifically the quality of courage, which is often perceived as masculine.

Jason Hefley, a construction worker, focuses on good character as endemic to manhood:

To be a man is to be trustworthy, to be genuine, to do what you say you're gonna do, to follow through on your word, be honorable and treat people well. To put it in short version, just do the right thing.

In some cases, there are elements of sexism in these descriptions. For instance, Bill Yoelin, a rugby player, states, "Being gay has made me more of a man. . . . Had I not been honest with myself, I think that I would have been, you know, what I would describe as a pussy." Logically, this statement can be interpreted to imply that honesty is a quality inherent in men, but not in women. Likewise, equating manhood with courage or trustworthiness suggests that these characteristics are naturally less prominent in women. Jack Malebranche, an author who works for an exercise equipment company, defined manhood by distinguishing different types of men within the gay community, suggesting that some are more like women and are therefore not men:

Mainstream gay culture is a celebration of fashion. It's the kind of music fourteen-year-old girls listen to. It's the kind of things that housewives would like. It's not something that you'd associate with men. As they become progressively involved in gay culture, they just move further and further away from what it means to be a man. . . . We give straight men a wide range of how they can behave. They can be nerdy little I.T. guys who don't really do anything traditionally masculine at all, but because they're straight, we give them their masculinity. They automatically get their man card, whereas I think homosexual men have to work for it. The measure of a man should be in his accomplishments. . . . I'm a man because of what I've done and who I am and what I stand for and what I talk about.

Malebranche is suggesting here that because so many gay men are not sufficiently masculine to qualify as men, those who do wish to be seen as men must be particularly successful and consistently masculine in their daily behavior. Another interesting twist in his philosophy is the idea that straight men are allowed a "wider range" for their behavior as men, whereas many people

would argue that the opposite is true: Gay men, if they are known to be gay, are able to express a broad spectrum of emotions in public, while many straight men feel obligated to restrict their behaviors and emotions within a narrow masculine range in order to avoid the accusation that they might be gay. As sociologist Michael Kimmel (2003) explains:

Homophobia is a central organizing principle of our cultural definition of manhood.

Homophobia is more than the irrational fear of gay men, more than the fear that we might be perceived as gay. . . . Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men. (p. 63)

If a gay man is out as gay, he might, as Malebranche suggests, work harder to affirm his masculinity. On the other hand, he might be less inclined to worry about this because, unlike the straight man, he does not have to deal with the fear of being seen as gay. This positions him as free to define manhood and masculinity on his own terms, although others may not agree. If, as I have suggested, identification is key to the understanding the meaning of manhood, it may be that Malebranche and members of the “mainstream gay culture” he derides are identifying with different types of men.

As with *Bear Run*, the film *The Butch Factor* includes one transman, Jackson Bowman. His comments about manhood describe his conscious attempt to learn the social norms associated with manhood, his partial rejection of those norms, and his comfort within the gay community:

I feel like I had to grow and learn how to become a man. Just seeing how we teach men how to be men, I think I had to learn the same way as everybody else did. How I sat and how I walked and how I talked and all these things that I felt like, well, if you do these things, that’s what makes a man. If you pay for dinner or if you take up lots of space with your body or if you act like you know what you’re doing all the time, then that’s what men do so that’s what I’m gonna do. And it didn’t feel right and I didn’t know why. And it wasn’t until I started being able to be in gay male spaces that I realized that

there were a hundred million other ways of experiencing maleness and masculinity than what television or billboards or sports or whatever said.

Unlike Malebranche, Bowman does not expect gay men to imitate the precise masculine qualities that many straight men expect of themselves. He initially constructed his gender expression by attempting to identify with mainstream cultural performances of manhood, but the diversity of men within the gay male community allowed him the freedom to be more true to himself. He does not define himself outside the parameters of manhood, but clearly considers himself a man, and he verbally makes the argument that the definition of manhood should be more broad than that offered by mainstream culture.

Because these two documentaries, *Bear Run* and *The Butch Factor*, address gay male culture, gay men are likely the majority of viewers. As such, the films' depictions of gay men and transmen are not likely to influence the thinking of the majority of non-gay and non-trans individuals who never see them. In a 2008 academic article, Paisley Currah expressed concern that the general public will learn about transmen, if at all, from the few stories generating headlines in the news. He wrote, "That a man can get pregnant may be the central, and for many the only, fact that most people in the United States now know about transgender issues" (p. 332). This was, of course, a reference to Thomas Beatie, a transman who chose to become pregnant because his wife was no longer able to bear children. Because the Beaties were willing to expose their private lives to public scrutiny, many members of the transgender community and their allies began to fear that media sensationalism would further misunderstanding about transpeople and hinder any efforts to educate the public. In a 2008 article for *The Advocate*, Jen Christensen explained that Beatie had revealed his pregnancy in a recent issue of the magazine, and that some transgender activists were becoming concerned that this story would have "a high 'ick' factor for the general population." For example, Jamison Green found some disturbing comments being made online: "They wrote 'disgusting' or asked, 'How can someone do that to themselves and think he is a man?'" Green added, "I worry that for the uneducated and less accepting, this brings

back the whole ‘freak’ label to transgender people” (p. 34). Christensen also reported the following:

Alarm bells went off for Cathy Renna, managing partner of Renna Communications, a New York City-based firm that develops communication strategies for LGBT organizations. ‘My sense is that this story has all the hallmarks of one that could be easily sensationalized—one that could easily set back some of the improvements that have been made by transgender people,’ she says. ‘Beatie’s article opened the Pandora’s box. . . . Generally, with the public and mainstream media we’re still doing Trans 101,’ says Renna. ‘I worry this kind of story will create a whole new level of regulation. Anti-trans groups will use this as ammunition to influence politics to make laws that won’t let trans people make decisions about their own body. I so hope I’m wrong.’ (p. 34)

For those who assume that a man must be male, no pregnant person can be considered a man, regardless of his appearance or behavior. For others, a transman can be accepted as a man, but only on the condition that he conforms to the cultural norms associated with men. Renna is concerned that a non-standard anatomy combined with non-standard behavior will stretch the definition of manhood beyond what most people can take, leading to increased restrictions and greater support for the belief that transpeople are, indeed, mentally ill.

When another pregnant transman, Scott Moore, and his husband were interviewed for *The Advocate* by Emily Drabinski in 2010, Moore suggested that the answer to this problem was not to keep it hidden, but rather to normalize it: “Thomas Beatie is not the first, and we’re not the last. . . . It’s not that uncommon, it’s just not talked about” (p. 24). Drabinski explained that “part of Moore’s decision to go public with his story” was to “remove the stigma for other transgender men who need medical care” because numerous doctors had refused to treat Moore. His hope, then, was “to make trans male pregnancy an unremarkable occurrence” (p. 24). Significant in this article was Drabinski’s attention to the criticism Moore received from other transmen who argued in online comments that Moore was not “really a man” (p. 24). This type of rejection from other transmen suggests that some transmen place restrictions on manhood not

unlike those imposed by non-trans people, the birth sex of the transman's body being a notable exception. Drabinski explained that Moore saw his pregnancy as "the mark of an exceptional manhood" because his body had a capacity that most men's bodies do not. Strangely absent in this article was any comment on the fact that Moore and his husband Thomas Moore were in what appeared to be a gay relationship. It was stated that both men were transsexual and that they had been able to marry legally because Scott Moore was still legally female while his husband was legally recognized as male. However, the relationship was not framed as gay, nor was the orientation of either man explicitly named. Given the reasons for which some men are marginalized, one could argue that there were at least three aspects of Scott Moore's life that could have prompted others to doubt his manhood: He was born into a body designated female at birth, he was pregnant, and he was a man in a relationship with another man. The concern expressed by some transmen is that a case such as this receives a great deal of media attention, while those transmen who live more conventional lives as heterosexual (non-pregnant) men do not. Consequently, they fear that these more sensationalized cases may come to represent all transmen.

Another media representation of a transman who had given birth aired on a Barbara Walters television special in 2008. While the program (Sloan, 2008) featured the pregnancy of Thomas Beatie, an additional segment contained an interview with Leaf and Andey Nunes, a gay couple with a four-year-old son. This story is significant because it is a rare media depiction of a successful relationship between a natal male (Leaf) and a transman (Andey). According to a related article on the ABC News Website (Goldberg & Adriano, 2008), the couple married prior to Andey's transition, which he delayed in order to get pregnant. One year after the child's birth, he began testosterone treatments and had chest reconstruction surgery. Andey Nunes explains, "We're a gay male couple that got to have a child the old-fashioned way" (Several Approaches section, para. 8). Given that the vast majority of documentaries about transmen feature men in relationships with women, the depiction of a transman in a gay relationship, broadcast on a prime time network special, has tremendous potential to increase public awareness of the varied sexual orientation among transmen.

Autobiographical Essay: Nick and Mark

Finally, I shall end this discussion of media representations with excerpts from a personal essay written by a transman and published as part of an anthology about transgender people in romantic relationships. Dr. Tracie O’Keefe (2008),¹¹ co-editor of the book, explains that while the authors of the contributing essays found themselves “interacting with others in a romantic, loving, and sexual way,” there are many “trans and intersex people who, through fear of rejection, never venture into the waters of love. They may have little confidence in their physical selves, poor self-images, and low expectations that anyone could ever find them attractive” (p. 271). She adds that once transgender people do find stable relationships, they often “experience major fears of rejection at some future date when partners get bored of living with the realities that their trans partners face each day” (p. 273). Given the degree of pessimism and fearfulness experienced by so many, the narrative written by Nick Laird is a success story about a transman in a relationship with a natal male, and this is why I have chosen it as a high note on which to end this chapter.

Near the beginning of his essay, Laird (2008) describes the expectations he had for his life as a transman following his transition:

Before I met Mark, I had resigned myself to living a single life with a few friends for occasional company and masturbation for a sex life. . . . I had accepted being single and understood that there would be no one out there desiring a man like me—a man with a clitoris. Mark had no idea. He assumed I had a penis and I assumed he would only have a relationship with someone who had a penis. (p. 74)

After describing their first meetings and the ease of their conversation, Laird reiterates his pessimistic state of mind: “I knew Mark, a gay man, would never be interested in me. I thought he might possibly find me attractive with my clothes on, but definitely not if he knew what was under my clothes” (p. 75).

This story takes an interesting turn when Mark reveals that he is HIV-positive. As Laird (2008) states, “it was his disclosure that opened the door for mine” because it “meant our relationship had reached a new, deeper level of openness and trust and I knew I needed to tell him

about me” (p. 76). During the course of their conversation, Nick explained that he was a transsexual man who had had no transition-related surgeries: “I was basically telling him I had tits and a vagina and I knew at this point that any interest he may have had in me would be gone” (p. 77). About a week later, Mark confirmed that he was, in fact, still interested in Nick. In thinking about this on his own, Nick was still worried that Mark’s feelings would not last:

I became convinced that Mark only thought he wanted to be with me because he had not seen me naked. . . . I felt so uncomfortable at the thought of him seeing me naked. I knew that Mark completely accepted me as a man the way things were and I did not want his view of me to change. (p. 77)

In this statement, Nick makes clear that the male body is often seen as a requirement for manhood. While his overall appearance and behavior position him as a man in society, he fears that his actual anatomy will undermine this. As it turned out, Mark was also “feeling rejected and unattractive and thinking nobody would ever want him” (p. 79). Each man felt that there was something about himself that would cause other men to reject him, yet each remained interested in the other. Consequently, once they did begin their physical relationship, Nick did not take it for granted: “I had been worried I would never have sex with another human being ever again and was feeling tremendously lucky to be doing it” (p. 80).

Laird (2008) describes his father’s reaction to the relationship as a means of illustrating how the general public understands transsexualism:

He asked me why I would go to the bother of transitioning if I was going to end up being with a man anyway and said Mark was not really a gay man if he was with me. His views seemed to sum up how most of the world tends to think of sex and gender. (p. 81)

This belief that a natal male cannot be gay if he dates a transman was also described by Califia (1997/2003b) when he explained that some gay males fear being ridiculed or rejected by their gay male friends (p. 217). Just as this project contemplates the meaning of manhood, some natal male gay men likely ask themselves similar questions when they consider dating transmen. For

example, if they date men who are not male, are they, themselves, still gay? If they feel that the answer should be yes, they must come to the conclusion that a man need not be male.

Summary

The above media representations of transmen vary considerably in terms of the ways in which they describe manhood and the degree to which they position transmen as men or as gay men. While men can be marginalized for a variety of reasons (sexual orientation, race, physical ability, body size, etc.), the lack of a normative male body appears to be the most damaging to one's claim to manhood. To some extent, the deliberate effort to achieve a masculine appearance or to enact stereotypically masculine behaviors can be used to mitigate many forms of marginalization that are related to the perception of femininity, and this is also true for the transman if he is not known to be transsexual. However, once others become aware of his trans status, their conscious knowledge that he was born with a female body tends to take precedence as they form opinions about his identity. In terms of identification, natal males are able to identify with one another as males, no matter how diverse their behavior or appearance. For instance, while a masculine male might state on some particular occasion that a more feminine or fearful male is not a "real man," it is conceivable that the more masculine male might change his mind if the other male begins to express more masculine behaviors or performs some impressive act of bravery. In other words, if one associates the meaning of manhood with the constructed nature of masculinity, there is some flexibility in who can be called a man.

However, if the meaning of manhood is tied to the designation of one's body as male at birth, there is nothing the transman can do to place himself in the social category of *man* if others are aware of his trans status. Because the conflation of sex and gender is so profound, a man who is known to be transsexual might always be framed as a woman by some people, no matter how masculine or courageous his behavior. This was evident in the posted comments about Tyler McCormick's International Mr. Leather title, with some posters using female pronouns when referring to McCormick. It was also the case with Michael Alvear (2003), who used female pronouns and the name "Patty" for Patrick Califia. Some transmen respond to this dilemma by

choosing to call themselves *transmen* rather than *men* in order to distinguish themselves from those men who were born male. This was true for Matt Kailey (2005), who felt like a “fraud” when he called himself a “gay man” online (p. 65). As he states in his autobiography, “I finally decided to fully accept myself as transsexual, instead of male” (pp. 61-62), and this led to “the image of myself as a transman instead of a ‘man’” (p. 63).

The documentaries *Bear Run* (Hunt & Baus, 2008) and *The Butch Factor* (Hines, 2009) each include one transman who identifies himself as a man. The difference between these two representations, apart from the sexual orientation of each transman, is the way in which each film was produced. In *Bear Run*, the transman, Mikhael, is seen to interact with other bears who accept him as a member of the community, while the transman in *The Butch Factor*, Jackson Bowman, is interviewed independently. He talks about being in “gay male spaces” where there are numerous “ways of experiencing maleness and masculinity,” but we never see him in these spaces or witness the degree of acceptance he receives from other gay men. It is also not clear whether or not these other gay men are aware of his trans status in these spaces.

The conflation of sex and gender is particularly problematic for someone like Thomas Beatie, whose life as a transman who became pregnant received a great deal of national media exposure. For those who insist that a man must be male, pregnant transmen will always be framed as women to some degree. From the perspective of the transman community, some transmen argue that media representations of pregnant transmen are always damaging in this regard. However, transmen such as Scott Moore, who was interviewed by *The Advocate* during his pregnancy, believe that the answer is not to hide these realities, but to display them to the degree that they come to be seen as commonplace in the culture. Clearly this outcome would require many representations of pregnant transmen over a great length of time. The Barbara Walters special containing footage of Leaf and Andey Nunes and their son was less problematic with respect to the perceived manhood of transmen because Andey Nunes had given birth just prior to beginning his transition. In other words, the timing of his pregnancy allowed the public to frame him as a woman who gave birth and then became a man, even though he clearly identified as a

man while pregnant and was already planning to transition. In the case of Beatie, it was the *visual* image of a pregnant man that the public found most disturbing.

This project's focus on gay transmen highlights the fact that men can be marginalized *as men* for multiple reasons. While the manhood of all transmen can be questioned on the basis of anatomy, the manhood of all gay men can be questioned by those whose definition of manhood requires heterosexuality. Of course, as with all forms of marginalization in this culture, the social position of any particular gay transman is not so much additive as it is intersectional. It is not automatically true that every gay transman will face more social hardship than every heterosexual transman or every natal male gay man. Numerous elements such as class, race, and even personality are also factors in determining how one is viewed and treated by others. Among these, some can be changed while others cannot, just as some can be hidden while others cannot. Ultimately, media representations have the greatest impact on those social groups that are the least understood by the general public. Therefore, their effect on the lives of gay transmen can be tremendous.

In this chapter I have reviewed a sampling of mass media texts that can influence public perceptions of transmen. In contrast, Chapter 4 offers analysis of personal interviews with natal male and transsexual gay men. By switching the focus from public representations to private realities, I will be better able to examine how individual gay men and gay transmen perceive the concept of *manhood* with respect to themselves, as well as how they navigate the marginalization they sometimes face as gay men and as gay transmen.

Chapter 4

PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

While media texts reflect, and influence, the meaning of *man* on a social level, personal interviews are able to interrogate how the individual man has come to understand the term throughout his life. This chapter will demonstrate that while natal male gay men (NMG) and transsexual gay men (TSGM) may conflate sex, gender, and gender expression to varying degrees, they are all able to describe instances of identification with other men, as well as a lack of identification with women. It is interesting to note that members of both groups questioned the manhood of transmen, with some transsexual men making the argument that the use of terms such as *transman* is more “honest” than the use of the term *man* for those whose bodies were designated female at birth.

Because these interviews are limited to five natal male gay men and four transsexual gay men, it is not my intention to provide generalizable information for either identity category. In keeping with McGee’s (1990) theory of textual fragmentation, I am analyzing these interviews in order to provide “dense, truncated fragments” (p. 288) of meaning in order to offer some insight into the contemporary lived experience of natal male gay men and gay transmen in the United States, and the ways in which these men conceptualize or identify with the term *man*.

Overview of Interview Subjects

All of the interviews were conducted in 2009 at various locations in two states. While these nine men do not represent a great deal of diversity overall, the relative homogeneity of this group benefits my focus on gender and sexuality in that any differences among their responses to my questions cannot so easily be attributed to, for example, different cultural backgrounds. In fact, I did not inquire as to the racial or ethnic identifications of these men, nor did I ask for details concerning age, education, or employment, but this type of information was often volunteered. Some did refer to themselves as White, and I can state from observation that all gave the appearance of U.S. Whiteness. However, I cannot state with certainty that all identify as White. In terms of age, two men did volunteer that they were in their early fifties, and the youngest was

likely in his late twenties. Those at the highest level of education were the three men who were enrolled in Ph.D. programs when their interviews were conducted. Of these three, one was working as a university instructor, one had a staff position at a university, and one was working in the psychology field as a therapist. Of the remaining six, two were working as therapists, one was working at a technology company, one was working as a stylist at a hair salon, one was a college student who was also employed full-time, and one was currently unemployed, but had previously worked at a financial institution.

To a certain extent, I shall also be positioning myself as the “fifth interview” in the TSGM category by including my own feelings and experiences in response to some of my interview questions. In doing this, my intention is twofold: My own responses will not only add another text within the category of *gay transmen*, but will also serve to reveal my own inherent biases, given that these are always implicated in my interpretations and analysis as the author of this study. It should also be noted that I sometimes had occasion to describe my own experiences to my interview subjects during our conversations, potentially affecting the content of the responses I received from them. Therefore, taking all of this into account, I shall clearly identify when a comment or personal narrative is my own rather than using a pseudonym that would disguise my identity.

All of my interview subjects chose pseudonyms for themselves, and their actual names are not revealed. Among the nine interview subjects, there were two couples, and all four men were interviewed separately. It is important to note that each member of a couple was aware that his partner was also being interviewed. In the case of one couple, the two men were interviewed back-to-back in the same location, with the one partner stepping out of the room while the other was interviewed. The men in the other couple were also interviewed in the same location, but on successive evenings. These latter two men, who lived together, both indicated to me that they were discussing the content of these interviews with one another on their own time. In addition, I received emails from both couples indicating that all four men were aware that their partners would likely recognize them from any quotations I might include. Aside from the men in these

relationships who were aware that their partners were being interviewed, none of the nine men were directly informed of the identities of any other interviewees, and no recordings or transcripts were shared with any of them.

Recruitment of Interview Subjects

For the sake of clarity, I shall now preview the pseudonyms for these nine men, including their relationship status when they were interviewed, and I shall also explain how each man was recruited for this project. Two of the five natal males, Peter and Edward, were known to me prior to this research. Peter, an acquaintance of several years, was in a committed relationship with another natal male (who was not interviewed), and Edward, a friend of mine for over six years, was not currently in a relationship. I had not been acquainted with the remaining three natal males, Paul, Rich, and Mark. Edward recruited his friends Paul and Rich, a married couple, by sending them my recruitment script. I encountered Mark when he and his partner were seated near me in the audience of a workshop at a gender conference. Assuming that they were likely a gay couple, and not knowing whether or not either of them was a transman, I told them about the study and asked if they would like to be interviewed. As it turned out, Mark was a natal male and his partner Christian was a transman. While I was certainly aware that romantic relationships exist between natal males and transmen, I did not anticipate being able to locate such a couple for this project, so my “accidental” encounter with them was quite fortunate.

My interviews with four transmen—Liam, Teddy, Bruce, and Christian—were all conducted at the same gender conference. I located two of these men, Liam and Teddy, by posting in advance to an electronic mailing list associated with the conference and then receiving their replies. Bruce had been a distant acquaintance of mine for several years, and he also responded to my post. As I noted earlier, I encountered Christian and his partner Mark during the conference, and interviewed them separately. Christian was the only transman in a committed relationship at the time of these interviews. Teddy stated that he had been interested in another transman for quite some time, but that they had not yet dated. Both Bruce and Liam were unattached. I shall also position myself among this group by stating that I am unattached as well.

Question Development

In constructing two sets of interview questions used for natal males and transmen, I decided to begin with simple concepts, gradually adding layers of complexity, some of which would not necessarily be anticipated by the interview subjects. For example, the natal males knew in advance that the interview would address the meaning of the word *man*, but I did not directly inform them that the subject of transmen would be introduced. However, in the case of those natal males who already knew me personally (two of the five), the inclusion of this subject was likely anticipated. My deliberate vagueness prior to the interviews was meant to avoid the construction of pre-planned responses designed to make the interview subjects appear more open-minded about transsexualism than they actually were. In other words, had I interviewed natal males who harbored negative attitudes towards transmen, I did not want them to spend time considering the types of responses that they assumed I wanted to hear. This is not to say, of course, that they could not have constructed such responses in the moment, but it made spontaneity more likely.

Both sets of questions covered the same topics, following the same progression of increasing complexity, but they were not identical (see Appendices A and B). I began by asking my interview subjects how they perceived the meaning of the word *man*, how they initially came to learn this meaning, and how they related it to themselves as adults. Most did identify themselves as men, but I must confess to feeling some initial disappointment when one transman, Christian, used the phrase “two spirit”¹² as a means of self-identification, not because I disapprove of this identity or doubt his sincerity in using it, but because the implied fluidity of this identity construct did not fit tidily into my preconceived vision for this portion of the study. I had set out to examine how gay men conceptualize the term *man*, given that their manhood is sometimes called into question by the larger society. In the case of Christian, he appeared to be calling his *own* manhood into question, so it was helpful to me when he provided this explanation for his identification as two spirit: “I didn’t want to give up my feminine aspects because I had worked so hard to get to that point of accepting my feminine side.” He added that he refers to himself as a man in most social contexts, given that he always uses male pronouns and presents himself as a

man. He only identifies as two spirit in the company of transpeople or other people who “get that.” My initial reaction to Christian’s language choice is likely related to my own personal concerns, particularly during early transition, that I would be perceived, not as a man, but as gender variant or genderqueer due to my androgynous appearance. As I explain in greater detail later in this chapter, early transition can be a more frustrating experience than pre-transition for some transsexuals.

Following my questions about the term *man*, I added the concept of sexual orientation, asking similar questions about the meaning of the phrase *gay man*. Natal males were asked if they ever self-identified with orientation terms other than *gay*, on the assumption that terms such as *queer* might be used. Transmen were asked two different questions about alternate terminology: First, they were asked what language they used to describe their own gender identities (on the assumption that they might not always use *man*), and a separate question asked their preferred terminology for sexual orientation (on the assumption that they might not always use *gay*). My choice to ask about the phrase *gay man* after asking about the word *man* presupposes that an interviewee’s initial reaction to the word *man* might be more in accord with hegemonic conceptions of manhood in U.S. society, whereas an emphasis on gay men serves to remind the interviewee about the marginalized experiences of gay men. As I shall note in my analysis, this was often the case, with many of these gay men, both natal male and transsexual, referencing stereotypical images of heterosexual men as exemplars of *man*.

While my initial recruitment scripts for interview subjects requested “adult men who identify as gay” and “adult transsexual men who identify as gay,” it did not turn out to be the case that all of the men identified their orientation as *gay* in every context. For example, some also identified with the term *queer*, given its multiple interpretations and political deployments, while others found this term disturbing or offensive. As Doty (1993) explains, “Some gays, lesbians, and bisexuals have expressed their inability to also identify with ‘queerness,’ as they feel the term has too long and too painful a history as a weapon of oppression and self-hate” (p. 4). As I shall note, some interviewees made this point in accounting for their dislike of the term.

The latter portion of the interviews for both groups concerned the interaction between natal male gay men and transsexual gay men, with the men from each group being asked to describe their feelings during these interactions. While the NMGM question list included two hypothetical questions for those natal males who had not, to their knowledge, ever met transmen, ultimately these questions were not needed, since all five men were aware that they had interacted with transmen.

With these interaction questions, I was looking for comments concerning the degree to which natal males accept transmen as men, as well as the degree to which transmen feel anxiety about this. Because I had previously asked natal males to name the characteristics they consider to be typical of men, I was now able to ask them to describe the degree to which they felt transmen possessed these characteristics. I also asked them whether or not they found themselves consciously thinking about the trans status of these men during their interactions. Transmen were asked to describe their feelings during interactions with natal males in general, and then during interactions with natal males who were gay. More specifically, I asked how they believed they had been perceived by these natal males, and whether or not they had ever consciously altered their own personalities or behaviors in order to be perceived differently. Finally, I asked transmen to describe their interactions with other transmen.

Both sets of questions concluded by addressing the prospect of romantic or sexual relationships between natal males and transmen. Natal males were asked if they had ever felt attracted to transmen or dated transmen, and those who had not dated transmen were asked to speculate on how they would feel about this. Transmen were asked whether or not they had dated natal males, but I added another layer of complexity in also asking whether or not they had dated other transmen.

Collectively, these questions approach the concept of *man* from a variety of angles within communities of men whose manhood has been socially marginalized due to non-normative orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The men I interviewed, whether natal male or transsexual, were asked to describe how they relate the term *man* to themselves as individuals, as

well as to others who identify as men, despite numerous inconsistencies of anatomy, appearance, behavior, and attitude.

The Interview Process

Before the interviews began, I informed each man that we would speak for about one hour, and that the interviews would be audio-recorded. On those occasions when I had gone through all of my questions and the interviewee had no more comments, we concluded in less than an hour. When other interviews reached the one-hour mark, I informed the interviewee of the time and we continued with any remaining questions or comments. Overall, the interview length ranged from the shortest at 35 minutes to the longest at one hour and 46 minutes. I should note that this one very long interview was conducted with a friend, and our mutual comfort level partly accounts for the added length. The second-longest interview was one hour and eight minutes.

All nine of these men appeared to be comfortable with the interviews and the subject matter, although a few had difficulty answering questions concerning childhood, stating that they could not remember particular events. For example, when I asked one transman how he had learned the meaning of the word *man* during childhood, he responded, “Wow. Okay, that’s a while ago . . . that’s way so far back there in a foggy, foggy history.” Another transman, when asked when he first consciously thought of himself as a man, replied, “I don’t know exactly. I have a bad memory. I’ve blocked a lot of things out, um, so I don’t have a good memory for a lot of my childhood and a lot of other things in my life.” This difficulty in remembering one’s early life is not uncommon among transsexuals. In his autobiography, Chaz Bono (2011) writes that when he looks at a photo of himself as a very young child, he can’t remember anything about it:

Many of my early memories are under some kind of psychic lock and key, housed deep in the recesses of my mind, with some part of me standing guard against them. . . . So when I look back on those early years and I see myself as so many did—an adorable baby and toddler dressed in super-girlie clothes . . . there is a huge disconnect. (p. 10)

While this “disconnect” is a problem for some transsexuals, only two of the transmen I interviewed made these types of comments. Most of my interview subjects, both natal males and

transmen, were able to answer questions related to childhood, although they approached them in different ways.

The Transcription Process

Direct quotations used in this project were transcribed from digital audio recordings. I was the only person who transcribed the five interviews with natal males. However, for the sake of time, I received assistance in transcribing the remaining four interviews with transmen. The undergraduate student who typed these initial drafts did not have access to the actual names or contact information for these four individuals. For the sake of accuracy, any repeated words and nonfluencies (e.g., “um,” “you know”) were included in all transcriptions; consequently, they were also included when I felt that interviewees’ comments were significant and appropriate for direct quotation. However, any omitted material within quotations is indicated by the insertion of ellipsis points.

Analytical Themes

In comparing the content of all nine interviews, I have structured my analysis into three themes, each of which combines the responses to several of my interview questions:

Theme #1: Coming to an understanding of *man* as a concept

Theme #2: Relating the concept *man* to sexual orientation

Theme #3: Considering the manhood of transmen

Within the first theme, interviewees describe how they perceive the term *man*, explaining how they first learned its meaning and when they first thought of themselves as men. They also describe those situations in which they are particularly conscious of themselves as men, noting the characteristics they possess that they feel are typical of men, as well as any characteristics they perceive themselves to lack. Finally, they describe times when they have compared themselves to other men. In addition, the transmen discuss any gendered terms other than *man* that they use to describe themselves.

The second theme includes discussion of the term *gay man*, as well as other terms used by these men to label their sexual orientation. They also describe the characteristics of those

individuals they find attractive, explaining how these attractions relate to the orientation labels they prefer to use for themselves. The third theme addresses the characteristics of transmen, relating them to the characteristics of *man* as a concept. Natal males describe their perceptions of transmen, as well as their feelings about interacting with transmen socially and intimately. Likewise, transmen describe their feelings about interacting with natal males and other transmen, both socially and intimately.

Theme 1: Coming to an understanding of *man* as a concept.

I began these interviews by asking the most basic of questions: “What characteristics do you think of when you hear the word *man*?” Four of the five natal males responded by naming characteristics related to the physical body (biological), as well as to attitude and behavior (social). Peter, Mark, and Rich all associated the concept of *man* with the term “male” or “male anatomy,” although Peter emphasized that this was only his initial understanding of the term *man*, after which he had realized that it also had other meanings. Several men began their descriptions with the word “masculine,” which does not relate directly to the physical structure of the body. Overall, a variety of biological and social concepts were used, including “strong,” “big stature,” “deep voice,” “men’s clothes” and “short hair.” Edward mentioned several self-acknowledged “stereotypes” for man: The role of a provider, the capacity for being “only emotional in certain ways,” and the tendency to seem “more angry than sad.” Paul added that men were generally “more problem-solving than empathetic.”

The fifth man, Rich, provided the most theoretical response to the question, explaining, “I realize being male is different than being a man, but they’re, they’re closely related.” Interestingly, this attempt to problematize the conflation of sex and gender was in no way prompted by the question, particularly since it was the first question of the interview. The other four named both biological and social characteristics with little attempt to differentiate maleness from manhood. This suggests that these two concepts may be at least somewhat conflated in their minds.

Among the transmen, Bruce offered the most concise response to my question, simply listing the characteristics “powerful, strong, wise, masculine, [and] active,” several of which could be construed as either biological or social. For example, one could be physically strong and powerful, or one could have emotional strength and social power. Christian was more specific in naming similar characteristics, associating the word “strong” with “muscles, physical strength” and “physical power and presence,” as well as “sweat” and “hard labor.” However, he also named “courage . . . fierceness,” and “a tenderness that comes with being a protector.” It should be noted that, while both of these transmen mentioned physical attributes, neither of them used the word *male*.

Liam’s initial response was to reference the generic use of the term *man* as synonymous with “mankind” and “human beings,” adding that his “gender specific” reaction would relate to “the characteristics of man, as in the male, uh, of the species.” After naming a few of these characteristics—“tall in stature . . . facial hair, short-cropped hair”—he introduced a more symbolic vision: “You know, uh, there’s almost this mythic figure that comes into my mind as somebody who stepped right out of the 1950s.” A few minutes later, he elaborated on this:

I don’t know if it’s something I picked up from, uh, my, my raising or whatever, but I sort of have this vision of the, maybe it’s some kind of ideal, whatever you want to call it, of a Jimmy Stewart. [Laughs] You know, the upright, you know, do-right person who, you know, might have a challenge or two but always comes through in the end.

I found it interesting that Teddy, in a separate interview, also referenced Jimmy Stewart by name as a man he thought of as “masculine.” In his analysis of gendered media representations, David Gauntlett (2008) explains that the films of the 1950s “almost always focused on male heroes” who were “assertive, confident and dominant” as they “made the decisions which led the story” (p. 50). He points out, however, that the concept of masculinity is a relative one:

The stylishness of the gentlemen at the heart of Hitchcock’s thrillers, say, can seem more ‘feminine’ than the grunting macho heroes of 1980s action films, but it was tied to a

buttoned-down, statesmanlike, quick-thinking masculinity which contrasted with the feminine beauty and lack of assertiveness of key women characters. (p. 50)

In other words, the masculinity of Stewart's male characters was relative, depending on whether it was juxtaposed with feminine female characters or compared to the hypermasculinity of later film genres.

It was particularly striking to me that two of the four transmen I interviewed mentioned Jimmy Stewart by name, since I have long admired some of Stewart's portrayals of U.S. manhood as well. Unlike the "macho heroes of the 1980s," for whom I hold little admiration, many of Stewart's characters were not only "stylish" and "statesmanlike," but also witty, self-deprecating, and vulnerable. One cannot help but speculate that if three of the five transmen involved in this study continue to name Jimmy Stewart's screen persona as an icon of manhood, even in the twenty-first century more than ten years after the actor's death, perhaps Stewart's body of work deserves additional scholarly attention.

Following this initial question about the characteristics associated with manhood, I asked these men to revisit their childhood years and consider how they first learned the meaning of the word *man*. Not surprisingly, four of the five natal males mentioned the influence of family members. While Peter referenced his observation of the differences between his mother and father, Mark and Paul described experiences of direct teaching. Mark's father and grandfather, for example, explained to him that they were men, informed him that he would one day become a man, and added that his sisters would one day become women like his mother. Paul's father introduced him to toy shaving kits so that he could learn to "do the things that daddy does." Paul also remarked that the difference between men and women became clear to him through the observation that "men stand up" and "girls sit down" in the restroom.

Edward's observation of family interaction was more subtle. For example, his grandfather taught him to shoot, and Edward understood that outdoor activities such as fishing and golfing were expected of him, yet he noticed that none of these experiences were offered to his sisters. During holidays, "the ladies would stay in the kitchen and talk" while "I was expected to

go with the menfolk of the family and watch the big game or whatever.” The one direct verbal message he received about manhood took place when his parents divorced: “I was now the man of the house at age six when Dad moved out . . . so I needed to be strong for my sisters and, um, to help my mom.” Through this common colloquialism, “man of the house,” Edward understood that the eldest male in a family is “the man,” although he doubts that he fully grasped the meaning of the term at that age. He knew that “what it meant to be a man in the bigger sense was the protector . . . the provider,” yet, at the same time, he clearly understood that these behaviors were not expected of him at age six.

As with the previous question, the response from Rich was again distinct. He did not recall his parents defining the word *man* in terms of behavior, so he feels that he came to think of *man* as a legal category: “Other than, than perhaps turning eighteen years old, there’s not a crisp delineation between being a boy and being a man.” Here he is attempting to define the category *man* by distinguishing it from the category *boy*, whereas others seem more inclined to differentiate *man* from *woman*.

Like Rich, two of the four transmen could not remember much direct teaching from their families with respect to the meaning of the word *man*. Liam was raised by a single mother, so he believes that he must have first learned about manhood by noticing sex differences, e.g., the fact that some people have facial hair while others do not. The only male role model he could recall was his grandfather, but his memories of this man were not clear. Bruce stated that, because he had been raised as a girl, he received direct instruction about the norms of *womanhood*, while the particulars of manhood had been left unstated: “I have a clearer sense of when people told me what *woman* or *girl* meant than I do what *man* or *boy* meant.”

The other two transmen responded to this question with immediate references to pop culture. Teddy stated that he had “watched a lot of old TV,” citing “wild west programs” as well as *The Brady Bunch*, from which the character of “Mr. Brady” was his role model. He also observed the actions of his father and brothers, attempting to determine what he was “supposed to do” as a man. However, since he was still perceived as female at that time, he could not fully

emulate these men on a daily basis: “I also didn’t necessarily want to be like my dad and my brothers cause I saw some problems with them too.” These “problems” included getting “in trouble with the law,” overworking, and “being on drugs and alcohol”:

We don’t take care of ourselves as much as, you know, women maybe. . . . I didn’t transition for a long time because I didn’t want all these things to happen to me, and I thought that they would. . . . If I’m related to these people, um, am I gonna be like them?

Teddy is actually referencing two distinct assumptions here: (1) that transitioning to live as a man would cause him to adopt what he perceived to be the common faults of men, and (2) that he would be somehow predisposed (genetically? socially?) to behave as his blood relatives have. Curiously, this latter assumption is not necessarily gender-specific; in other words, if he was genetically predisposed to behave like his relatives, he might have done so whether or not he had transitioned to live as a man. For example, women can also get “in trouble with the law,” work excessive hours, or abuse drugs or alcohol. It is perhaps his assumption that a predisposition to behave in these ways is informed by the social norms of manhood, such that he would be more likely to enact them as a man among other men. As a result, he may have concluded that he could more easily avoid these behaviors prior to transition.

Like Teddy, Christian also cited pop culture images of manhood such as the Lone Ranger, Zorro, Superman, and other “heroes of the day.” He explained:

Because there was so much abuse in my family and my views of manhood were kind of skewed by that, um, men were frightening to me. Um, I used to watch a lot of old movies and looked for some kind of role model of a different kind of a man, um, because until I hit puberty I was quite certain I was gonna grow a penis and become a boy. Um, I actually had a hard time believing I was actually a girl. Um, and I didn’t want to be the kind of man that my father was or that my peers were. Um, I didn’t want to treat people that way.

Here, Christian is expressing a concern similar to that described by Teddy. He felt that the role models of manhood within his family were flawed, and he feared that this influence would limit his ability to construct his own persona to reflect his own values.

As for myself, I can recall no direct teaching about the meaning of terms such as *man*, although I was certainly raised with the expectation that I would identify as a girl and then as a woman. I understood that this expectation was based on my body type, regardless of my feelings, and unlike some transmen, I never believed that my body would magically change one day. In this way, the distinction between sex and gender was clear to me, although I realized that it was not clear to everyone else. One day in grade school the teacher asked the class to describe what a father was. Other children listed various activities and characteristics, but when the teacher called on me, I remained silent because I was too embarrassed at that age to explain that a father was the person who contributed the sperm to create a pregnancy. I had reacted to the question as one of sex and biology, not gender, and it was clear that I was the odd one in the room. The teacher was apparently dumbfounded by my refusal to speak despite her repeated demands, and finally gave up and dismissed the class for lunch.

My own perception of the gendered term *man* related to my identification with my elder brother Bill who, like me, exhibited a reserved temperament and put great stock in his own intelligence; he was the only member of our family, other than myself, to attend college. My fondness for some of the characters portrayed by Jimmy Stewart is relevant here if one considers that George Bailey, from the film *It's A Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946), had long been eager to attend college and see the world. Therefore, remaining in his hometown to run the family business became a source of frustration for many years, particularly when his brother Harry was able to achieve the dreams George had planned for himself. Like George Bailey, my father never left his hometown, and he lived in his parents' farmhouse throughout his life. Given this family background, I came to view a man as one who faces a tension between the responsibility to take care of others—described by natal males Rich and Paul, as I noted earlier—and the need to break free from dependency on others in order to find personal fulfillment. Also, since my father and

both of my elder brothers were reserved individuals, I learned to associate men with relative silence and a lack of emotional expression, not unlike Edward's comment that men are "only emotional in certain ways."

Like the natal males, the transmen in this study had observed sex differences as well as the behaviors of adult males during their childhood years. However, the experience of identification with men was significantly different since they were neither taught nor encouraged to apply these observations to themselves and, in some cases, they were directly told that they should not do so. This suppressive message created an internal dilemma. While the transman's inner voice suggests, "I'm supposed to be like these men," various external voices are insisting, "No, you are not like them and you never will be." This, of course, is the quintessential experience among transsexuals: Being told that you are one thing, knowing that you are another thing, and gradually determining how these positions can be reconciled.

It is also noteworthy that none of the natal males referenced pop culture images of manhood in describing how they came to understand the meaning of *man*. This is not to suggest that they were never influenced by such images during childhood, yet they chose to leave the subject unaddressed, instead focusing on their observation of male family members and the direct teaching they received about their future lives as men. While the transmen were able to observe male family members as well, any direct teaching they received not only lacked descriptions of their future manhood but also clearly contradicted it. Pop culture icons, therefore, served as a recourse; Jimmy Stewart was not going to break character during a film and lecture these men about the futility of their identification with him.

At this point in the interviews, I asked the transmen a question that was not asked of the natal males. Because transmen do not always use the term *man* consistently, I asked them about the language terms they used to describe their own gender. As I noted earlier, Christian named his self-identification as "two-spirit," although he refers to himself as a man in most social situations. Similarly, Bruce explained that he would not mention his transsexual status in unfamiliar or dangerous contexts "where I'm in a really new-to-me place, and I don't know the people that I'm

around and I have some reason to be concerned for my safety.” Otherwise, he identifies as “female-to-male” because he considers this term the most honest: “I just don’t feel like I can pretend that the female part of my existence didn’t ever exist. . . . I can’t deny the fact that I’m a female-to-male transsexual and so that’s just who I am.” Both Christian and Bruce chose to use the term *man* within ordinary social situations for the sake of expediency or safety while each maintained a personal self-concept, two-spirit and FTM respectively, that felt more accurate.

Liam, on the other hand, explained that he did not have strong feelings about the gendered labels that others might use for him:

I don’t have issues with being called a transman or transmale or transgender or freaking weird, whatever. [Laughs] . . . I feel comfortable being transgendered, so I’m not as weird about it when people slip up or if, if they say, “Oh, you’re a transguy. I can tell.”

He did indicate, however, that he prefers people to address him as “sir.”

Teddy’s feelings on the matter were quite different. Referring to himself as a “guy” or a “man,” he pointed out that he “never identified as a woman” and “never identified as trans,” although he accepts the fact that others do: “I know a lot of transpeople identify as trans, and I don’t share any commonality with them. . . . I never wanted to be, like, genderqueer or in the middle. I never felt androgynous.” While he recognized that some transpeople must identify as such in order to make clear to the larger society that transpeople exist, he expressed strong feelings about having been labeled incorrectly by others in the past:

I was never a lesbian. I was never a part of the women’s community. I always had men around me. My friends were guys. . . . People who saw me before as a dyke, I’m like, “I’m not a dyke. I’ve never been a dyke.”

I then asked how he felt in these situations:

Horrible. Offended. . . . I’m not, and I know that’s what I look like. . . . When I would do things to change my appearance, um, cut my hair short . . . quit wearing makeup, people, like, assumed I was a dyke. I’m like, “No, I’m not a dyke.” So what’s, what I

would do to show the world that I wasn't a dyke was, I would put a bunch of makeup on and big fuckin' earrings. . . . It kept them from assuming that one thing.

I responded to this by asking, "So, they assumed a *different* wrong thing?" He laughingly agreed, and I replied that I understood exactly what he meant.

Of the four transmen I interviewed, I most closely identified with Teddy on this particular question. Like him, I also identify as a man, not a transman, except in an academic context when it becomes relevant to my scholarship or teaching. I have often remarked that the days of early transition were more frustrating than the days when I lived in the role of a woman. This is because I felt even more invisible than I had before beginning transition. When I was perceived as a heterosexual woman, people were not aware of my gender identity, but at least they were correct about my orientation; I was oriented toward men. However, when I appeared to be a woman with short hair and masculine clothing, they were misperceiving both my orientation and my gender. In short, I had to become even more invisible before I could become visible. I do recognize that my past is not irrelevant because it has, unavoidably, affected my personality and mannerisms but, unlike Bruce, I do not feel that calling myself a man equates to pretending that I never inhabited a female body. I say this not to disparage the way Bruce chooses to identify, but to clarify that I relate the linguistic difference between *female* and *man* to the difference between sex and gender. Consequently, identifying as a man does not unequivocally imply that one inhabits a normative male body, even if there are other people who assume that it does.

These scenarios described by Teddy and myself could be described as misidentification. During early transition, because a transman's androgynous physical appearance could be read as both masculine and female, it may be interpreted by some people as lesbian on the assumption that this combination of characteristics is typical of lesbians. However, this misidentification does not necessarily imply misrecognition. For example, if the people who interpreted Teddy's appearance as lesbian had a positive attitude about lesbians as worthwhile and respectable human beings, they were not failing to recognize his humanity; rather, they were simply making an interpretive error based on their assumptions about sex, gender, and orientation. However, those who restrict the

category of *human* to individuals who live comfortably within the hegemonic parameters of male=man=male=masculine=heterosexual and female=woman=feminine=heterosexual may not fully recognize the humanity of any gay or transgender people. As Butler (2004) explains, “the very terms that confer ‘humanness’ on some individuals are those that deprive certain other individuals of the possibility of achieving that status” (p. 2). Therefore, even though all of my interview subjects self-identify as men to some degree, they are all subject to misrecognition on the basis of sexual orientation, a lack of sex-gender correspondence, or both. As a consequence, their ability to perceive themselves as men is always mitigated to some degree by their awareness that other members of society harbor these marginalizing attitudes toward them.

When I asked these men to describe when they first thought of themselves as men, they made references to both family and peer relationships. As a natal male, Peter replied that he had never questioned that he was a man because his father had repeatedly told him that he needed to be a man on those occasions when his father saw him as less than manly. For example, as a child Peter had cried after catching a fish and after shooting a bird. Peter explained that his father saw men as stoic, brave, tough, willing to fight, and emotionally unexpressive, but Peter’s own self concept is more emotional: “I’d like to think that, um, that I’m much better at expressing affection than him, and telling people that I love them, which he’s not really good at. He’s very uncomfortable with those types of things.” His father’s concept of manhood as emotionally unexpressive is reminiscent of Paul’s comment that men are “more problem-solving rather than empathetic,” as well as Edward’s awareness of the stereotype that men are “only emotional in certain ways.” In Peter’s case, he has redefined manhood for himself, rejecting his father’s expectations. When asked to recall a time when he began thinking of himself as a man rather than a boy, he described the first time he took a road trip by himself at age 17 or 18:

I kind of remember it like this, this feeling of freedom and saying, “Oh, I’ve moved past being my parents’ child and being my own person.” Um, I don’t know if I label that as being a man, but I think I label it as being my own person and, I say those two things are the same but I kind of felt probably it was.

During this interview, I commented to Peter that I'd felt the same way the first time I drove 100 miles by myself, the difference being that I'd done this at age forty. In other words, I could relate to the vague connection Peter was making between feeling like an independent adult and feeling like a man, but my own experience of this in middle-age, having lived in the social role of a woman for some time, implies that I did not feel "adult" until I was living as a man. This feeling is echoed by Jamison Green (2004) who writes in his autobiography, "I had not been able to grow up fully because I was never going to be an adult woman. I knew that the only way I could grow up—really be an adult—was to become a man" (p. 22).

Mark was first told that he was a man at 18, when he had "reached the age of majority." He added that this made sense to him because "I had masculine characteristics. I am a cismale and so, yeah, society was easier on me." As the partner of a transman, Mark is more likely than most natal males to be familiar with a term like *cismale*—a variant of *cisgender*. He also attends gender conferences where such terms are commonplace. Interestingly, he chose to reference male privilege here as well, despite the lack of prompting.

Rich, who had previously named the age of 18 as the only clear delineation between boy and man, recalled that he and his friends "started to become really sensitive about not being called a boy" when they were 15 or 16. Recognizing that they were not yet men at that age, he suggested that this sensitivity was a search for independence and "an egotistical thing as much as anything else."

Finally, Paul and Edward used the term *puberty* in describing their first memories of manhood. Paul explained that he had unexpectedly "hit puberty" at age nine: "That's when my father said, 'Well, you're a man.'" Edward associated puberty with "an ascension out of boyhood," both in terms of "biological changes," as well as in connection with "Roman Catholic confirmation" as a "coming into adulthood" by "taking on your baptismal vows for yourself."

Collectively, these five natal males made clear that one's initial self-identification as a man may relate to social and familial norms, to secular law, or to religious philosophy. While the label is sometimes taken on through a conscious identification with particular characteristics, it is

most often received from an external source at a young age. If a boy is repeatedly told by authority figures that he will one day be a man, he will pay particular attention to those ways in which his own characteristics can be identified with those of adults already known to be men. He comes to identify himself as a man, partly because he has recognized these commonalities and partly because he has been encouraged to seek them out. In the case of transmen, however, that encouragement is lacking and the concept of gender can be confusing.

When asked when he first consciously thought of himself as a man, Teddy described an incident that occurred between the ages of four and seven:

Some boy, next-door-neighbor boy or something, who I had a crush on, even as a kid, came up to me, behind me, and kissed me on the back of my neck and my thought was, “He thinks I’m a girl.” . . . I was embarrassed and then I was confused for having that thought because, you know, you’re told one thing but you feel the other.

At this young age, Teddy was surprised to find that other people saw him as a girl, even though he had been taught that this was the case.

For Bruce, the initial sense of being a man began when he was eight years old and strangers perceived him to be a boy, even though he was wearing a girl scout uniform:

Someone said, “Do you realize you’re in the women’s restroom?” . . . So I think at a very young age I knew there was something different about me because I continued to have those experiences as being mistaken for a man in the women’s restroom.

While this story does not illustrate his self-perception, but rather the perceptions of others, it was his first response to the question. Minutes later, he related the following:

It wasn’t until I was 37 years old and I met another transman who I had a chance to sit down and talk to and listen to his story of what it meant to him to transition and why that was important to him and, um, what happened in his life that led up to that . . . that this lightbulb went on and I went, “That’s it. That’s what I haven’t been able to explain all these years.”

It was his identification with another transman that created this “lightbulb” moment:

I was like, “Dude, you’re telling my story. Like, you don’t even know me. How do you know all this about me?” You know how it is when you meet someone for the first time and you have similar backgrounds and stories. . . . It was that spark of a “Holy shit. This is what I’ve been supposed to be doing all this time.”

This narrative can be viewed as an illustration of identification and consubstantiality. When Bruce recognized himself in the stories told by another transman, he saw the two of them as “reflected in one another” (Butler, 2004, p. 131). In the words of Burke (1969), they were “substantially one” or consubstantial with one another because this man related feelings that Bruce had experienced, but had not heard in anyone else’s narrative up to that point. At the same time, Bruce and this other transman were also different from one another in some ways. As Burke explains, the uniqueness of each person—that which falls outside their consubstantiality—represents each person’s individual identity (p. 21). For Bruce, this didn’t occur until he was 37 years old.

Liam, who appeared to be in his twenties, stated that he first considered himself a man as an adult, only two years prior to our interview:

I felt rather lost for most of my life, so it wasn’t really until two years ago that it was like, wow. Oh my God. This totally makes sense now. I am male identified. . . . All the problems I’d had up until then just suddenly made sense and they weren’t problems anymore.

He explained that this occurred when he attended an annual event for the trans community where he lived:

It’s like, you know, go dress up in your nines. . . . There was a moment where I was dancing on the dance floor and there was me out there in my suit and I was surrounded by all these tall women [laughs] in heels, and I just, there was something about that experience. . . . A lightbulb went off and I realized that I was, one, *with my people*, if you will, and two, that I realized, yes, that I’m definitely a man.

Like Bruce, Liam refers to a particular “lightbulb” moment when his identity as a man became clear. In this case, his feeling of identification was not with an individual, but with a community of people who had something in common with him.

Christian provided the greatest detail in response to this question, so much so that I feel his remarks warrant more extensive consideration. He began by stating that he had identified as a man “as far back as I can remember,” using male pronouns and referring to himself as a boy during childhood:

I was supposed to have been born a boy, and that’s what my parents were told until I was literally born, and my father was so upset that he didn’t get a son, that he had a third daughter, um, that he would abuse me for being female. . . . My way of trying to make sense of it was, “But I wasn’t born female. I just haven’t grown a penis yet.”

He did not describe the nature of the “abuse” that resulted from this disappointment, nor did he detail the behavior of his mother:

She was mentally ill and there were problems in their relationship. She began abusing me because I was using the male pronouns so she kind of made me her husband, um, and it, it was very confusing cause I was getting conflicting messages. . . . Everything inside tells me I’m male, but you’re abusing me for not being male and you’re abusing me cause I am male.

At school he was called a “tomboy” on the assumption that his male identity was only a temporary phase. However, this created confusion for other boys:

They were told in classes that I was a girl, so they would routinely grab me and drag me to the bathroom at recess and hold me down and try to feel me up to figure out what parts, you know, do you have? . . . I was very acutely aware of all the hatred that was directed at me, but I couldn’t understand why cause I didn’t understand I was gender non-conforming.

This changed when puberty arrived suddenly:

I remained a tomboy, flat-chested. . . . I had to have my long hair—my dad insisted—but, um, I was very plain. I didn't play with dolls. . . . I did all the things that were more traditionally, stereotypically male. Um, and then it was literally over night that I grew breasts and I was fairly large chested. . . . When I had top surgery I was 42-D. . . . It was really devastating, like my body was betraying me. . . . Everything I had, without realizing it, been telling myself so that I could cope with the world, it suddenly shifted and I had to accept that that wasn't it, and it threw me into a really deep depression.

When he finally attempted suicide as a teenager, he was sent to a hospital where he was told that he was a lesbian. While he knew this wasn't the case, he felt it was safer not to argue with the authorities:

I had actually heard of transgendered in the third grade from watching *Donahue* and I had known from that that I could have surgery and get on hormones. . . . But there was no trans community that was visible, so I just went along with, "Okay, I'm a lesbian."

As I noted in Chapter 2, Phil Donahue had discussed transgender issues in a number of *Donahue* shows, and these were judged to be sensitive, informative, and educational (Gamson, 1998, p. 48). Christian's reference to watching the series while in the third grade makes clear that Donahue was educating, not only the non-transgender public, but transgender individuals as well, myself included. Since Christian was unable to find a transgender community during his youth, the *Donahue* show was his sole source of information.

Beginning in early adulthood, Christian spent many years in the lesbian community: "When I first came out as a butch lesbian, that was really powerful for me. You know, I was able to claim something powerful and masculine." Eventually, however, he realized that while this identity was closer to his own, it wasn't quite right:

It's somewhere on the spectrum, but I haven't gotten to my destination yet. . . . When I got to that point, that's when I started to go to transgender cause I'd always filed in the back of my mind that one *Donahue* show. . . . Good old Phil; he saved my life.

Coming out as a transman within the lesbian community was fraught with challenges:

It took me a few years to really kinda come to understand the lesbian community. Um, I really didn't understand the identity politics. . . . There weren't as many out transmen as there are now so it was very much, uh, shunned. . . . It was probably early to mid nineties when I started to talk about, "You know, I'm not just butch. I'm transgendered and I identify as being more masculine than feminine." I started off with that. Uh, I didn't quite say "male" because that was a charged word and I ran in a lot of feminist circles and I didn't want to get clobbered.

He states that, in response to this revelation, some "butches" would indicate that they felt the same way he did, while others would become "aggressive and angry," prompting Christian to "quickly back off." As he explained, "I was a little gay boy at heart. I didn't want to get beat up."

Christian's current self-identification as a "two spirit" who lives as a man was formed when he first attended a gender conference in 1997. He explained that "the whole conference was very focused on surgery and hormones or else. If it's not surgery and hormones, you're not really a man." Ironically, however, it was at this conference that he first met an individual who identified as two spirit. After they spent some time talking, he felt that this person understood him:

I wasn't ashamed of the feminine side anymore. I'd done so much work to try and not have a problem with that. . . . It's more clear now that I'm post-transition. I'm more effeminate as a man, and that's where the two spirit part came out that, that I was the reverse. I was not a masculine woman; I was actually more of a feminine man and I just hadn't been able to, to get there until I transitioned.

In his autobiography, Jamison Green (2004) made a similar point:

I reflected on all the years I had thought my masculinity was the problem for my female body, and came to understand, more concretely than before, that it was my female body that had been the problem for my masculinity. (p. 36)

Christian describes himself as a feminine man while Green sees himself as more of a masculine man, but both indicate that they are not masculine women. In other words, the issue is not the

degree of femininity or masculinity, but whether they are perceived by others to be men or women; attempting to become more or less feminine or masculine will not solve the problem. As Green explains:

We come to understand and accept . . . our masculinity or femininity and its relation to our femaleness or maleness, but it's the body that gives us problems—it's the body that we have to deal with . . . in order to express our deepest sense of self. The rest of the world has this reversed: while taking their bodies for granted, they assume their problem (if they have one) is masculinity or femininity, and this reflects on their self-concept as men or women. (p. 36)

Christian's identification as two spirit, therefore, reflects an acceptance of his femininity and a realization that being a man does not require a particular degree of masculinity any more than it requires a male anatomy.

All of my interview subjects identified as men to some degree, sometimes partly because of their anatomy, and other times in spite of it. The natal males were aware of themselves as boys at a young age and were often directly told that they would one day be men, whereas some transmen did not come to this realization until well into adulthood. My next question brought these men back to their present lives by asking them to describe situations in which they are particularly conscious of themselves as men. As it turned out, two of the natal males, Mark and Peter, did not find this question to be particularly salient. Mark stated that he did not really give it much thought, while Peter explained that he hasn't felt the need to tell himself that he's a man: "I don't know if I really add that part of my life as being important to who I am." Such comments can be situated within the context of privilege. As sociologist Michael Kimmel (2003) observed, "It is a luxury that only men have in our society to pretend that gender does not matter" (p. 4). He explains that when one is a member of the dominant social category, there is little motivation to think about that category on a regular basis: "You're everywhere you look, you're the standard against which everyone else is measured. You're like water, like air" (p. 3). With respect to gender privilege in U.S. society, this would apply most specifically to those men who are male,

masculine, White, and heterosexual. It is logical to assume, then, that men who are marginalized in one or more of these areas might be more likely to contemplate their own manhood, particularly in comparison to other men who possess all of these dominant characteristics. Therefore, although two of my interview subjects seemed to indicate that thinking about themselves as men was not significant, all of these men are marginalized to some degree within U.S. society, at least with respect to sexual orientation. In addition, some of the men expressed concern as to whether or not they were perceived by others as sufficiently masculine. It also goes without saying that the transmen, who had not been born into conventionally male bodies, would put a great deal of thought into their lives as men.

For Rich and Paul, a natal male married couple, the self-perception of manhood related most closely to matters of employment and domestic life. Rich stated it this way:

I probably equate having a job, earning a living, and being responsible for my own support with being a man. . . . Occasionally, if I'm faced with something unpleasant to do . . . well, you know, time to be a man and just do it.

Paul's initial response focused on their home life: "On a daily basis I, I sort of have this reminder. Yes, you're a man, you're married to a man, it's all man, man, man. So there's just testosterone everywhere." He also referenced shaving every morning and participating in a local arts organization in which men predominate: "Those things have, in my daily life, reinforced the fact that, yes, I'm a man. That, that and having responsibilities, you know, that aren't always fun. Paying bills, mortgages." When asked if those types of responsibilities seem more common to men than to women, he responded reflectively:

My knee-jerk reaction is yes. But when, when I take another moment to think about it, I know better. Rationally I know all adults face the same things pretty much, you know, responsibilities, mortgages, car payments, getting to work, having a job, finding a job, you know, all that. So I know better. I think I was enculturated with that at a very young age because I was still part of that generation where moms stayed home and didn't work.

Both of these men strongly associated their own consciousness of manhood with adult responsibilities.

For Edward, the issue was not so much responsibility as privilege. For example, he had learned from a female colleague that walking to his car at night was a different experience for him as a man than it was for her as a woman because, he explained, “There isn’t a lot of thought given to my safety.” Later in the interview, Edward returned to this subject and told the story of how he had learned this lesson: “We work late at night and I’d say, ‘See ya’ and off I’d walk . . . to my car without thinking about the fact that she had an, actually a darker route to where she was parking.” At first he did not understand her request that they walk together because he could not see himself as physically intimidating to potential predators:

We had long talks about this. She was like, “It’s not about that.” She’s like, “I’ll kick the ass if the ass needs to get kicked,” she said, “but . . . you’re being there will keep us from getting into that spot to begin with. . . . You read as a guy, and that’s enough.”

At this point, Edward realized that his ability to walk to his car unthinkingly was one privilege of being a man. The other issue that came to mind was the question of who picks up the check in a restaurant. Having been raised in the South, he had observed that his grandfather always paid. Consequently, “I definitely feel a compulsion to, to, an internal expectation to, to, to pay for it if I’m the only or certainly the eldest of the men at the table.” Given his more recent education, however, he frequently asks himself, “Do I need to legitimize myself by being the one to pay, or is it a power kind of thing? . . . Is this inappropriate of me? Is it kind of paternalistic, or am I just being nice?” His women friends have actually insisted that he not pay every time because they see this routine as “enforcing gender stereotypes.” He understands this, but then thinks to himself, “Well, now I’m getting a free meal.” In essence, he feels that the man seems to win either way, and this makes him feel self-conscious as a man in these situations.

When the transmen described situations in which they were particularly conscious of being men, their comments were closely connected to the experience of being transsexual. For example, Liam described answering the phone at this job, explaining that the callers could not see

his appearance: “All they are connecting with is my voice. . . . It sounds really masculine, and so it’s actually sort of empowering.”

For Teddy, it is the behavior of others that makes him conscious of being a man. For example, a group of women will change their topic of conversation when he walks into the room, and strangers are less likely to ask him for change or cigarettes because they may perceive him as “an aggressor.” He remarked that he experiences “more of a bond” with men, who are now more “talkative” than they had been before his transition. He also laughingly observed, “straight guys aren’t hitting on me.”

Bruce also remarked on the changes he noticed in others’ behavior. Whereas prior to transition he could stand in a grocery check-out line and interact with a child because mothers were not threatened by him as a woman, he now feels that “as a guy that’s, like, not okay.” He added that he had recently spoken to another transman who told him a similar story:

He had a baby, like a four-month-old baby, and he said, “Now I can talk to mothers with their babies in the checkout line again because I’m not just some creepy guy who wants to know about their kid. I’m a guy with a kid, and that suddenly puts that bridge back into place.

This story suggests that unfamiliar men are often viewed by women as potential threats while unfamiliar women are not. For Bruce, this type of scenario made his social identity as a man more salient since he had not faced this situation prior to transition. Another obvious change for Bruce relates to his having been raised as a girl:

Women are always supposed to go in first or, you know, the men are supposed to hold open the door. So I had to think, 37 years of, okay, I get to walk in first, and now all of the sudden people look at me when I walk in first. It’s like, “Who the fuck do you think you are? You know, you’re a guy. Wait for everybody else.”

Here, the situation not only prompted Bruce to think about being a man, but demanded that he remain aware of it and act accordingly based on social norms of etiquette. This discussion also led him to speak at greater length on the subject of privilege:

There are times when I can stand up and my voice will be heard differently than someone who is not viewed as a White man who has inherent privilege associated with that—which is so ironic because I don't have economic privilege. I have education privilege certainly, um, and the color of my skin gives me privilege anywhere I go in this country.

With respect to male privilege specifically, he did not see it as exclusively negative:

Male privilege inherently isn't really a problem. It's what you do with the male privilege that can be the problem, so if I use male privilege to my advantage or only to, uh, further myself or my cause or other people like me's cause, that's a problem, but if I can use the male privilege that I have to dismantle oppression to people who are marginalized, that's very different.

This discussion of male privilege can be compared to the comments made by Edward and his internal struggles over issues such as picking up checks in restaurants. However, Bruce has also encountered transmen who insist that they have no male privilege because they had not been raised as boys, even though women seem to feel threatened by them in public spaces. To this, Bruce responds:

Dude, that's male privilege, like all those places where people are uncomfortable with you as a guy, that's because you're carrying a power that they don't have, or that they don't perceive that they have, or that they perceive that you're gonna use against them. . . . It's not earned. You get it just because people perceive that you have a dick in your pants.

As I noted in Chapter 2, Kessler and McKenna (1978) refer to the genitals that are assumed to be present as “cultural genitals” (p. 154), and Bruce is implying that male privilege is dependent upon this assumption. If true, this suggests that public knowledge of a man's transsexual background would likely undermine any male privilege he might otherwise have.

Bruce made one final comment about his awareness of being a man. Prior to transition, he had a job in city government, and after transition he returned there to work in a very similar position. In comparing these two time periods, he found that while he had never been promoted as

a woman for over eight years, he was promoted as a man within three years. While there may be many other factors besides gender involved in these promotional decisions, their effect on Bruce is an increased awareness that he is now read as a man.

Christian's response to this question was unique in that his awareness of being a man was directly related to the fact that he was gay. When asked when he was particularly conscious of being a man, his immediate reply was, "Any time that I step out of the gay community." In comparing his experiences before and after transition, he found that living as a gay man required more caution than living as a lesbian:

Being in a relationship with another gay man and realizing the kind of hatred that gets leveled at two men showing any form of affection, um, that's really opened my eyes. Um, I've actually in the, in San Francisco I got bashed twice without even being with another gay man because I was too effeminate. . . . My partner is very clear because he's a cisgendered gay man, he's very cautious about where he'll hold hands with me and where he won't and, you know, all of that, and having spent so much more time as a lesbian, I really pushed the envelope. Um, you know, I was never afraid to hold my partner's hand and show affection and I was very in-your-face about it. But it didn't have the same impact.

Here, Christian is particularly conscious of being a *gay* man in public, not simply conscious of being a man. For him, gender expression and sexual orientation are inextricably connected because they jointly affect his social status.

I am similarly inclined to consider these concepts jointly, although I have thus far experienced no violence or threat from strangers who perceive me to be a gay man. I believe that my tendency to foreground my orientation whenever I am asked to consider my gender has much to do with the hegemonic status of heterosexuality. Since I am aware that people assume heterosexuality unless they receive cues or direct statements to the contrary, it is important to me to be read as a gay man, not simply as a man. Most transsexuals share the experience of feeling that one's gender identity is invisible prior to transition. Consequently, having one's orientation

perceived incorrectly feels like another form of invisibility. Having said this, I believe that I am most conscious of being a man when I am around women because the contrast feels so obvious, and this is not necessarily related to anyone's perception of my orientation. Similarly, I tend to feel as though others' perception of my manhood is on shakier ground when I am in the presence of men who exhibit numerous masculine characteristics in their appearance and behavior because I likely seem more feminine in comparison.

Along these lines, I asked my interview subjects to consider the extent to which they personally possess characteristics that they see as typical of men. Both Mark and Paul immediately responded by describing their male bodies. Mark stated, "I have the typical male genitalia of a cismale. Um, I have a hairy chest and body and facial hair." He also referenced social factors such as clothing and behavior. Paul responded similarly, explaining, "I have the anatomy of a man." As examples of "physical characteristics" he named a deep voice and short hair, but he added the following:

I tend to, in my own personality, be the problem solver. . . . When a problem is presented, my first reaction is, "How can I fix this for you?" rather than "I feel bad for you." And that has always to me been a very man, male sort of thing.

For both of these men, biological aspects of the male body came to mind first, followed by social characteristics. Paul's reference to problem solving was echoed by Edward who described his inclinations this way:

I've really worked hard to have a more, more feminine or even androgynous communication style, but I very quickly jump to solution when, when communicating with folks rather than more just, uh, empathic listening or something. Why else would you be telling me about your problems if you didn't want my help?

Edward also named other social characteristics, explaining that he can be very protective of others even though he is shorter than average, not physically large, and not "particularly" masculine. He feels that he takes up more space than others, exhibiting habits such as spreading his belongings

all over a table at a meeting, leaving less space for other participants, and he sees this as “kind of masculine” behavior.

One personal characteristic that he has worked hard to keep under control is his “fiery temper,” which made itself known from an early age:

I can very quickly get very very angry. . . . To me, that fits with kind of what, what I, I think of in terms of what it means to be a man, so when I was in, I don’t know, early early high school I actually stuck my hand through a wall, I got so angry, and when I was elbow-deep in drywall I was like, “Okay, this is probably not a good thing.”

He does not recall ever assaulting another person physically, but he has “snapped at people” verbally:

I’ve watched several people cringe from the sudden and quite nasty either tone or, you know, withering verbal assault. . . . I had been calm, calm, calm, calm, calm, whereas internally it was, “This is really getting irritating” . . . and then it went from zero to sixty. . . . I don’t know if that’s another masculine thing, but I will sit on it, sit on it, you know, sit on it kind of thing.

On the whole, he sees himself as “very individualistic”: “I like to do stuff my way. I like my own space and those kinds of things.” He sometimes makes the joke that he has a “historical and genetic imperative to impose my order on the world as a White guy.”

When Rich responded to this question about his own characteristics as a man, he named only social factors, but he prefaced his comment by acknowledging his awareness of social construction:

I know that a lot of this falls into the gender roles that we’re taught and, you know, men are supposed to be a little more strong and a little more tough, maybe a little more, well, responsible, impermeable, you know, strong, kind of in charge.

When asked if he felt that he possessed these characteristics, he replied that, “for the most part,” he did.

Peter was amused by the question because his concept of the typical man is nothing like the way he perceives himself:

That is something that I think of all the time because I sort of laugh at what is typical man things. . . . You read stories in the newspaper of, you know, frat kids doing something stupid. . . . I laugh and, and say, “Really? This is what men do?” . . . You get this, like, hypermasculinity that just doesn’t make any sense to me. . . . This is like, you know, there’s a weird group of people out there that are still hunting and gathering. . . . It’s this strange peculiar subculture to me but . . . it’s the majority to the world. So in that case, I guess *I’m* in the subculture.

Peter was the only man whose self concept differed from the set of characteristics he had associated with the term *man*, yet he expressed no doubt that he considered himself to *be* a man. The other four males were able to name characteristics, both biological and social, that connected their own life experiences to the conceptions of *man* they each espoused. However, when I asked the five male interviewees if there were characteristics typical of men that they wished they possessed to a greater degree, two provided specific answers. For Mark it was his voice:

Everybody tells me I have a very gay voice, and it’s like argh! . . . I don’t think I have one, but everybody tells me that. . . . They perceive my voice [as] effeminate. It’s not that there’s anything wrong with that, but I’m male identified, not female identified.

It is interesting to note the equation that Mark is constructing here. A “gay voice” implies an “effeminate” voice, which contradicts the fact that he is “male identified” rather than “female identified.” Therefore, one who is male-identified must not have a “gay” or “effeminate” voice if he is to make clear that he is not “female identified.”

Paul’s response had more to do with physical appearance and behavior: “The way I carry myself, I wish it were a little more stereotypically masculine. . . . I would like to be more muscular.” Also, “I consider myself to be a high strung person, which was a trait that my mother had. . . . A worrier, yes, and easily agitated. . . . Trivial things sometimes can be, you know, monstrous.” While this trait has caused him concern due to its health-related problems such as

high blood pressure, he adds that he has “always considered it to be more of a feminine trait, mostly because my mother is like that.”

In Peter’s case, he is not concerned about lacking any characteristics as a man because being able to “do yard work and kill spiders” seems sufficient: “I think all the other characteristics, I don’t really want, which is strange but I, I really don’t. I don’t want those. I don’t want that hypermasculinity. I don’t want to be able to punch somebody in the face.” Again, Peter is scoffing at the hypermasculine qualities that tend to be seen as “typical man things,” yet he does not reject the term *man* as a label for himself. As he stated earlier, his initial understanding of the term was a basic relationship to the male body, so he appears to continue his use of the term as an identity label on those grounds. Since he associates *man* with qualities that he views as negative, he does not desire to possess them. Therefore, he perceives nothing lacking in himself as a man. Mark and Paul, however, associate *man* with physical and behavioral requirements that they fear they do not meet.

These two distinct questions regarding characteristics of men that are present or lacking in each individual were answered separately by the natal males. However, when I asked the transmen to name qualities typical of men that they felt they did possess, two of the men began their responses by discussing what they felt they *lacked*. This can be related to the fact that these two men, Christian and Liam, began by discussing their physical bodies, whereas the other two men, Teddy and Bruce, began their responses by discussing social and interpersonal qualities.

For Christian, this question brought to mind physical characteristics of males that he could not achieve, or could not achieve to the degree that he would prefer:

I wish I was taller. I wish I had a different body type where I was maybe a little thicker in the torso and a little more muscular. . . . I kind of imagine that, like this big strong glistening tan chest, and that’s not gonna happen.

Liam also began his response by referencing one particular aspect of his body: “It’s hard wanting to be Jimmy Stewart but only five-foot-three.” He explained that he walks with an “upright posture” that gives the impression of extra height: “People are surprised when I walk up and get

closer to them, that they are looking down at me.” However, he also addressed characteristics that are behavioral rather than physical, stating that he does possess one quality that he had ascribed to Jimmy Stewart: “You do right cause that’s what you’re supposed to do.” He explained that he attempts to “embody” the qualities of man that his mother described as common “back in the Jimmy Stewart world.”:

There were certain roles that were, you know, assigned, and that was what you did.

There was the bad guy and the good guy, that kind of thing, so it was all very cut and dry, you know. It wasn’t as spectrum-wise as it is now but, um, there’s something to that that’s attractive because it does make things easier when you’re dealing with other people.

The simplicity of clear-cut roles for men and women is perhaps one reason why male icons of the past can seem so appealing as role models for some transmen. I would argue, however, that this admiration for pop culture representations of manhood only functions at a relatively superficial level. While transmen can look to the male characters portrayed by Jimmy Stewart as models for behavior or appearance, the men in those films did not face the same types of challenges in their lives. For instance, when I remarked to Liam that I could not completely identify with Stewart because he wasn’t gay, Liam replied, “It would have been nice.” As would-be role models, Stewart and his fictional characters can be somewhat helpful to us as men, but not as gay men or as transmen.

In responding to this question about qualities he does or does not possess, Teddy focused on social rather than physical characteristics. He began by stating that he does not take much time to get dressed in the morning: “I look in the mirror, but I don’t obsess about how I look.” The implication here, of course, is that women are more inclined to “obsess” about their appearance than are men. He went on to explain that the characteristics he sees as “manly” are not qualities he wants to have. These include talking about sports, “downgrading of women,” and “being loud and obnoxious.” He acknowledged, however, that sports talk could create “more of a bond with more men,” despite his own lack of interest. These comments are reminiscent of Peter’s statement that

he does not want the hypermasculine characteristics encouraged by his father, but rather the ability to express emotion and tell people that he loves them.

Bruce described himself in a similar manner, stating that he was pleased with his ability to “bring to a conversation . . . more compassion or more emotional connection or more ability to listen.” He also explained that while he might use words such as *powerful*, *strong*, and *active* to describe the meaning of the word *man*, he would not necessarily use the same words to describe his own experience as a man:

I think of myself as having compassion and understanding in ways that people who are socialized as male—I’m almost 50 years old—people who are socialized as male from birth and have 50 years of that “this is how you’re supposed to live as a guy,” would have a very different view of the world than I do. So I think I’m, like, the softer kinder version of male than . . . the average guy my age.

He also feels that he has “more ability to listen” than most men. While he sees himself as “active” and “strong in some ways,” he wouldn’t necessarily describe himself as “masculine,” although he recognizes that other people probably would. When asked if there are any physical attributes that he lacks, he responded that he did not really think he was missing anything: “I suppose I could have more physical strength, but I’m stronger than I was before I transitioned. . . . I was a taller-than-average woman, so that makes me kind of an average height guy.”

Having asked these men about the characteristics they perceive themselves to possess or lack, I then asked them to describe times when they had consciously compared themselves to other men. All five natal males were able to recall such times, although one man, Rich, downplayed his tendency to do this, stating that he has “never been the type to really compare myself to others very much.” However, he acknowledged that the “rare” times when he has done so have been related to career, status, and income level, particularly when another man his age had a higher status position. Paul made similar comments, explaining that, as a “slightly insecure person,” he has often compared himself to others in terms of social status, but he has also compared his “manliness” to that of other men “many, many, many times.” For example, “Am I as buff?” or

“Am I dressed as well?” In the physical comparisons that Mark has made between himself and other men, he has never viewed himself as superior: “If it’s a negative it’s like, ‘Damn, I wish I had more muscles like that one’ or ‘a little bigger penis like that one.’”

Peter and Edward thought about comparisons they had made during high school. As Peter explained, he felt “less self-worth” because the “jocks” got all the attention for their ability in sports, but this feeling did not last into adulthood:

Later in life I was comfortable with the fact that I don’t care about those things. Uh, in high school I did, but looking back I only cared about those things because other people told me I needed to care about those things. Uh, now I kind of look at that and say why, that’s stupid.

From sixth grade through high school, Edward compared himself to other male students, initially asking himself if he was playing enough sports. He notes, however, that he wasn’t actually concerned about being manly but about seeming manly enough to escape suspicion about his sexuality: “It was not quite for the same goal of achieving, you know, archetypal manhood, but avoiding detection of, of the gay thing.” At this point in the interview, he made an interesting point about growing up in the South, explaining that he had an option not necessarily available to young men elsewhere in the country. Instead of the “jock” or the “Don Juan,” he could be the “southern gentleman” (also called the “bachelor gentleman” or the “gentleman dandy”) who was seen as “not sexually active,” or at least not inclined to talk about it if he was. Edward’s own strategy was to fill his schedule with activities, allowing no time for dating. This gave him the reputation of a nice young man who was loved by the girls because he seemed “safe,” and who was “not threatening to the other guys” because he wasn’t competing for their “alpha male status” nor for the girls. As he sums it up, this strategy gave him “the avenue to be this asexual, um, but still gendered, um, uh, thing.” He was gendered as a man, yet he was not perceived to have any sexual orientation at all.

Collectively among the five natal males who were interviewed, comparisons to other men involved social status, specific physical attributes, physical abilities, and overall appearance. In

Edward's case, however, his initial concern about appearing "manly" equated to coming across as heterosexual, suggesting that a gay man does not fully qualify as a man in some contexts. His later "southern gentleman" strategy also had complex repercussions on his adult life because he hadn't dated during high school: "There's kind of a social retardation. By the time I came out, it was like, you know, I have all these years to make up for." Once he did come out in college, he explains, "trying to construct that identity for myself, as opposed to keeping it under wraps, probably is when that sense of self as a gay man really began to form." It was also a surprise to some friends who, while they saw him as a man, had never thought of him as a sexual person. Edward explains that the innocent social reputation he had fostered actually hampered his sense of identity:

Being a man means being with a woman. Well, broader than that . . . it's being with *somebody*, you know. Well, I didn't even have that, so again when, when the coming out was happening it was, all right, now I've, I've missed this whole piece of what it means to be a man.

This adds another component to the social concept of *man*, suggesting that, ideally, a man should not only be physically male, strong, responsible, and protective, but also sexual in some way. If a majority in U.S. culture agree with Edward's assessment that a man *should* be heterosexual, but *must*, at the very least, be sexual, then a celibate man's claim to manhood is a shaky one. This is in keeping with the theories of early 20th century psychologist G. Stanley Hall, who felt that both evolution and civilization were dependent upon men who were assertive and manly; consequently, civilization was threatened by men who were not. Referring to teenage boys in 1908, he stated that "a perfect gentleman has something the matter with him" (Rotundo, 1993, p. 269).

As a southern gentleman, then, Edward was both *man* and *not-quite-man* because, socially, being a man implies an active sex life and preferably a heterosexual one. Paul stated that he had also lived in the south during his teen years, but he was "very open in high school." This openness was not verbal, however: "I just never really had to tell anybody." He believes now that people either did not know, or did know but did not care.

In asking these natal males to describe times when they had compared themselves to other men, I did not reference the fact that they were natal males, nor did I suggest that other men might be other than male. The corresponding question, when asked of transmen, was worded differently in that I asked them to describe times when they had compared themselves to natal males, not simply to men in general. This relates to the fact that transmen are socially marginalized on the basis of their birth sex if their trans status is known.

Bruce, who had previously rejected the idea that he lacked any physical attributes as a man, acknowledged making comparisons, largely on the basis of overall fitness: “I think I do that anytime I see a guy, uh, you know, what does he look like as compared to me? Or, wow, I wonder how much work it takes for his body to be in that much shape.” Upon saying this, he quickly added that these physical comparisons do not represent wishfulness on his part, and while he does not criticize those transmen who pursue genital surgeries, he does not feel that this is a necessity for him:

If I had a hundred grand just plopped into my lap, would I have all the surgeries I could have to make my genitalia look male? I could think of way better things to do with \$100,000 than buy something that doesn't look or function the way cisgender males' plumbing works. . . . I don't see how it's gonna make me more complete as a person.

Teddy, on the other hand, feels some discomfort when comparing his body to that of a natal male. As noted earlier, he is interested in dating a particular friend of his who is also a transman. Sometime just prior to our interview, the two of them had observed a natal male who, Teddy's friend remarked, looked like a man he used to date. Not surprisingly, Teddy was motivated to compare himself to the man they had observed:

Oh, honey, that's intimidating. . . . His stature, the tallness. It was the height and more, more developed musculature . . . and the fact that he has one certain thing I'll never have and that's, you know, the thing we're missing. . . . Those are the, the three things that, that I would like to have that I don't have is things I can't have like the height and the genitalia.

In this situation, the comparison was linked to Teddy's perception of his own physical attractiveness since the person he would like to date had been involved with a natal male.

Christian responded to the question of comparison with great detail. Since his own partner is a natal male, he began by describing the comparisons he makes between the two of them:

I look at him and, you know, he is a little bit thicker in the torso and he's very strong. . . . I love that I can't get one hand around any part of his arm. Um, I love the pattern of hair on him. . . . These are things that I've noticed about men for many years, trying to imagine what I would look like as a man. . . . I've looked at facial hair. I've looked at, you know, head hair and how things recede and male pal, uh, pattern baldness. I've looked at back hair, arm hair, chest hair, leg hair.

He explained that he had initially made these comparisons in an effort to picture his own future self, but that he now considered himself to be "four years post transition" and, as such, he was no longer focused on goals for his own appearance because "now it's more of an admiration." He also mentioned that he sometimes compares himself to other transmen:

If I notice something on somebody else and I like it on them, it helps me to accept myself a little bit more. . . . It was definitely envy for a long time, but I think I've gotten to a place of accepting that this is my body type, um, and it is what it is and, you know, there are guys out there who wish they had my body type.

For Christian, finding some degree of identification with both natal males and transmen has been comforting because he has achieved a feeling of self-acceptance that shields him from feelings of inadequacy.

When I compare myself to natal males, I find that my feelings still resonate with that envy stage Christian experienced. Like many transmen, I am not as tall as the average natal male, and this becomes particularly salient when I attend formal events populated by numerous gay men. Because most of these men are not only taller than me, but also less curved in the hip and leg areas, they look better in suits that were designed for tall male bodies with narrow hips and slender

legs. I frequently feel that I am seen as the “short, dumpy guy,” and this has sometimes caused me to avoid such events.

Liam could not recall a specific memory of comparing himself to natal males, but he did emphasize, like Bruce, that natal males had been socialized differently as children. This “different point of view” has become obvious to him during conversations with natal males: “There is that sense of, like, wow, you know, if I had been born a bio male I would have a completely different life, but I don’t dwell on that.”

Both Bruce and Christian suggested that they were basically content with their own bodies, regardless of the differences they observed when comparing themselves with natal males, while Teddy and I expressed less satisfaction. It is interesting to note that Teddy and I were also the two transmen in this study who stated a preference for using the term *man* rather than a term like *transman* to identify ourselves, whereas Bruce considered the term *female-to-male* more appropriate, and Christian viewed himself a two spirit who lives socially as a man. In other words, the two transmen whose language use was the most binary were also the two who seemed the least secure about their own bodies when comparing themselves to natal males.

Collectively, all nine men suggested that the concept of *man* reflects both social and biological characteristics, but the natal males were more inclined to conflate the concept of manhood with anatomical maleness. Even when their manhood was questioned or compromised due to their identification as gay or to their presentation of characteristics inconsistent with the narrow parameters of hegemonic masculinity, they maintained a personal and social identification as men. While both natal and transmen reported their own childhood observations of differences between men and women, only the males received direct teaching and modeling from parents and others about their future lives as men. When they first came to see themselves as men—based on their age, their own adult behaviors, or their engagement in various rites of passage—their declarations of manhood were not met with any resistance from family members or other influential adults, and were often encouraged. Transmen, however, lacked direct teaching about their future manhood, and in some cases received teaching which directly contradicted the idea

that they might one day live as men. As a result, they were either confused about the concept of manhood or else came to an early understanding that sex and gender were distinct concepts because they felt confident that they should one day be men despite their female bodies. Two transmen, Bruce and Liam, did not clearly perceive themselves as men until adulthood. This occurred for Bruce when he came to identify with another transman, and for Liam when he found that he identified with the transgender community as a whole. Another difference between the responses offered by natal males and transmen was the fact that some transmen referenced their identification with pop culture models of manhood during their youth, particularly if they felt that the male role models in their own families were flawed in some way. None of the natal males made reference to Jimmy Stewart or other images of manhood within pop culture.

While all of the natal males referred to themselves as men, this was not fully consistent among the transmen I interviewed. For example, Bruce felt that it was more “honest” to call himself a transman rather than a man, except in situations where he felt concern for his safety if he referenced his trans status. Christian also identified as a man in many social situations, but he preferred the term *two spirit* because he felt that it took his “feminine side” into account. Another transman, Liam, did not express a strong preference regarding gendered labels for himself, stating that he was equally comfortable being called a man or a transman. The remaining transman, Teddy, did insist that he identified as a man or a “guy” rather than a transman.

Members of both groups indicated a particular awareness of their manhood in situations involving their own male privilege. Some natal males also referenced adult responsibilities as reminders that they were men, while others stated that they rarely thought about it. For some transmen, reminders of their own manhood were closely related to the transition process. For example, Liam was aware that he was a man when others heard his deep voice over the phone, and Bruce explained that he needed to acquire the habit of holding doors for others rather than walking through them first.

When these men associated themselves with the characteristics typical of men, the natal males were able to name both physical and behavioral characteristics that they possessed as well

as lacked. For example, male genitals, muscles, and vocal tone all relate to the physical body, while problem solving, achieving social status, earning a high income, taking up space, and exhibiting a quick temper are behavioral. The transmen were more inclined to name emotional and interpersonal qualities as positive characteristics they possessed, while physical attributes such as genitals, muscles, and body height were often referenced as lacking or insufficient. This implies that they felt comfortable with themselves as people, but they were dissatisfied with their bodies to varying degrees. Men in both groups expressed a distaste for the aggression often associated with hypermasculinity, and they took pride in their own ability to connect emotionally with other people.

Theme 2: Relating the concept *man* to sexual orientation.

Once these men had discussed the various meanings associated with the term *man*, as well as their identification with these meanings, I asked them to consider how this concept intersects with gay orientation. My questions probed the meaning of the word *gay*, as well as their use of this term as an identity label. I found that the transmen offered particularly interesting interpretations of gayness as a concept, ranging from stereotypical responses to innovative constructions concerning similarity and difference.

When I asked what characteristics he associated with the term *gay man*, Bruce simply listed four qualities: “Artistic, compassionate, uh, thoughtful, non-monogamous. That’s it.” Christian’s reply was also brief, but then he found himself critiquing what he had just said:

The first thing that comes to my mind is more stereotypical . . . very effeminate, uh, kind of flamboyant . . . from Nathan Lane to maybe a RuPaul where they start to get a little fiercer, and then it kind of masculinizes from there. . . . I feel guilty when I, when that stereotype hits my head. There are gay men who are not effeminate and so I immediately find myself forcing a shift that I want to recognize the full range. I don’t wanna stay stuck in the stereotype but it’s always the first thing that hits my mind.

His response began with a more narrow image, partly influence by pop culture, and then he reminded himself to acknowledge the “full range” of gay men. Liam had a similar experience in answering this question:

It often falls into the whole category of what mainstream gay culture seems to have turned into of, like, well-groomed man, likes to eat good food and nice drinks and dresses well and has a condo . . . but that is sort of what first pops into my head, even though I’ve never met anybody like that. . . . I’ve met people who want to be like that and do their best no matter how much they’re in debt to live like that. . . . There is a part of me that wants, you know, to, um, at least attempt to attain those goals, if you will, but then on the other hand I realize what a crock of shit it is because it’s perpetuated by a marketing system that wants us to buy their stuff.

This is essentially the *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* vision of gay men. As Berila and Choudhuri (2005) suggest, this series “reifies a commodified masculinity: being a sensitive and stylish man means consuming products” (§ 24). While Liam acknowledges that it “feels good to look nice,” he also appreciates attending an event like a gender conference because “it opens my mind up to the rest of us, which is pretty much the majority of the population.”

Teddy responded to the question about the term *gay man* by providing a definition: “They like the same sex.” He chose not to describe any specific characteristics because “there’s not one type of way to be gay, just like there’s not one type of way to be a man.” He uses the term *gay* to describe his own orientation, but his application of the term is very specific:

To me, gay is, you love the same sex as yourself, and I prefer other trans guys, so to me there’s no other way to be gay. That’s the gayest way to be gay in my mind is, I’m attracted to my same sex. My same sex is another F-to-M. . . . Other guys I know that claim they can only be gay with a bio-man, it’s like, how is that gay exactly? . . . They won’t date trans guys either. They’ll only date bio guys, so I don’t understand that I guess.

This is an interesting linguistic construction that I did not hear from the other transmen, nor do I subscribe to it for myself. His comments make clear that, within U.S. culture, there is some confusion as to whether *gay* refers to same-sex attraction or same-gender attraction. Since sex and gender tend to be conflated by most people, this would not appear to be a relevant issue in most cases. However, for transsexual men, it highlights a crucial difference. As Mark noted in his interview, his own attraction to his partner Christian is not so much about the anatomy of the body as it is about Christian's masculine appearance and "affectation." For Mark, and presumably for other natal males who partner with transmen, gayness is a matter of same-gender attraction. For those natal males who only find themselves attracted to men with normative male anatomies, gayness would seem to imply more of a same-sex attraction, particularly if overt femininity in a male partner is not seen as problematic.

Liam stated that he refers to himself as gay, but he pointed out that he is also comfortable with the term *transfag* because it reveals his trans status:

That's what I am. I'm not lying about being a bio-guy to pick up on you, kind of thing. I'm a transfag. . . . I don't find it insulting at all. Well, I will say that *faggot*, on the other hand, is still insulting to me. Yeah, I don't like that term. That's weird how that extra syllable just adds a little insult to it.

Just as Bruce expressed reservations about using the term *man* rather than the more specific term *transman*, Liam appeared to be concerned that using the word *gay* would imply that he was a natal male. Whereas Bruce did not want to "pretend" that he was never female, Liam goes so far as to use the word *lying* in this context. Bruce's view of the term *man* and Liam's view of the term *gay* suggest that the link between these terms and natal maleness is so strong that their use by anyone besides a natal male constitutes deception. This issue is related to the use of the term *passing* for a transsexual man who visually appears to be male in a public setting. Many transmen refer to themselves as "passing" when strangers perceive them as men and assume that they are natal males. However, transman and author Matt Kailey (2005) critiques the use of this term:

The problem with “passing” is that the concept is built around the idea of deception—that a person is one way and is “passing” for something else. And as I struggled through my “manly” stages, I wanted nothing to do with “passing.” I was a man. That I was a man without a penis was simply an unfortunate fact of life. . . . The concept of “passing” assumed that I was attempting to be something I wasn’t—that I was pulling a fast one on the rest of the world, getting by with some kind of false presentation. If I really was a man, then I wouldn’t be “passing” for one—I would just be one. (p. 32)

In other words, a drag king could be said to be “passing” as a man, while a transman simply *is* a man because he identifies as a man at all times. Communication professor John Sloop (2004) emphasizes the negative connotations associated with the term *deception*, which implies “something sinister afoot,” such as “a predator who preys on others by keeping them from apprehending the truth” (p. 57). This also brings to mind Gamson’s (1998) analysis of talk shows in which he explains that transsexuals are framed “not so much as gender-crossers but as *gender-liars* (p. 97). As Liam said, “I’m not lying about being a bio-guy to pick up on you.” Likewise, as noted in Chapter 3, Patrick Califia (2002) remarked that it was difficult to “claim” the label of *man* (p. 393) because he would always be a “transsexual who passes” (2003, p. xiii). It is interesting to find these constructions coming from transsexuals themselves, but this emphasizes the point that not all transmen interpret the term *man* in the same way.

With respect to the term *gay*, Bruce states that he is “a gay man,” but he quickly adds that this “really confuses people” because he had previously lived as a lesbian:

The best way I know how to explain it is, I’m a gay person. When I was female bodied that made me a lesbian; now that I’m male bodied that makes me a gay man. . . . Prior to transition I had never had an intimate relationship with a man. I was 37 years old. . . .

Post transition I’ve only had relationships with men. How the hell did that happen?

He has no explanation for this shift in object choice, other than the vague notion that he naturally tends toward gayness no matter which gender he expresses. In terms of identity labels, Bruce

notes that he also uses the term *queer*, but he feels that “*gay man* is more readily understood in broader circles than *queer* might be.”

When I asked the natal males if they ever used any other language besides “*gay man*” to describe their orientation, most stated that they did not. Mark was the only man to name *queer* as a label he would use for himself. Both Peter and Edward saw *queer* as a term used by the “younger generation,” and they had no objection to this but did not feel comfortable using it for themselves. As Edward explained, “I don’t use it, um, cause it usually was followed by a fist, um, in my generation.” Paul was more vociferous in his objections to the term:

I grew up in an era when you didn’t say that. That was like the N-word to me. . . . When I hear it, I still go, “Ahhh!” you know. About the only context I can handle it in is when you talk about the TV show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.

Edward noted that he had also referred to himself as a *homosexual*, but that he has never really liked it because he sees it as “clinical” and associated with “negative connotations.” Mark objected to the term *homosexual* as well.

For natal males, the term *gay* appears to be perceived as a fairly stable signifier, whereas transmen address it with greater complexity. As these particular transmen have demonstrated, there is also some debate as to how the term *gay* should be defined, i.e., same sex, same gender, same trans status, etc. As I demonstrated within the first theme, the term *man* is also perceived as relatively unproblematic by natal males until the topic of transmen is considered, and transmen themselves differ in their opinions as to whether they should refer to themselves as men or as transmen. It is hardly surprising, then, that the topic of intimate relationships between natal males and transmen is rife with complexities. As a precursor to this discussion, I asked both groups of men to describe the characteristics they find attractive in other men.

Among the natal males, Peter had the most difficulty with this question, and he was quick to point out that he did not know the answer: “That’s a question that I’ve been thinking about since I first thought I was gay.” He explained that he can find women physically attractive, yet he has no desire for them. “It’s very strange. But I guess that’s, that’s what really hit home with me

that I'm absolutely gay. There's no sort of question. It's completely unequivocal, uh, because I have no attraction at all to, to women." Rich's initial response was also a bit vague. Stating that he was "not attracted to a particular type of man," he added that a man could be tall or short or have any hair color. Even after a clarifying question, he had to give it some thought:

ETB: But it is clear in your mind that you're more attracted to men than women.

Rich: Oh yeah.

ETB: What's that difference for you?

Rich: That's a good question. [long pause] That's really hard to define. . . . I don't necessarily crave men that are macho or masculine in the traditional sense of the word.

He went on to name "overall body physiology," explaining that "men are typically a little more angular" and "firm," and that women are "a little more curvaceous" and "generally softer, gentler." He also named voice as a factor.

While the responses from Peter and Rich were not particularly specific, these two men did not hesitate in stating that they were not attracted to women. For Mark, who is in a relationship with a transman, attraction was less about the body and more about masculinity in general:

Somebody who's masculine identified. Um, they don't have to have all the parts. They just have to be masculine identified. They need to appear masculine. They have to have an affectation that's reasonably masculine. Um, so if they're a little more on the effeminate side, I'm not attracted to it.

When asked whether or not specific aspects of the body were important, he replied, "It doesn't matter to the final attraction because it really comes down to a chemistry ultimately." He stated a preference for facial hair and chest hair over smoothness, but explained that, ultimately, these aren't essential issues: "The physical has to be there to some degree, but it's not the whole package."

Paul's response to the question about attraction was focused more on qualities of emotion and attitude than on physical attributes. After mentioning masculinity and "the tendency to be strong," he named "the tendency to have a slight emotional aloofness. I, I associate that with masculinity, and that attracts me." Describing his father as aloof, he offered the following speculation:

For a lot of gay men I think there's a trigger that we do tend to look at men who remind us of our fathers. . . . Even at an emotional level, even if it's not a man that looked like our dad, I think there's something that triggers in us, when we find men who had certain behavior traits similar to our fathers. I have found, for myself and for a lot of people I've known throughout the years, that tends to be an attraction, and for me personally, my father had a slight aloofness. . . . He didn't engage automatically. And I find myself attracted to men who do that.

In keeping with this, he added:

Emotionally, I think I'm attracted to men who tend to approach romance by sexual matters, which is very different than, than, than a woman. It's not necessarily as touchy-feely, um, care bear, um, you know, cuddly, you know. It, it, it's a little more, I wanna say cut and dried.

Paul appears to be suggesting here that women approach relationships through romance, which is later expressed physically, while men begin with a physical expression that may lead to romance. In his experience, this delay in emotional connection has been associated with a natural inclination toward "aloofness" in men. His perception that women desire relationships that are "touchy-feely," "care bear," and "cuddly" is strongly contrasted with the phrase "cut and dried."

Edward's lengthy response to the question addressed both the emotional and the physical, emphasizing his lack of attraction to extreme qualities. He stated that he has met "a number of archetypal nasty gay men, um, who, you know, I can't stand to be around because, you know, they feminize and thereby put down everyone around them in order to be alpha dog." Instead, he prefers men who are "a little more androgynous. They don't have to be right all the time. They

can communicate as much about emotion as they can about fixing the problems.” Physically, he is not interested in “the hypermasculine . . . leather daddies” or “the rugged, um, you know, unshaven, um, big beefy muscular kind of types. Again, I don’t know if that’s just intimidating, or my track record with them has been that they’re pretty and that’s about it.” In terms of body hair, on a “spectrum” from “twink . . . to bear,” he stated that he prefers less hair rather than more because “a pelt is not desirable.” On the other hand, he also has no interest in the “young shapeless teen-esque bodies,” explaining that “some of it might be just that’s too feminine, and I don’t like women in that way.” Ultimately, he named his ideal type as “the boy next door” who is “more like me than unlike me.” He named the actor Matt Damon as an exemplar of his ideal type.

Edward expressed a preference for men within the androgynous range between femininity and extreme masculinity in terms of both emotion and physicality. While the feminine was not appealing to him, he was equally unattracted to hegemonic masculine attitudes and hypermasculine bodies. Given his interest in men who can “communicate about emotion,” he likely would not share Paul’s attraction to aloofness. His response relates more closely to Peter’s earlier comments about the value of expressing affection as a man, and the “peculiar subculture” of hypermasculinity. Both Edward and Peter indicated awareness of their own sensitivity while also positioning emotional expression as a valuable trait for men in general. The other three men placed greater emphasis on both physical and emotional expressions of masculinity, although none professed a preference for hypermasculinity.

Among the transmen, Bruce provided the most amusing response, but his observations also suggested that relationship behaviors within the gay and lesbian community have become decidedly stereotyped:

I think of myself as having an attraction to men with lesbian sensibilities. Now what the hell does that mean, right? So I’m attracted to men, but when I think of, at least my history as a lesbian, um, monogamy was important, building a home together was important and, you know, I see so many gay male couples. They never live together, they

have open relationships, um, and, I dunno, maybe I could do that. I've never really tried, but I'm not sure I'm wired that way.

In his experience, Bruce has witnessed monogamy in the lesbian community, but not in the gay male community. Consequently, he thinks of relationship fidelity as a "lesbian sensibility." He also prefers people who are "well grounded," who have a "broad range of interests," and who don't "play games." When I asked him to name something specific that he finds attractive about a man, he mentioned the smile and the eyes:

Like if they can get a real connection. . . . That's one thing that women and men do differently. Women are much more likely to make direct eye contact with somebody than men are because men were socialized to believe that that connection is a confrontation.

As with fidelity, Bruce sees the ability to make a connection through eye contact as more common to women than to men. He added that since most men had received "heteronormative socialization," the tendency to see eye contact as confrontation is present in gay men as well as straight men. He pointed out, however, that when gay men do make direct eye contact with one another, it often signifies more than an emotional connection. Bruce explained that someone had given him some very specific advice about making eye contact in gay bars:

If you look at a guy in the eyes and then you look away, that doesn't really mean anything. If you look at the guy in the eyes and you connect and hold the gaze, that might mean that you want something. If you look at their eyes and then turn and look at their crotch and then look back at their eyes or put your hand to your mouth, that means you want something *now*. And I'm just like, they don't have any of those kind of rules in the lesbian bar.

For Bruce, one of the characteristics he finds attractive in men, eye contact, can become intimidating when he isn't sure how he should react or how his behaviors will be interpreted by others: "What am I saying? And I don't even know when I'm doing it."

Christian explained that his feelings of attraction are all about masculinity rather than physicality:

I'm not really concerned with what's in a person's pants or under their shirt. . . . I'm attracted to masculinity and I don't really care what form that comes in, um, as long as the person's comfortable in their skin.

For Christian, these masculine individuals have included "butches who were non-trans" and "trans guys that were pre- and post-transition," as well as his current partner, who is a natal male. He explained that he had always been attracted to men, but when he was living as a masculine woman in the lesbian community, he only dated "butches":

A lot of other people in the community couldn't understand that because everything is still based on a hetero model for a lot of people and so, especially a lot of older, uh, lesbians would be like, "No you have to date fems." No, I don't like them. I like butches, and that's been part of my evolution now that I'm transitioned is realizing I, eh, it's masculinity, and it doesn't matter what body parts. . . . I'm very much attracted to female-bodied masculine women. Um, and some people would call me bisexual and I'm not offended by that. Um, it's just my own identity. I am a male-bodied person attracted to other masculine people. And to me, that's same with same. Um, and so bi would imply, in my mind, that I was also attracted to effeminate men and, uh, and feminine women. And I'm not.

Like Teddy, Christian defined the word *gay* in a way that made sense to him. Teddy stated that he considered himself gay because, as a transman, he is attracted to other transmen whom he considers to be the same sex as himself. This "sameness" for Christian had more to do with masculinity. Neither of these definitions is restricted to the standard concept of "same sex" defined as natal male, and Christian's definition cannot be restricted to the concept of "same gender" if it includes masculine individuals who identify as women.

When I asked Teddy about the types of people he found attractive, his initial response involved the language of gender rather than sex:

Men. And like I said, I'd . . . ideally I would be with another trans guy, but they don't necessarily have to be trans, but a guy. I cannot have emotional attachments to women at all. And I have tried, and I can go through the physical act with them, but it's not fulfilling, and romantic or emotional, it's not there for me.

Following up on this question, I asked Teddy to clarify what it was about men that he found emotionally or physically attractive. In other words, what was different about men and women in terms of his own attractions? His initial response was "smell." He then added, "Body texture of the skin, body shape, muscular, you know, the muscle distribution, um, clothing—not into crossdressers—energy, um, yeah, just the way they carry themselves in the world, you know, body language." It is interesting that this clarification is restricted to aspects of the physical body. He did not elaborate on his earlier comment that he "cannot have emotional attachments to women at all."

Liam also discussed the attractiveness of body types, but he finds that he is now attracted to a broader range of individuals than he had been before his transition:

It used to be that I was attracted to very, uh, effeminate men, uh, it might be slender body type, short, uh, I guess you could call them harmless. But now that I'm, you know, undergoing this transition and, of course, on hormones, I'm experiencing this kind of wide-ranging attraction to, uh, anything that moves [laughs]. So, it's, it's weird. I don't quite know if I'm going to settle down into a new preference or not but . . . I'm starting to respond to just the sexual energy in people and whatever that is, is like, "Wow, hey, that's kind of cool. I might wanna experience that." And so it's less defined around what they look like or, you know, how they present themselves.

When I asked Liam if this greater range of people are still men as opposed to women, he replied, "Yeah, that is true. There has to be something masculine about them." He added that he could not define the word *masculine*, and that he did not have a preference in terms of masculine expressions: "I don't prefer facial hair over shaven or, you know, bears over twinkies, you know. It's weird but, um, it all seems attractive to me in some way." This led him to consider more non-

physical aspects of attractiveness: “I do want them to be confident and comfortable in their own bodies, mostly because, otherwise I start feeling like I have to be their therapist [laughs]. Um, you know, to reassure them, ‘Oh yes, of course you’re sexy.’” When I asked him if confidence is attractive, he provided a more nuanced response:

Yeah, I guess that’s it. Maybe I wanna date Jimmy Stewart. No. [Laughs] Um, yeah, confidence, but not, you know, that false bravado thing of like, “I’m macho man. Of course you want me.” That’s like, “Um, no thanks. I’ll pass.” I find that very unattractive.

This rejection of the “false bravado” of some men was echoed in Edward’s stated aversion to men who “put down everyone around them in order to be alpha dog.” While Paul had described his attraction to men who are “aloof,” none of the men expressed an attraction to hypermasculinity.

I have likewise been repelled by arrogance and hypermasculinity in men, both before and since my transition. My experience is somewhat similar to Liam’s in that I had previously been attracted to a more narrow range of men—those particularly gentle and sensitive, which Liam referred to as “harmless.” After years of increased testosterone levels, I am now better able to appreciate the masculinity of men’s bodies with respect to characteristics such as body hair and muscle tone. However, I continue to find hypermasculine behavior unappealing, and I have never been attracted to the extremes of physical masculinity such as the bodybuilding physique. Unlike several of the transmen I interviewed, I have never dated anyone who was female-bodied at birth, neither women nor transmen.

Given that the concept of homosexuality implies an attraction to sameness, all nine of these men perceived their own gayness as an attraction to people whose sex, gender, or gender expression was similar to their own. Men in both groups described their attraction to particular characteristics such as muscle distribution, eye contact, androgyny, emotional connection, aloofness, more or less body hair, a desire for monogamy, etc. Because sex and gender were in correspondence for the natal males, they were attracted to male-bodied men in most cases, although they all expressed some degree of open-mindedness toward the idea of dating transmen.

Mark, the only natal male involved with a transman, explained that he was attracted to “masculine-identified” people, but this did not include an attraction to masculine people who identified as women. This was not the case for his partner Christian, who stated that he was attracted to masculine people of any sex or gender identity. On this basis, he described himself as “a male-bodied person attracted to other masculine people.” In other words, gayness was not restricted to the constructions of male-with-male or man-with-man. Because his attractions included masculine women, he added that he was not offended if others perceived him as bisexual rather than gay. In terms of alternate terminology, Liam stated that he preferred to identify as a “transfag” rather than a gay man because he didn’t want to be perceived as “lying” about his physical sex. This suggests that the term *gay man* can be taken to imply male anatomy.

Theme 3: Considering how manhood functions within intimate relationships.

My introduction of transmen as a question topic during these interviews came as no surprise to the transmen, to the natal males who knew me personally, or to the male partner of a transman. It may have taken Paul and Rich by surprise, but they expressed no discomfort with these questions. I began by asking the natal males to describe what came to mind when they heard terms like *transsexual man* or *transman*. Both Peter and Mark made immediate comparisons between their earliest impressions and their current feelings. Peter explained that, in his youth, he thought it was “peculiar,” but once he met transgender people and learned about the subject in a college class on human sexuality, his attitude changed: “I don’t question that now, never have in recent years.” What he meant by this, he explained, was that he has no right to question the self-professed identity of another person if he expects people to honor his identity as a gay man. Mark stated that, previously, upon hearing a term like *transman*, he would have anticipated “a person who was too feminine for me, or way too butch and just . . . I don’t want to use the word *ugly*, but unattractive to me.” As with Peter, however, his feelings have changed: “In the last year I’ve done a lot of work around that, and what comes out of it is just another man, really.” Through a process of deliberate introspection, Mark found that the concept of a transsexual man emerged as “just another man,” despite his earlier assumption that such a person would be “too feminine” or

“way too butch.” This seems to suggest that his initial reaction to the term *transman* was the expectation of an obvious and disconcerting mismatch between a female body with “feminine” attributes and an excessively masculine gender expression.

When I asked Paul what came to mind upon hearing words like *transman*, his initial response focused on definition:

I’m educated on the topic enough to know that it means someone who has gone through at least some level of physical transformation to the opposite sex. In those clinical terms, I understand it is someone who is not a transvestite. It is someone who is not a drag queen.

As Paul was speaking, I was wondering if he had been confused by the term *transman*, since he appeared to be describing transwomen. He continued:

It is someone who actually at a very deep level identifies as a woman, or, well, when I hear the term. Tra . . . wait a minute! Okay, okay, I’m getting my terms mixed up. . . . No, I really do mean trans version of man. Um, yeah, I had to think about those terms because they’re new. . . . So I had to think, a transman. What direction are we going? From what to what?

This confusion over terminology is a common problem, exacerbated by the fact that much medical literature continues to label transsexuals in accordance with birth sex rather than gender identity. In other words, some researchers refer to transmen as “transsexual females,” and to transwomen as “transsexual males.” As Scott-Dixon (2006) explains, using “the term ‘male homosexual transsexual’ (which actually denotes a male-to-female trans woman who prefers male partners) is at best confusing and at worst insensitive” (p. 14). Schleifer (2006) further comments that “this approach excessively privileges the materiality of the body over the discursive and interactional strategies that individuals use to negotiate their bodies, selves, and desires” (p. 60). Since most people do not recognize a distinction between sex and gender, this privileging of the body seems commonsensical. Consequently, the term *transman* is interpreted to mean “a man who is transsexual,” and *man* is taken to be a synonym for male.

Since Paul's response thus far had been restricted to definition, I asked him more specifically what he might anticipate from a transman in terms of physical appearance, personality, or behavior. He replied that he would expect a transman to be of "shorter stature" with physical features that were "rounder" and "softer." This is in keeping with Durgadas' (1998) comment that the fat man's "male status is revoked" if his body is "visibly, palpably soft and round" (p. 369). Noting that he had met three transmen in the past, Paul explained that he would also anticipate a "more melodic voice" because this trait often "carries over through the transformation." In terms of personality and behavior, he stated that he would not expect a transman to be more or less "butch" than any other man. It is interesting that he chooses to use the term *butch*, here, rather than a term such as *masculine*, since the word *butch* has a very different connotative meaning for female-bodied people than it does for male-bodied people. Masculine women are often assumed to be lesbians, and lesbians who are masculine are often referred to as butch. On the other hand, "butch" men are perceived to be achieving, or at least attempting to achieve, normative masculinity, and the more a man exhibits this quality, the less likely he is to be perceived as gay. One possible exception to this is the man who identifies publicly as gay while also exhibiting overtly masculine qualities. In this case, the term *butch* might be applied as a means of foregrounding the performative nature of this man's behavior. If Paul does not expect transmen to be more or less butch than other men, perhaps he does not expect them to exaggerate their masculinity in a manner that would seem unnatural or forced.

Paul had also noticed "a higher level of empathy" in the transmen he had met, and he suggests that this may mark them as transmen rather than natal males:

I associate the, the tendency to wanna solve a problem as being male, and the tendency to want to empathize with a problem as being female. I think that is an emotional trait which, at least half the time in my experience, has carried over, and that's kind of a, a, a giveaway.

This response is in keeping with Paul's previous comment that he associates masculinity with aloofness. If he perceives empathy and aloofness as oppositional, an empathetic person cannot be read as masculine.

Asked what his thoughts would be if he was told that someone was a *transman*, Edward stated that his immediate reaction would be to brace himself to defend that person from verbal attacks:

I kind of get my hackles up waiting for someone else in the group to make some kind of comment. . . . I kind of get ready to try to respect the person for who they are and play the role of educator or whatever because far more often than not, that, that unfortunately . . . is required.

He stated that he had previously been in the position of defending transpeople when rude remarks had been made. Consequently, when he hears a word like *transman*, his first thoughts concern issues of "presentation" and "passing" and the discomfort felt by some non-transsexual people when the transperson exhibits a "mismatch between the nonverbals and the identity." As an example, he told the story of a transwoman asking him for advice about her outward presentation as a woman because she "couldn't understand why people were so uncomfortable around her." In an effort to be of help, he found himself advising her to sit with her legs together and "demure a little more." For Edward, this situation was "very much a catch 22" because "there definitely is for me a tension in, you know, reinforcing gender stereotypes for someone's benefit." When considering transmen, however, he anticipated less difficulty:

The transmen, in my experience, do a better job of passing in broad strokes patterns than the transwomen do. . . . From the purely selfish end, that makes it easier for me because there's not as much educating I feel the call to jump in and do in those situations. . . . It's much easier for . . . a transman to be quiet in a space, or not to take up that space, 'cause that doesn't register as much as the transwoman who's bringing her male socialization with her and some of the male privilege that comes in with that, the expectation that she will get to talk first or whatever. . . . Almost to a person, that's been my experience.

Based on the transmen he has met, Edward characterizes them as “affable and friendly,” but also quieter, with more “feminine” nonverbal behaviors:

They don’t come in, um, as, uh, many nontransgender cisgender men come in with the bravado and the, um, the jockeying for position . . . so in some ways for me it’s actually kind of refreshing. It’s . . . another guy in the mix who isn’t gonna be trying to piss for territory.

Referring to himself as “not a strapping physical specimen,” he stated that “transmen are more like me” in terms of their overall androgyny. This sense of identification helps to explain Edward’s description of transmen as “kind of refreshing,” particularly if he has difficulty identifying with most men because he associates them with hypermasculine behaviors. This was illustrated when he related another story about a transwoman. She had not been to a mall since before her transition, and when she did go, she was shocked at how people were rudely bumping into her as she walked. According to Edward, another woman, a natal female, offered the following explanation to this transwoman:

You’re a woman now. They don’t see you. It doesn’t matter how tall you are. They don’t need to get out of your way now. When you were a six-foot tall strappin guy, people’d get out of your way. You’re not scary anymore.

This narrative implies that being read as a man sometimes means being read as scary or intimidating, which is not the way Edward sees himself. In this way, he is able to identify with transmen, at least in a social context.

When Rich was asked what comes to mind when he hears a word like *transman*, he first addressed the courage of transsexuals and his own willingness to use whatever pronoun is requested. He then added an insightful speculation:

What’s underlying this question is that, would I think of a female to male transsexual as a man in exactly the same terms I think of biological men, and, and that’s a good question. I hadn’t really thought about it until now, um, I, I don’t have a good answer for that. You’ve, you’ve made me think.

Rich was, of course, correct in his assumption about the question, and this became more clear when I asked all five men to name any characteristics, typical of men in general, that were present or absent in the transmen they had met. Rich named facial hair, men's clothing, and a deep voice as examples present in transmen, but he added that "you can still see maybe the slightly wider more women-like hips in some cases, um, and maybe slightly more gentle facial features." He pointed out, however, that there are natal males who also exhibit these characteristics, so they cannot be used as definite markers of transmen. Consequently, in the case of the transmen he has met, if he did not know they were transmen, he "wouldn't think twice about it." Mark made a similar statement, explaining, "I would not have known any of them were trans until they revealed. . . . In every case they were super heavily tattooed . . . and piercings all over the place." Here, Mark may be implying that tattoos and piercings are culturally perceived as masculine, or that they are more commonly worn by men than by women and, therefore, help to disguise a transsexual history. Of course, there are many women who are "heavily tattooed" in contemporary U.S. culture but, for Mark, they contributed to his inability to detect that some transmen were transsexual rather than natal male.

Paul named facial hair, tone of voice, and a masculine walk as characteristics of transmen that are typical of men in general, but he added that he had not noticed the aloofness in transmen that he has found in natal males. This is in keeping with Peter's comment that transmen, like himself, are "able to communicate emotion effectively." Paul also made the following observation about transmen based on his personal experience: "If someone who arguably may be considered really really hot or good looking were to walk by or walk through the crowd, the natal male . . . would comment and follow with eyes at the very least," while the transman would not.

Edward professed admiration for transmen who decide to transition "despite the flack they must get, and the repercussions that must come with that." In making a comparison to the decision to come out as gay, which can also suffer repercussions, Edward sees some hypocrisy in those gay people who fail to recognize this connection: "I've had cisgender folks, especially within the gay community wonder how, you know, how can they do that, why would they do that

to themselves?” He observes some gay people judging transpeople just as they, themselves, have been judged by the larger society, yet they do not acknowledge that both scenarios involve issues of identity.

Edward stated that he wishes to be an ally to transpeople, but he is inclined to “chastise” himself when he suspects that a man might be a transman and he finds himself looking for an Adam’s apple as evidence of natal maleness:

I think, in all honesty, trying to discern real from not real, men and women, which I hate, the, everything that has to do with that, but I think I do. . . . Part of my brain is trying to, is, you know, scanning, looking for some indicator.

Paul related a similar experience when he encountered men who were somewhat shorter than the average man:

It kind of stood out, because of their height, uh, and that made me think, “Oh, I wonder,” and then I took a second look and I was like, “okay, kind of some rounded features” . . . and it’s not like it should be a game where you, you know, guess the transgendered person.

For both Edward and Paul, the inclination to “guess the transgendered person” came naturally, despite the internal misgivings they felt about it.

Rich described becoming acquainted with a man at a local arts organization, and only later finding out that he was a transman: “When I first met this person I had no reason to suspect that he might be a transsexual. I just figured he was a man and didn’t think twice about it.” The conflation of sex and gender is evident here when he states, “I just figured he was a *man*,” clearly referring to an assumption of maleness. This attention to the sexed body became prominent for Paul when he was asked if he found himself consciously thinking about the trans status of transmen during his interactions with them:

Yeah, I found myself doing that, yeah, I did. And, and basically, it was, I was trying to go, “Okay, I know who you are now. I know who you were. Let’s see, you know, what

did you change?” I mean, you know, and it’s not a fair thing to do. It really isn’t. But I think it’s human nature.

Paul also observed that transmen “have generally been less comfortable around me,” and he wonders “if it’s some kind of vibe I give off. . . . Maybe I’m, like, observing them too much, makes them feel scrutinized.”

These comments from Edward, Paul, and Rich make clear that transmen face a dilemma. On the one hand, members of the general public have little knowledge of transsexual identities. Therefore, if they encounter transmen socially, not knowing their trans status, they are inclined to perceive transmen as men simply because these men exhibit cues that allow them to be read as male. On the other hand, people who are more educated on the subject—who know more about the transition process and the appearance of the trans body—are more likely to scrutinize the appearance of the transman, seeking evidence of a female body. While these more knowledgeable people may be more inclined than the general public to view transmen in a positive light, making an effort to use the correct pronouns and treat transmen respectfully, the unconscious or even conscious inclination to conflate sex and gender prompts a search for loopholes—shreds of evidence that these men are not “real” men—suggesting that the term *man* is granted more out of politeness than from full acceptance.

Edward was troubled by the idea that he might, on some level, consider himself superior to transmen. In terms of masculinity, he wondered if the presence of transmen made him less concerned about “measuring up” than he would be in the presence of other natal males. He explained that he questions this because he often feels more comfortable around transmen:

I hope I can be self-critical enough to say, is that because I see someone who is another gender non-conformist to the degree that I am, I think in terms of not being the pushy, or as pushy, or physically intimidating? . . . Or is it, um, I, I go into that interaction knowing I won? . . . Is this a guaranteed victory that if someone is comparing us, you know, I’m gonna take the trophy? . . . And that’s horrific to think about. . . . I have

questioned myself from time to time. Is, is it comfortable because I win? You know.

Or, and then part of me goes like, “How do you know you win?”

Edward’s last comment makes reference to the fact that some transmen have a very masculine presentation in comparison to his own. Consequently, during an interaction with a transman, he cannot assume that he will always be perceived as the more masculine or attractive man.

Given that some transmen anticipate rejection from natal males, I was interested to hear how these transmen felt during their interactions with natal males, both gay and non-gay, and how they approached the subject of dating. Like Matt Kailey, as referenced in Chapter 3, some of these transmen also described their experiences with computer-mediated interactions.

Teddy explained that, before transition, he had difficulty talking with men because they did not share “commonalities like sports and cars.” Since his transition, however, heterosexual men no longer see him as a “possible date,” but as a “buddy.” In fact, some of his male clients have assumed that he was straight and asked him for advice on where to meet women. While he does not believe that most gay men see him as straight, this had been a concern for him in the past:

A lot of that’s when I’m out with my roommate, and I told her to go out by herself now.

Normally I have to, like, break down that wall cause people won’t approach me if they thought I was with her and I’m like, “No, I don’t like girls.”

Again, Teddy is expressing a concern that he will be misidentified, in this case as a heterosexual man rather than a lesbian. His suggestion that “people won’t approach me” likely refers to gay men who see him with a woman. It is also notable that he refers to others approaching him, but he does not describe himself as approaching others. One challenge Teddy has had to face since transition is his assumption that a man is expected to be assertive when he is attracted to someone. When he was living as a woman, this was not expected of him:

Before, I mean, people would come to me, they would pursue me, and now I’m the one that’s supposed to be doing the pursuing, and so that’s something I’ve gotta figure out when I’m dating. . . . I’ve never had to do that before.

He explained that making a comment such as, “Hey, you’re cute” involves additional expectations for his behavior: “*Now* if I do that it’s like, I better have an agenda or a reason. You know, I better be ready to do something.”

While Teddy stated that he was interested in a particular transman at the time of our interview, he also indicated that he had previously felt attracted to a couple of natal males, but “they couldn’t deal with me being trans.” He first experienced this type of rejection after meeting a man at a party:

This guy comes up to me and grabs my leg. It was somebody that I had sort of, had seen before, and I was like, “Before you do that, come here.” [Laughs] Cause I like to give a warning. And I told him I’m trans. He’s like, “Okay,” and he didn’t seem to care and we made out and stuff and then we met for drinks after that a different time, and I thought everything was fine and, um, you know, we hung out one more time. He’s like, “I just can’t do it.” I’m like, “What?” He’s like, “Well, I’m interested in you but I like dick.” I’m like, “Okay.”

Teddy clarified that his use of the phrase “made out” was meant to refer to kissing and touching. So in this case, a natal male found Teddy attractive as a man, and he was able to engage in some physical behavior with him, but he felt unable to take the relationship any further due to Teddy’s anatomy as a transman. The other instance of rejection that Teddy described was when a man approached him and stated that Teddy was “the type of person he’d be interested in,” except for the fact that Teddy was a “pussy.” Teddy then asked him, “Are you gay because you like men or are you gay because you like dick?” The man’s response was simply, “I don’t know.”

After Christian’s transition, he found that it was “a little bit scary sometimes” to interact with natal males whose behavior was more in line with hegemonic masculinity. He feared that if he did not act the same way, his personal safety might be at risk. However, he has since met many natal males who do not behave in accord with that hypermasculine stereotype:

There’s lots of guys out there, cisgendered guys, who are wonderful and they’re not sexist and they’re not the enemy. They’re not horrible. There’s, there’s tons of them and

so I'm not as afraid now as I was early in transition because I've got so many role models now, um, of, you know, cisgendered guys who, you know, are happy to be an ally.

When I asked him about interacting with gay males specifically, he expressed no reservations: "I find myself feeling really comfortable. Whenever I'm in the gay community, any form of queer community, I'm very comfortable." However, his attempts to date natal males were not successful until he met his current partner:

I didn't really have much luck with cisgendered men. Um, I kind of just fell into a relationship with my partner, but a lot of cisgendered gay men, the minute I would decide to disclose that I was trans they didn't really wanna have anything to do with me.

Christian was also able to offer some interesting comparisons between dating a natal male and dating other transmen:

There are things that I miss about being with, with a transman. . . . There's that shared history and shared understanding, um, that my partner tries to understand but, you know, he wasn't socialized female for 30-plus years. . . . Like with my ex, our bodies were similar, you know, and, and there, there was a comfort in that that I miss sometimes. But it's not a better or worse thing; it's just a difference, and there are things that I love about my partner that I couldn't get from being with a transman.

Here, Christian is highlighting the significance of his identification with other transmen. While it is important that transmen are able to identify with other men *as men*, for some transmen it can be just as important to identify with other transmen *as transmen*.

When asked about his interactions with natal males, Liam described his feeling that he had now "joined the club" where there is a "sense of camaraderie with men" because "there is this certain body language in common." During early transition, he believes, he was not always perceived as a man because his body language was too feminine. As he explained, "You have to train yourself not to do certain things." One example of a change in his behavior concerned his initial shyness. For instance, when he first began attending support group meetings, he would say nothing about himself, but "later on I realized, you know, guys are not shy; they just say what they

are. . . . So there was that, like, learning experience for me of, like, I need to just learn how to be myself.” At the time of our interview, he felt that he had improved in this area; however, he had also found that others were perceiving him as straight because “I’ve not quite absorbed what’s considered gay behavior.” This desire to be read as a gay man is in contrast with his feelings during early transition when he was hesitant to tell others that he was gay:

I remember my first couple meetings with the gender support group and I, I felt very very uncomfortable revealing that I was married or that I was attracted to men. . . . If you’re one gender, you’re supposed to be attracted to the opposite gender and so, yeah, I was a little nervous about that because of the idea of being ostracized for it.

With respect to dating, Liam explained, “I know what I want and, uh, the only problem now is convincing myself that other guys are going to be into that thing of dating a trans guy when they’re gay, but I’m working on that.” Having heard stories about transmen being rejected by natal males, he has mixed feelings on the matter:

I have a very primitive understanding, I guess, of gay culture or what it means to be a natal gay male, but my perception is that there is this obsession with the penis, so when I hear a story like that it seems inevitable to me that someone would have that reaction of “Well, you don’t have a penis so I’m not interested.” So yeah, I’m not surprised. On the other hand, though, it seems like, well, that’s kinda stupid. [Laughs] Because it’s not all about the cock. I start thinking along the lines of, like, well, you should be attracted to me for who I am, not what I have between my legs.

Such scenarios have not lessened his interest in natal males, but they have made him hesitant.

When asked how he would feel about dating a natal male, he replied, “It would rock. Uh, no, right now I’m in limbo land. I feel like I’m not quite ready for a real relationship yet.” He explained that this hesitancy is partly due to the subjects covered in the workshops he attends at trans conferences: “The topics of conversation come up of like, you know, *When You Get Rejected*, *Personal Safety*, issues like that, and I start hearing these things and I’m like, well, maybe I just don’t wanna do this yet.” While he insisted that transmen shouldn’t “have to be afraid all the

time,” he also felt unprepared for what he perceived to be a different lifestyle in the gay community:

I always had been in relationships that lasted about a year or more, so the idea of a hook-up is like, uh, what does it mean? I don’t know. So I guess you could say that’s one of those things that I am still trying to learn about, uh, the rules of engagement in the gay scene, cause they are different than heterosexual relationships.

These comments are reminiscent of Bruce’s comparisons between the lifestyles of gay men and lesbians, as well as the humorous advice he received about eye contact in bars. Liam sees his previous life in the role of a heterosexual woman as part of a very different world than the one he is attempting to enter, and he has dealt with this by placing himself within particular segments of the gay community:

I think I find most, my comfortableness is being with the *out* crowd of the gay scene as opposed to the *in* crowd of the gay scene. You know, spending more time in the leather bars as opposed to the really hip hop happening places . . . where everyone’s, you know, I’m generalizing obviously, but it seems like everyone is obsessed with the same kind of look, you know, the physique, the haircut, the, you know, the clothing and the, and the dance moves.

This is not the case at a particular leather bar in his local community:

They have bear nights and leather nights and whatever. I feel more comfortable there because there’s a guy in a harness who has bigger man boobs than I do [laughs] and it’s awesome. I don’t feel so down about my own body.

When I asked him if these segments of the gay community were more accepting of transmen, his response was speculative:

I would assume they are, but I haven’t explored that fully. I mean, I haven’t told anyone in the leather bar that I’m a trans guy, so I don’t know what that experience would be like, and I’m definitely not gonna try that in one of those hip hop happening places.

Given his concerns, I asked if he would consider a relationship with another transman. He responded that, having attended trans conferences, he now sees this as a possibility:

I don't have huge hang-ups on body parts, so to me again it's that I'm attracted to the sexual energy and confidence, and if a person embodies that and looks, I guess you could say, masculine, then, yeah, I don't have, I don't have hang-ups with that. I'm not obsessed with cock, I guess you could say.

While Liam feels that he has "joined the club" of men in general, the rejection faced by other transmen has made him hesitant to date natal males or, in some cases, to even reveal his trans status.

Bruce initially responded to the question about interacting with natal males by relating amusing anecdotes. For example, he believes that he asks more questions than natal males tend to do, and he wonders if he seems strange to them: "Why is this guy asking so many questions? Like, doesn't he know guys are just supposed to figure this stuff out? You know, the whole ask-for-directions thing." He added that he sometimes unknowingly makes comments that threaten to reveal his trans status:

Right after I transitioned, it took a few years for me to realize that when I went to the store to buy shoes, I didn't need to qualify to the shoe salesman that I needed an eight *men's*. I could just say that I need a size eight 'cause they would decide by looking at me whether I needed a men's or a women's shoe.

He has also found that natal males tend to assume that he is straight "unless I specifically say I'm queer." On the subject of dating, Bruce made a particularly interesting observation about another assumption that is often made about gay men. He explained that during one of his first dates with a natal male after his transition, he felt the need to reveal his trans status:

We'd had this great conversation through dinner and I kept . . . feeling like I was telling him a lie cause I was talking about previous relationships that I had been involved in as a woman, which made it appear that I was straight and, and at some point came out as gay, and I thought, "You know, I'm leaving some shit out. He's missing whole, whole parts

of who I am.” So I said, “You know, there’s something you really need to know about me because it’s a part of my identity.” I said I was born female and I identify as a gay transman.

This man’s response was, “Oh, like, that’s not what I was expecting,” and Bruce realized that his date had been bracing for a different announcement: “It’s like they’re relieved when you tell them you’re a transman because what they’re expecting you to say is that you’re HIV positive.”

However, this sense of relief can also be combined with disappointment. As Bruce commented, “It’s a weird, weird dance. Very weird.”

When I asked Bruce about the possibility of dating transmen, his reply was direct and decidedly different from the comments made by the other three transmen:

This is the interesting conundrum. Part of what I’m attracted to is a penis. So, no transmen I know have a penis. They might have a phalloplasty or a metaoidioplasty,¹³ but that’s not a penis. . . . I have had intimate encounters with both transmen and with cisgender men, and I remain, uh, more attracted to a cisgender man than I do a transman. But that doesn’t mean that I would totally close the door on transmen as being an option for dating.

While he allows that “there could be a trans guy out there that’s just the right person for me,” he has decided that “it’s not something I worry about.”

I can definitely relate to Bruce’s feelings in this matter because, as of this writing, the idea of dating a transman remains a gray area for me. While I feel it would be foolish to rule it out because I recognize that it is sometimes possible for a good emotional connection to take precedence over one’s physical attractions, it is not what I imagine for my future. Consequently, I recognize the tremendous irony—what Bruce refers to as a “conundrum”—in this juxtaposition of feelings: If there is to be a male partner in my life, I have to assume that he would be content with me as a transman, yet I find it difficult to believe that I would be content with a transman myself. In other words, I expect a form of acceptance from a future partner that I would, perhaps, be unable to offer if I were in his shoes. Because of this incongruity, I am not inclined to take offense

when some natal males explain that they are unwilling to date transmen. To respond to these men with anger or resentment would be nothing short of hypocrisy. I am offended, however, if these same individuals insist that transmen are not men. I can accept the fact that some men would not be attracted to trans bodies, but I cannot accept having my identity defined by people who have not shared my lived experience.

One context for interaction between transmen and natal males has been the Internet, and all four of the transmen I interviewed were able to describe various forms of such computer-mediated interactions. For Liam, this interaction has come in the form of the online virtual world known as Second Life. He explained that prior to his transition he had created a male avatar for himself and had formed a “virtual relationship” with another male avatar. After about six months, the other person wrote, “Are you actually a guy?” When Liam revealed that he was not a natal male, the other person—a counselor in real life—sent Liam some information that led to his eventual transition. While this was a positive experience, the next incident was less so. Liam explained that another individual he encountered online was a natal male gay man who was part of the “gay scene” within Second Life. When Liam revealed his trans status to this man, the response was, “Why the hell would you do that?” In reply, Liam wrote, “Well, you know what? It’s just me. Uh, if you’re not comfortable with it you don’t have to talk to me anymore.” The man then responded, “Well, I mean, I consider you my friend, but maybe I didn’t need to know that about you.” In time, however, the man said, “Okay, you know what? It’s fine. I’m glad that you’re happy . . . being a faux guy.” Liam feels that this was initially “a negative reaction,” but after he described his personal situation to this man and added the fact that he had been depressed prior to transition, the man acknowledged, “Okay, well maybe it’s a good thing that you figured this out.” When I asked Liam about his interactions with “live” people, he joked that he did not have time for them because he works full-time and attends school: “At some point I will reach the, you know, that niche. I think actually that experience with that person having a negative reaction like that has sort of made me hesitant to try that in the real world.” This experience,

combined with the stories he has heard about natal males rejecting transmen, has added to his feelings of insecurity about dating.

Teddy's online experience has involved reading personal ads on Craigslist, and he has found that many of the natal males who indicate an interest in transmen are expressing very specific desires that do not match up with his own:

I'm a top, and most male guys that are into trans guys, the ones that I've seen posted or heard of . . . they like bottoms. They like trans guys, but they like trans guy bottoms.

They don't want to be topped by a trans guy.

Teddy is also frustrated by what he perceives to be the inconsiderate behavior of natal males who "don't want to do anything for a trans guy." As Teddy explains it, "They just wanna have somebody they can fuck in two holes or three holes and that's it. It's like, so where's the reciprocity?" In speaking with other transmen, Teddy has also come to the conclusion that most transmen do, in fact, identify as bottoms. He has posted questions to discussion groups attempting to locate other transmen who identify as tops because he wants to hear their advice on how they "navigate the dating thing," but he has received no replies.

Bruce explained that he had placed his own ads online, and that he had been frustrated by men who did not take the content of his ads seriously:

If I were to place an ad on Craigslist today I would say "Forty-seven year old female-to-male transsexual, um, interested in anal sex. Vaginal sex is not an option." . . . I'm very clear it's not a choice. . . . It's not about them looking at me as a woman because they can penetrate my vagina. It's that it hurts and I'm not into that kinda pain, and it would probably cause me physical damage.

Some respondents, however, seem unwilling to abide by the rules he has set. When he explained this to a friend of his, the friend replied, "Well, the reason why they're not willing to give that up as an option is because that's part of what they're attracted to is that they know that you have a vagina and they want to fuck you vaginally." This has been frustrating for Bruce because, as he explained:

I'm really clear. I've not had lower genital surgery. I mean, I'm very upfront about it. Before I will crawl into bed with somebody, I want to feel safe. Cause I don't want to feel violated through that experience, and so I'm really clear about what they can expect and not expect and how things are gonna look.

He described one situation in which he met a man and explained these parameters, but the man continued to attempt some sort of negotiation. Bruce responded, "No. No buts about it. If that's where you want to go, you put your clothes back on." Fortunately, he has also received "some very respectful responses" to his ads.

Christian had also placed ads online, explaining his trans identity and including photos of himself, but he found that the respondents continually expected him to be a transwoman rather than a transman:

We'd actually meet and they'd be like, "Oh," cause there's this way that trans guys are invisible when, when people see, like, on an ad or something, they see "trans," they think "transwoman." . . . They identified as straight, but they were specifically looking for either a hookup with a gay man or looking for a transgendered woman. . . . In the discussion I would be very clear that I'm, I'm, I identify as a gay man, but I'm not a transgendered woman. And I would explain I was born in a female body and I'm now male. And they were still surprised. Like, they still had it in their head, like, no matter how clearly you explain it, they still think "transwoman." And I'm like, no, I'm not a chick with a dick. I'm actually a gay man. You know, I'm a real man with a pussy.

Despite these unambiguous descriptions, however, some of these men would not give up on their previous expectations:

One guy actually pulled out an outfit for me to wear. He was like, "Well, could you just wear this for me?" And he had a woman's outfit for me to wear and some make-up and I said, "No, I can't do that for you." I said, "So, you know, either you shut up now and we do it or, you know, I can leave cause I don't need sex that bad.

Christian explained to me that after his identity was finally established, they would have “awkward sex,” so I asked him why these men would follow through with this if he was not at all what they had been expecting. “I guess that’s kind of a guy thing,” he suggested. “If you have a place to stick it, don’t say no.”

I then asked Christian how he felt during these encounters, given that these men were basically settling for something they hadn’t anticipated:

It was discouraging. . . . A couple times of that and I was very clear that I, I needed to find a different way to, like, meet people. Um, I stopped doing the Internet after that. I was like, “This isn’t gonna work for me.” . . . I didn’t want to be the freak. I didn’t wanna, I didn’t wanna get the tranny chaser again. . . . So I had pretty much given up on cisgendered men until I met my partner. He gives me a little hope.

Eventually, Christian found his partner Mark without the aid of computer mediation. A mutual friend had been attempting to introduce them for years, and then they finally met at a trans conference.

Personally, I have no desire to seek a partner online for several reasons. The one benefit I can attribute to this method of introduction is the fact that one can take the time to compose one’s words carefully. However, as Christian’s experience makes clear, even the most precise language will not necessarily override the most fervent expectations. In addition, I have always preferred face-to-face communication for the wealth of insight communicated through facial expressions. Indeed, I’ve exhibited a lifelong dislike of the telephone for this very reason. Finally, since online introductions are often attempted with brief sexual encounters as the primary goal, I simply lack the patience to wade through the offers of casual encounters in hopes of finding someone who shares my desire for meaningful connection that will last longer than a few hours.

The four transmen I interviewed had attempted to meet men online, but with less than ideal results. A man on Second Life initially referred to Liam as a “faux man,” although he eventually came to some degree of understanding. After reading some ads on Craigslist, Teddy came to the conclusion that many natal males have a selfish desire to use transmen for sexual

purposes with no “reciprocity.” Bruce had a similar reaction when the respondents to his ads attempted to ignore the explicit parameters he had set for their encounters. Perhaps most surprisingly, Christian’s respondents appeared to be incapable of understanding the content of his ads, no matter how clearly he attempted to write them. While this list represents the experiences of only four individuals, it does suggest that online methods of introduction can produce a wide variety of unanticipated results for transmen. The only positive story from this particular group of men concerned Liam’s online correspondence with a counselor who provided him with helpful transitioning resources, while each of the other stories appeared to result in some degree of frustration and exasperation.

In an offline context, several of these transmen have experienced rejection from natal male gay men, while both Liam and I have not really pursued relationships since transition. In attempting to learn the “rules of engagement” in the gay male community, Liam has made efforts to “train” himself to behave in accordance with the body language of other men, and he has found himself more comfortable interacting with “the out crowd of the gay scene.” Since transition, Teddy has felt an unfamiliar and uncomfortable pressure to “pursue” relationships in an assertive manner, combined with the added expectation that if he does so, he had “better be ready to do something.” For both Liam and Teddy, the prospect of dating as men has suggested the need to change their behaviors in order to comport with social expectations. Christian has feared for his personal safety in the presence of hypermasculine men, having been “bashed” twice because he was perceived as “effeminate,” and his natal male partner has taught him to be more cautious about expressing affection in public. In Christian’s case, social expectations for his behavior have involved not only the degree of masculinity he exhibits, but also the degree of apparent gayness. It would seem that these transmen have been learning the “rules of engagement” for men on multiple levels. It is one thing to be a gay man among other gay men, while it is quite another thing to be a man in the presence of hypermasculine heterosexual men.

Having heard from transmen regarding their interactions with other men, I asked the natal males about the prospect of forming intimate relationships with transmen. When I asked Edward

if he had ever felt attracted to transmen, or if he would consider dating one, he replied that he could not recall ever feeling attracted to a man he knew to be a transsexual, yet he recognized that many of the qualities he finds in transmen are the same qualities he looks for in a partner, i.e., quiet and sensitive rather than hypermasculine and dominant. His one area of uncertainty, however, was the question of physical intimacy:

How's that gonna work? . . . It would definitely be something that I would want to put on the table, uh, but, and talk through, cause I don't know how I'm going to react or, I know I would love to say, "Oh, you know, I fall in love with individuals" or whatever. But I'm socialized and I do identify as a gay man and that's more than liking penises. . . . Am I gonna be interested if, if, if he still has a vagina? Well, I really hope my relationships are based on more than, you know, a single external reproductive organ. . . . So does it come down to what you're able to do physically, kind of stuff? To me that's kind of shallow, but I also see where that, that's, can be a really important and healthy part of a, of a relationship. . . . I hope I am, am . . . I almost said "man enough" . . . to be able to take the whole person. . . . I have high hopes for myself.

Edward's concern seems to reflect a tension between an ideal version of himself, who is fully able to accept the transman's anatomy, and what he fears may be his more authentic, and more discriminating, self.

Like Edward, Peter also had high hopes for himself, stating that "if everything was great" in terms of "emotional connection, shared interests, [and] sexual chemistry," he did not think he would question his attraction to a transman, but he does not believe that this open-minded attitude is common among most gay males: "I don't think it's typical at all. Not to say that I'm, you know, righteous but, um, educated." When asked to speculate as to what most gay males would think about transmen, he replied:

I'd venture to say that they might be turned off by that. Some might even go so far as saying, using terms like *disgusted* by it, um, cause I've heard that term before. . . . Most

of that comes from either confusion or just the lack of information. That might be a kind of a, a fear of the unknown.

In addition to this speculation that many gay males are confused by the subject of transsexualism, Peter offered a critique similar to Edward's observation that some gay people judge transpeople just as they, themselves, have been judged: "I would hope that most gay men don't take moral high ground because, you know, we're the ones who get subjugated from the moral high ground of others." Peter explained that his dislike for this attitude stems from his childhood when he was told that being gay was:

This horrible sin, and these people are burning in hell. . . . I really, really resented that, and I still do to this day, and so it's given me a resentful outlook at all religion. . . . I don't like it when it's an us versus them, and so I can't have the same sort of philosophy.

The responses of Edward and Peter were similar in that they both observed what they saw as a kind of hypocrisy in other gay males, and both expressed the hope that they, themselves, would be able to accept transmen as partners.

Paul began his response to the question of attraction by stating that he would not expect to be attracted to a transman because he likes "angular features," but anticipates that transmen would have "soft features." I then rephrased the question, asking, "If you were single and met a man you found attractive, and found out he was a transman, would you date him?" To this he replied that he probably would; he added, however, "In the back of my mind I'd be, I'd be thinking, okay, let's talk about the plumbing." Through the course of our conversation, Paul came to the conclusion that the current stage of the transman's transition would make a difference to him in terms of the physical characteristics that he could accept in a potential partner: "My mind would probably draw a line in there somewhere." For example, someone who had a male-appearing face but a body that appeared more female "would be a problem."

At this point, Paul offered a more philosophical comment on the dating situation for transmen:

I think that straight men have, frankly, fewer hoops to jump through than gay men do. I think, I think it's much harder to find yourself marketable as a gay man . . . [The] range of what look, what looks are acceptable and attractive and desirable is wider, I think, with women than it is with gay men. I think we really do have some tunnel vision based on how we've, you know, created our own culture. And we have, we have a history of trying to make ourselves ultra butch because we were told for so long that we're sissies.

Paul was suggesting that some gay men emphasize their masculine presentation to counteract the fact that they are feminized by some heterosexuals. Likewise, most transmen strive for a male appearance, with some extending this to hypermasculinity through weight-lifting, tattoos, or piercings, in order to counteract the fact that they are feminized by many people, including some gay males, who insist that transmen are women. Paul also suggested that gay men have created gay male "culture" based, to some degree, on this fear of feminization. His observation that women are more accepting of the transman's anatomy than are gay males carries the implication that women do not harbor an equivalent fear of social masculinization—not surprising if one considers that masculinity is more highly valued in the culture than femininity. Paul was not suggesting that dating a transman would make a gay male less masculine, but he did suggest that this concern over attributed masculinity has been factored into the creation of gay male culture, resulting in a kind of "tunnel vision" regarding male anatomy and appearance.

When Paul's husband Rich was interviewed, his responses were similar. Asked if he would date a man he found attractive and later learned was transsexual, he replied, "Intellectually, I would probably think, you know, that's, that's not a show stopper. You know, that's not a deal breaker." Just as Paul had referenced "plumbing" as a relevant aspect of transition, Rich focused on breasts:

If it were a person who was very, in the very early stage of transition, had breasts and so forth, and I would probably not find that person attractive. . . . If I first met somebody that, that still had very feminine looking breasts and probably other feminine qualities as

well, that probably wouldn't really click my switch cause that's just not what I'm programmed to look for.

Rich added that the question of whether or not he would reject a transman based on anatomy was new to him: "I can't say that that possibility or that thought has ever occurred to me prior to you asking me questions." Arguably, if many gay males never even conceive of transmen as potential partners, it would seem that the range of available men in the world, as they imagine it, does not include transmen as men.

Since Mark was the only one of these natal males who was actually in a committed relationship with a transman during his interview, his insight into how his thoughts and feelings developed over time warrants particular attention here. Initially, he had not been attracted to any transmen whom he had been aware were transsexual, although he allowed for the possibility that he might have been attracted to transmen without knowing it. This changed when he attended a transgender conference roughly one year prior to our interview:

I'm looking around and going, "Holy fuck, yummy!" and had to do some serious work on . . . could I be sexually attracted to a person in the lower region around the vagina? And what am I attracted to? What characteristics does a person need? And that brought up things like, okay, if a penis is not required and a vagina's okay, could I be attracted to a butch [woman]? The answer's no.

Following up on this, I asked him how he perceived the difference between a transman and what he perceived to be a "butch" woman, such that he could be attracted to one and not the other. Describing "butch" women, he explained, "They have breasts, generally. They smell a little different, and the skin texture's different. . . . There's things about them that aren't masculine enough for me." Once he had thought through these types of questions, he was able to reach a conclusion about his feelings of attraction toward the transsexual men he had encountered at the conference: "So I was able to put those pieces together and break it down enough, and that's when I realized, oh, I could potentially date a transman."

While Mark hadn't been attracted to the first transmen he had knowingly met, he explained that he had kept in touch with a few of them, and that they had later reported feeling awkward upon first meeting him:

They were fearful of rejection in a negative way, because there's positive rejection and there's negative rejection, and I wasn't negative in my rejection. I just simply, I was able to continue having a positive conversation with them and still make clear I wasn't interested.

When I remarked that many gay transmen have been justified in their fear because they have, in fact, been rejected, Mark was quick to suggest several reasons for this:

Yeah, and I know why. . . . I am a gay male with an average size penis, and *I'm* rejected because it's not big enough. . . . If you're not eight inches or bigger, or ten inches or bigger, it's not enough. and it's like, okay already.

He then added that "far too many gay men" either don't want relationships at all, or else "want relationships without the good emotional connection" because "as a cismale, you are raised . . . you keep your emotions to yourself." This statement echoes Paul's comments about "aloofness" in natal males.

Finally, Mark offered a third explanation for natal males' rejection of gay transmen: "Far too many gay men" have the attitude that "being with somebody with a vagina is a cop-out to being gay because the person might as well be a woman." In his own experience, other gay men have accused him of this "cop-out" due to his relationship with his partner Christian: "God knows I get told this a lot. . . . And then I get others that say, 'Well, well, you're bi.' And it's like, oh, no, I'm very gay identified. Bi does not come into it." I then asked Mark to relate his own experience to the fact that the concepts of *male* and *man* are different. Considering how his feelings had evolved, he explained, "In the past I would have said they're one in the same. I didn't catch the difference. As I began to know transmales I realized that there is a difference." When I suggested that many gay men can't see that difference, he replied, "No, they don't. Yeah. If you don't have a penis, you're not a male, you're not a man. . . . Or you could be a pseudo-man, but you're not a

real man.” Mark was also able to recognize that this experience of being framed as “not a real man” is shared by gay men and transmen. When I asked if he had ever been told that he was not a real man because he was gay, he replied, “Oh, yeah, a lot. My own father, in fact. Yeah, I got that from a lot of people over the years.”

When discussing his current relationship with a transman, in comparison to his previous relationships with natal males, Mark spoke frankly about his feelings of attraction to his partner:

On one level it’s no different than any of the other relationships. . . . It’s very much the emotional connection, the connection to the personality first and foremost. Certainly the physical I’m attracted to, and yes, I’m actually attracted to the fact that he has a vagina and fully functional down there . . . and found I really can be attracted to a very much masculinized vagina and clitoris.

When I asked if this relationship was clearly different from his previous relationships in any way, I found it interesting that his response did not address his partner’s anatomy:

It’s different in this particular case. I don’t know that it has anything to do with him being trans. It’s just that we have really hot sex and we really do connect on some levels that I haven’t with some others. I’ve had other relationships where I had a lot of hot sex, but I’ve had far too many where I didn’t.

I then asked him to clarify that he considered this relationship to be better than the others in an emotional sense: “M’hm, and that, I would actually say, is probably more because he is trans. . . . We’ve both talked about it. It’s because he, eh, raised a female.” By this Mark meant that females are typically raised to be more “emotionally connected” with other people, while “far too many guys” are not. Mark’s comments placed a higher priority on the interpersonal aspects of his relationship, with less emphasis on the fact that the structure and appearance of his partner’s body was something other than that of the “normative” male. This suggests an interesting question. If Mark is a gay man, attracted to men but not to women, it is important to him that he perceives his partner as a man. However, the partner he has chosen has a body that is not conventionally male, and he also perceives his partner as having a capacity for emotional connectedness that Mark has

not found in other natal males. Because he relates this emotional quality to the fact that his partner was “raised female,” he is implying that he values this supposedly “female” quality in a partner. This scenario clearly distinguishes the concept of *man* from the concept of *male*, and renders any possible definition of *man* even more elusive. If a man can be born into a body designated female at birth, retaining some aspects of female anatomy as well as behavioral characteristics typical of those “raised female,” what is a man?

All five male interview subjects expressed an understanding that a transman does not identify as a woman. However, even those who recognized a distinct difference between maleness and manhood found themselves seeking female cues on transmen’s bodies. This suggests that the seemingly automatic conflation of gender and sex is sometimes disrupted through formal education or interaction with transpeople, yet it is never fully eradicated. In effect, once these natal males learned that a man was transsexual, they could not help but dwell on that fact, at least temporarily. It becomes clear, therefore, that a natal male’s capacity to be attracted to a transman reflects his attraction to a non-specific combination of biological and social cues. For some, the emotional chemistry between two men is able to override the presence of characteristics that read as female or womanly, yet it rarely overrides *all* such characteristics. The comments from these five men suggest that particular attributes—e.g., soft skin texture, rounded features, breasts, a vagina, a very small penis—may undermine potential attraction for some natal males even if other attributes, such as emotional connectedness, enhance that attraction for other males.

Among the transmen, two reported that they had been rejected by natal males, and all reported problematic aspects of their online experiences interacting with males. They found that when their trans status became known, many natal males reacted with either rejection or some other form of negativity. For Bruce, this took the form of disrespect when a male refused to take seriously the boundaries Bruce had set for any sexual encounters. In Christian’s case, he was exasperated to find that natal males associated the term *trans* with natal males who present as women, no matter how explicitly Christian described himself. These types of stories have led to feelings of hesitation in men like Liam who has not yet dated since his transition. Three of the

transmen suggested that relationships with other transmen were a possibility for them, with Teddy indicating that this was actually his preference. Bruce stated a preference for natal males, although he allowed that he would not “close the door” on the possibility of dating a transman, and my own feelings are similar to this.

Summary

These nine interviews found similarities among natal males and transmen, as well as a few differences. Men from both groups associated the word *man* with normative characteristics of the male body, but they also shared a number of social meanings for the term. For instance, interviewees from both groups described men as valuing their independence, protecting others, solving problems, taking on adult responsibilities, and benefitting from male privilege. One difference, as noted earlier, was the fact that natal males did not reference pop culture icons of manhood; while some natal males talked about their own adult responsibilities, as well as those performed by their male relatives, several transmen alluded to these responsibilities by referencing Jimmy Stewart’s portrayals of manhood. For example, when Liam described the ideal man by stating that “You do right cause that’s what you’re supposed to do,” his model for this behavior was Stewart, not a man he had known in real life. The fact that no natal males turned to pop culture when considering models of manhood can be partially explained by the fact that their families of origin expected them to be men and often instructed them along these lines. Because the families of transmen did not expect them to be men one day, this direct instruction was lacking. While these transmen were sometimes able to view their older male relatives as models of manhood, they seemed more inclined to utilize cultural icons as additional examples. This suggests at least the potential that transmen may harbor more idealistic views of manhood than do natal males, given that pop culture images of men are often idealized.

Another difference concerned the ways in which men compared themselves to other men. While many forms of comparison were similar among members of the two groups—physical characteristics, emotional availability, etc.—only natal males stated that they compared themselves to other men in terms of career, income, and social status. While some transmen

mentioned their careers, this was almost never done in the context of comparison or competition. In fact, only Bruce made note of the fact that his educational level was a social privilege, and that his faster advancement at work following transition could be related to male privilege. This is not a difference between natal males and transmen that lends itself to any obvious conclusion, but it could be argued that the privileged position of natal males—i.e., the privilege of not needing to focus one’s daily attention on the challenges of transitioning or being perceived as male—allows for more time and attention to issues of social status among natal males. In other words, for natal males, the effort required to advance one’s career is not in competition with the concerns and expenses of transition. This could frame transition, not only as a financial challenge, but also as an emotional distraction that could potentially retard career advancement. On the other hand, the fact that transmen did not address career in terms of competition with other men might suggest that personal concerns, such as transition or relationships, are of greater importance to them because they have given so much thought to issues of identity throughout their lives.

Finally, the two groups sometimes differed in their use of terminology and the meanings they associated with particular terms. For example, most natal males used the term *gay man* to describe their own gender and orientation, and only one stated that he sometimes used the term *queer*. However, the gender labels used by transmen varied considerably. Some wished to be called men or guys, while others felt that trans-related terms were more accurate, or even more honest. On the subject of orientation, most natal males appeared to perceive the term *gay* as a marker for either “same sex” or “same gender” attraction. For example, when asked what attracted them, some mentioned physical attributes common to males while others spoke of behaviors that they felt were typical of men. Only Mark’s response was distinctly phrased, given his relationship with Christian and the knowledge he has gained about transgenderism. Mark explained that he was attracted to those who were “masculine identified” with a masculine “affectation,” although they need not possess “all the parts.” When the subject of transmen was introduced to the other natal males, their responses were somewhat similar to Mark’s, but they also expressed some hesitation and uncertainty. When the transmen discussed the word *gay*,

however, some less common constructions were introduced. Teddy agreed that it referred to same-sex attraction, but he felt that only another transman could be considered the same sex as himself; therefore, attraction between transmen was the only way that transmen could be gay. This suggests that a relationship between a transman and a natal male gay man could not be considered gay within Teddy's framework. Liam's use of the term *gay* was distinct in that he believed that it indicated the presence of a normative male body if used as an identity label, and was therefore somewhat deceptive if used by a transman who had not announced his trans status.

On the whole, meanings associated with the concept of *man* were more similar between these two groups than they were different. Based on this small sample, the term *man* brings to mind the image of a normative male body, behaviors associated with positive characteristics such as honor and responsibility, relatively neutral characteristics such as independence and masculinity, and sometimes negative characteristics such as arrogance, insensitivity, and selfishness related to social privilege. Each man named these characteristics based on his own experience in a variety of respects: 1) He observed various men throughout his life, 2) He received verbal and nonverbal messages about manhood from particular individuals and from society in general, and 3) He personally identified with some men more than he identified with others. I believe that the last of these is the most significant because, as Woodward (2003) explains, identification "moves beyond the 'externals' of similarity to deeper levels of unity" (p. 8). A transman is not a man simply because his behavior may be similar to that of a natal male, or because he may wish to be treated as natal males are treated; he is a man because he feels that he is, to some degree, consubstantial or "substantially one" with other men.

The information gleaned from these interviews suggests that, despite the relatively stable definitions associated with terms such as *man* and *gay* in contemporary U.S. discourse, individuals tend to assign more nuanced meanings to such terms. As a result, the use of such terms across U.S. culture is never consistent. Further, the dominant paradigm—i.e., the hegemonic assumption that there is a natural correspondence among sex, gender, and gender expression—is not exclusive to non-transgender individuals. While the transmen interviewed for this project clearly stated that

men need not be born into bodies assigned as male at birth, their descriptions of *man* as a concept continued to frame the male body and traditionally masculine characteristics of personality as ideals for this gendered identity to some extent. If *man* can only be defined as a set of identifications, as I am suggesting, it is the degree of men's identification with male, masculine men that keeps the dominant paradigm in place. In other words, the dominant paradigm of hegemonic masculinity persists because men continue to identify with this type of man. This also helps to explain why the term *man* has maintained its salience for transmen, particularly those who put the greatest effort into reshaping the body through surgery and achieving an outward male appearance.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Proceeding from the observation that the manhood of transsexual gay men has been repeatedly challenged, this project has sought to answer two primary questions: 1) Is there one ideological construct underlying these challenges?, and 2) On the assumption that transmen should be included in this category, does *man* have a consistent definition applicable to all men? In response, based on my analysis of both media texts and personal interviews, I have concluded that challenges to manhood are rooted in an assumed correspondence between physical sex, gender identity, and gender expression, and that the concept of *man* actually has no consistent definition. While other scholars have argued that gendered terms such as *man* and *woman* are cultural constructs rather than essential identities, more nuanced types of insights have emerged from this project due to its focus on men whose bodies cannot be categorized as normatively male. By disconnecting the concept of *man* from the sexed body, this project is able to focus attention on the thoughts and feelings of marginalized men, thus making clear their reliance upon identification with other men as a means of perceiving themselves as men.

The comments made by various men suggest that *man* should be conceptualized as a set of intersecting personal and social identifications, specific to each individual man, but also contextual in that he resides and interacts within cultures in which particular meanings tend to be associated with particular terms. Regardless of any given man's interpretation of the term *man*, there are predominant cultural meanings that affect his daily life, particularly if he has been marginalized as a man, or even excluded from the category. The degree to which others perceive him as a man, and more specifically as a normative man, affects the degree to which his life is impacted intrapersonally, interpersonally, economically, materially, and politically. Consequently, a cultural shift toward the idea that men identify as such based on their identification with other men will provide conceptual language beyond the limited definitions concerning physical sex and masculinity.

The conflation of sex, gender, and gender expression, combined with the assumption that “‘real’ women and men are exclusively heterosexual” (Johnson, 1997, p. 149), is entrenched within Western consciousness because of its historical persistence. Traditionally, the concept of *man* has been defined by male-bodiedness, masculinity, and attraction to women, while gender non-conforming identities have been medicalized and dismissed as unnatural. Because this dominant paradigm continues to marginalize identities that fall outside its boundaries, it is necessary to explain how the paradigm manages to function despite its failings.

Dr. Vernon Rosario (1996) refers to the “early sexological erasure of transsexualism and its subsequent slippage into homosexuality and transvestism” as a “hetero-hegemonic logic” (p. 43). In other words, there has long been a hegemonic assumption that it is in the nature of all human beings to be heterosexual; therefore, a gay or lesbian person might become deluded into believing that he or she identifies as the other sex, not because this is a deeply felt sense of identity, but because it fulfills an innate drive “to restore the ‘normal’ heterosexual pairing” (p. 43). It is assumed that the human inclination toward heterosexuality (and, by implication, procreation) outweighs the inclination to express a particular gender identity or inhabit a particular sexed body, i.e., one would be willing to live as whatever sex and gender would allow for a heterosexual life. Interestingly, however, it is *not* assumed that this drive to live one’s life as a heterosexual also outweighs one’s actual attraction to a particular type of sexed body or gender expression. Therefore, the argument that one transitions in order to avoid being gay is also an argument that one cannot change one’s attractions.

There are at least two obvious problems with the “hetero-hegemonic logic.” First, those who identify as gay men or lesbian women do not express a desire to transition in order to be heterosexual. If a male-bodied person is attracted to men and desires to transition and live as a woman, she was never a gay man, despite her male appearance. Further, her identification as a heterosexual woman cannot be reduced to internalized homophobia or the fear of social marginalization as a gay man for the simple reason that transpeople are also marginalized. It is also a false assumption that all gay men are more feminine than most men and all lesbians are

more masculine than most women. The second obvious problem with the hetero-hegemonic logic is the fact that some transsexuals are gay or lesbian *after* transition, thus proving that sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation are distinct phenomena. When nine transmen who identified as gay or bisexual were interviewed for a study conducted in the Netherlands (Coleman, Bockting, & Gooren, 1993), all of them “perceived their transsexualism and homosexuality as two separate issues and aspects of their lives. They stated that their transsexualism dealt with feelings about their bodies whereas their homosexuality related to their sexual attractions to other people” (p. 41). While transsexuals who identify as heterosexual after transition can also make the argument that gender identity and sexual orientation are different, they cannot cite their own experience as proof that the “hetero-hegemonic logic” is false. In this sense, one could argue that gay transmen and lesbian transwomen are key to our understanding of sex, gender, and orientation.

In addition to the hetero-hegemonic logic, another persistent hegemonic assumption in contemporary U.S. culture is the belief that gender identity must correspond to birth sex. This assumption can seem particularly salient for some natal male gay men, given their attraction to the normative male body as well as to gender expressions commonly associated with men. However, there are also natal male gay men who are not only able to see transmen as fellow men, but also willing to establish romantic and sexual relationships with them. Given this scenario, the question as to how one might define the term *man* leads to another related question regarding the definition of homosexuality. If it were true that all gay males viewed normative male anatomy as essential in a partner, the description of homosexuality as “same-sex attraction” would present no difficulty. However, the fact that this is not always the case for natal males who identify as gay men suggests that homosexuality might better be described as “same-gender attraction,” at least in some cases. For Rosario (1996), this indicates that “the union of same-sex genitals is not the *sine qua non* of homosexuality” (p. 43).

Ultimately, then, the question of whether sex and gender are synonymous or distinct concepts is inextricably tied to the way in which we conceptualize sexual orientation. If orientation is not simply an attraction to sexed bodies, or an attraction to gendered characteristics,

but rather some combination of the two, how is orientation problematized when the object of one's attraction lacks the conventional correspondence between physical sex and gender expression? Conversely, for the individual whose own sex and gender expression do not fully correspond (e.g., the transsexual), how does one navigate a field of potential partners who persist in conflating sex and gender (i.e., assuming that only females can be women and that only males can be men)? This is the rhetorical challenge facing gay transmen.

The Netherlands study (Coleman, Bockting, & Gooren, 1993) indicated that transmen were not initially optimistic about their future prospects with natal males: "They worried about difficulties in establishing and maintaining sexual relationships with men after reassignment. They were concerned whether other gay men would be attracted to them" (p. 41). Consequently, others' awareness of their trans status was something they preferred to avoid:

Subjects reported that they felt at ease in the gay community as long as people did not know about their sex reassignment. When their reassignment became known, they told us that some gay men found it hard to accept them as "gay men." (p. 44)

As it turned out, however, three of these men did establish "committed" relationships with natal males, and one of these male partners was interviewed for the study. The authors describe the experience of this male partner:

He had not been aware of our subject's sex reassignment when they had met. The subject's partner self-identified as gay and never had had sex with a female. In their sexual relationship he discovered that "being a man has nothing to do with having a penis." Despite his partner's lack of a penis, he perceived his sex-reassigned lover as a man. (p. 45)

Given this evidence, the authors concluded that while, "historically, biological sex has understandably been used as a reference point in assessing one's sexual orientation," it "might be better" to define heterosexuality and homosexuality by considering both the sex and the gender expression of the individuals to whom one is attracted (pp. 48-49). They explain their reasoning as follows:

Our observation that reassigned female-to-male transsexuals (without a phalloplasty) fall in love and do succeed in establishing sexual relationships with men (with penises) who view themselves as gay . . . invites us to introduce a nuance in this definition. The genital morphology was apparently not crucial in the cases of this study to be able to establish sexual contacts with gay men. At least for some gay men, the perception of these female-to-male transsexuals as men (and not as women) was more pertinent than the criterion of actual genital morphology. (p. 48)

The authors conclude this 1993 article by questioning “why sexual orientation should be weighed in the decision regarding sex reassignment in cases of female gender dysphoric individuals” (p. 49). This is a reference to the treatment protocol, standard at the time, that refused transmen permission to access transition-related treatments if they stated a self-identification as gay men rather than straight men. As noted in Chapter 3, the work of Lou Sullivan in the years just before this article was written had a significant impact on the subsequent changes in treatment protocols, and gay transmen are no longer prevented from transitioning in the United States.

Essays such as Rosario’s and studies such as that done in the Netherlands help to disprove the “logic” of the hetero-hegemonic logic. It is not the case that all human beings are driven to enact the “heterosexual pairing,” as there are many gay and lesbian people, both trans and non-trans, whose attractions can be described as same-with-same. However, the concept of homosexuality is also less simplistic than standard definitions suggest. The nature of the “sameness” of one’s attractions may take the form of anatomy, gender identity, behavior, outward appearance, or any combination of these. Likewise, even those who defend the dominant heterosexual paradigm must recognize that even so-called “opposite sex” attractions also vary along these same lines. Clearly, not all heterosexual men are attracted to all women, nor are all heterosexual women attracted to all men; human beings, no matter what their orientation, are attracted to unique sets of characteristics.

Despite this evidence, however, the dominant paradigm persists, thus marginalizing those who identify as non-heterosexual or gender non-conforming. As transsexuals, gay transmen might

find that there are some non-trans men who experience such a lack of identification with transmen that they cannot even recognize them as human; using Butler's (2004) language, transmen "fit no dominant frame for the human" (p. 25). Therefore, the most common rhetorical strategies for transmen who choose to resist this marginalization have involved attempts to create some form of identification between themselves and natal males. They manage their overall appearance and behavior, and sometimes offer their personal narratives in order to frame themselves as men, and as fellow human beings who are worthy of respect and recognition.

In keeping with Clatterbaugh's (1990) contention that one can best study a concept by examining its marginalized forms, I have chosen to track various understandings of the term *man* by considering the lives of natal male gay men and gay transmen, particularly as they intersect with one another both socially and intimately. While acknowledging that there are numerous other forms of marginality among men, I have centered on these two groups in part because of the tension that exists between them, with natal males sometimes rejecting the manhood of transmen. In addition, the focus on transmen allows for a discussion of the sexed body as a normative requirement for manhood in U.S. culture based on the conflation of sex and gender. This research has led me to my first conclusion, that the assumed correspondence of physical sex, gender identity, and gender expression is the most profound challenge for transmen and the most entrenched form of marginalization among men.

As this project has demonstrated, while many transmen attempt to create identification with other men in U.S. culture by achieving a normative male appearance and engaging in behaviors that are commonly seen in natal males, they also attempt to acquire non-trans allies such as columnists, filmmakers, talk show hosts, etc. who are willing to speak publicly on their behalf. Some transmen also participate in various forms of media by writing essays, allowing themselves to be interviewed, or appearing on camera. These media representations can have tremendous impact on public perceptions, particularly when the subject matter is otherwise unfamiliar. There are also some transmen who either avoid behaviors commonly associated with women, or at least avoid publicizing those behaviors. Many of these men are inclined to object when transmen such

as Thomas Beatie allow photos to be taken of their pregnant bodies for mass distribution. Other transmen such as Scott Moore follow a different strategy, increasing the public's exposure to such behaviors in an attempt to normalize them within the category of *man*.

For some transmen who are gay, however, these strategies are complicated by the added desire for intimacy with natal male gay men. In this context, the cultural assumption that men must be male can be exacerbated by the natal male's desire for a partner with normative male anatomy, and transmen may react to this predicament with emotions ranging from anger and resentment to frustration and sadness. Most transmen accept that there are particular males who do not find them desirable, just as any gay man might not find another gay man attractive, but most transmen are unwilling to tolerate a denial of their right to *identify* as men.

On the assumption that *man* cannot be defined based on the hegemonic assumptions of male anatomy, masculinity, or heterosexual orientation, a search for universal meaning does not lead to a common thread among all men, but to the individual man. Burke (1969) has theorized that human beings may be consubstantial with one another in a variety of ways, and it is through this identification with others that we are able to recognize their humanity. However, one single instance of identification may have little impact. Rather, if we are to persuade others, we must create a "body of identifications" through "trivial repetition and daily reënforcement" (p. 26). The marginalized man, therefore, must persuade others to see him as a man over time, repeating his rhetorical strategies until his particular form of manhood is accepted into the fold. He must remember, however, that he exists in a world of multiple strategies where the meanings of multiple concepts are constantly changing. Consequently, his own strategies may evolve along with his culture. While any single rhetorical act is synchronic, interacting with other cultural meanings of its time, a rhetorical strategy is, by its very nature, diachronic as it endeavors to keep up with all the changes that surround it. While I have not conducted an analysis of such diachronic shifts, I do note some of the ways in which the concept of *man* has altered in meaning over time. It is also important to remember that all of these meanings and strategic efforts are

necessarily affected by dominant powers and systems of oppression. This is particularly true when the rhetor is coming from a position of social marginality.

My second argument, that *man* as a concept is no more than a contextual set of intersecting identifications, implies that the marginalized man will meet with the least resistance to his claims to manhood the more he is perceived to be similar to other individuals who identify as men at a particular place and time. Because cultural norms change slowly, the attempt to stretch the meaning of a term will be dismissed if it proceeds too quickly. For example, on the one hand, Scott Moore's strategy may be on the right track in light of Burke's encouragement of "daily reëncement"; it could well be that the acceptance of pregnant men will become normalized the more often they are seen and heard over time. On the other hand, at this particular point in time, a culture that continues to wrestle with the very concept of a transman might react to pregnancy as a step too far, potentially diminishing the acceptance of *any* transman's claim to manhood. Also, because *man*, as a contemporary identity construct, is privileged in relationship to *woman*—and even more so in relationship to non-binary gender constructs such as *genderqueer*—the act of claiming one's identity as a man is a political one. The transman is, in effect, identifying "up," and this helps to explain the resistance he encounters from some natal males who do not wish to share the frequently privileged status of *man* with those born into female bodies. If these males feel superior to women, they may also feel superior to females, regardless of their gendered presentation. Similarly, heterosexual men often feel superior to gay men, thus marginalizing the gay transman even further.

Scholarly Contribution

There are numerous studies of masculinity, including masculinity in females, yet they often fail to take transmen into account. This project foregrounds the experience of transmen, and particularly gay transmen who are even less often the subject of study. Its contribution to the field of communication is significant in that it focuses on *man* as an identity construct; as such, the term *man* impacts communication by affecting how one perceives the identities of one's interactants, as well as how one's own identity is perceived by those interactants. In demonstrating how the most

common definitions of this term fall short, this project concludes that *man* as a concept, despite its ubiquity, is actually without stable definition. Put simply, *man* is whatever one perceives it to be, but this type of pithy description disguises how the deployment of socially accepted meanings can have consequences for men's actual lives. As I have stated earlier, there are multiple implications of this project— intrapersonal, interpersonal, economic, material, and political. For example, there are economic, material, and political consequences resulting from the fact that, according to current policy (Social Security Administration, 2011), an individual's legal sex designation can only be changed if a surgeon certifies that the person has received "sex change" surgery, and in most cases, thousands of dollars must be paid out-of-pocket because such surgeries are not covered by insurance. Many transsexuals cannot afford these surgeries—a fact that can also be related to employment discrimination in some cases. Therefore, when a legally binding form requires the selection of one's "sex" or "gender" from two possible choices, whether these are listed as male/female or man/woman, a transperson understands that the expected response is the declaration of one's *legal* sex designation, potentially undermining that individual's gender expression. If a transman has not undergone the type of surgery that would allow him to change his legal sex designation with the U.S. government, no matter how "male" he may physically appear, he is legally bound to declare himself "female" with no opportunity to clarify that he lives as a man. Likewise, if the form uses gendered terms (*man*, *woman*) rather than sexed terms (*male*, *female*), he is forced to select the term "woman."

In an interpersonal context, if individuals are known to be transsexual, they are often perceived as deceptive or manipulative and, therefore, untrustworthy. In other words, a belief that birth sex determines gender suggests that anyone who claims a different gender is simply lying. As Matt Kailey and some of my interviewees have noted, one's self-identification as a man in an online format can be perceived in this way by others once they become aware that one is a transman.

A project such as this not only adds to our understanding of terms such as *man* and *gay*, but also serves to remind scholars and academic disciplines of the salience of such terms in the

everyday lives of those who identify as men and as gay. Contemporary research, particularly in the field of gender studies, tends to favor the deconstruction of such terms on theoretical (poststructural) grounds, sometimes idealizing a future free of such constructs. It must be remembered, however, that those who live in the here and now as men and women—and particularly as gay men and lesbian women—are conducting their daily lives in a world where the majority of people do not recognize the legitimacy of this deconstruction. A tension exists between the utopian vision and the present reality.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the spectrum, there are also communication scholars who continue to perform studies premised on the assumption that men are male, that women are female, and that the contingent of those for whom this is not the case is a small and statistically insignificant population that need not be represented in their research. When numerous studies of male men and female women fail to recognize the existence of other sexed and gendered categories, the cultural tendencies to relegate these others to the status of mental illness, social deviance, or complete invisibility are only perpetuated. Therefore, while I do not call upon all such scholars to perform studies focused on transpeople, I do believe that greater effort should be made to acknowledge the lack of attention to these populations as a limitation in such research. In other words, a simple statement indicating that these populations are not represented in a given study serves to acknowledge the very existence of such individuals and subtly suggests that future research including these populations might be in order.

Social movement scholarship could benefit from this project's attention to, not only the diversity among men, but also the diversity among transmen. Framing manhood as a matter of identification rather than as a distinct definition makes clear that different men with different cultural backgrounds will likely identify with various types of men. For example, when sociologist John Fox (2004) describes some men's rights advocates as claiming that women are the "oppressors of men" (p. 105), and that profeminist men are "brainwashed lemmings" who have been "indoctrinated by the feminist curriculum" (p. 112), a focus on identification might prompt Fox to explore the possibility that these particular men are identifying with other men who have

had similar experiences with respect to women or feminism (such as paying alimony or losing children in a custody case); therefore, when these men use the word “man” to refer to all men, they may be speaking from a particular type of lived experience that not all men share.

Among transmen specifically, some may identify more closely with natal males while others think of themselves as transmen, differentiating themselves from males. For some gay transmen, their orientation as gay men might feel more significant than any identification they might have with other transmen, prompting them to avoid disclosure of their trans status, at least in some contexts, for fear that knowledge of this trans status would undermine their social identities as gay men. As Schilt (2010) notes in her study of transmen’s experiences in the workplace, “‘Transgender’ became a master status—an identity that overrode all others—even when they personally felt that other identities, such as gay or queer, had more salience for them.”¹⁴ As a result, “transmen felt that when they defended their personal identities as queer and/or gay men, their co-workers, particularly gay men, positioned them as extreme versions of butch lesbians—relegating them to social femaleness” (p. 118). This has significant implications for social movements based in identity politics in that some members of a movement might reject the participation of other members on the grounds that they are claiming an identity to which they have no right. For example, some women’s movements have rejected the participation of transwomen on the grounds that they were not born female (Denny, 2006; Meyerowitz, 2002; Prosser, 1998), and some African Americans have established parameters of “authentic” Blackness (Carter, 2003; Johnson, 2003). Thus, in the case of transmen, the failure of some to acknowledge their trans status could affect the GLBT movement’s degree of inclusiveness, in that the movement might underestimate the degree of transgender membership within its ranks and, therefore, feel justified in neglecting this constituency. On the other hand, those transmen who insist upon acknowledging their trans status might avoid contributing their time to gay and lesbian movements if they experience this neglect or fear outright rejection.

Counterpublic scholarship can benefit in similar ways. As noted in Chapter 2, while the members of a counterpublic identify with one another in their struggle against a more dominant

public, Felski (1989) points out that there can also be “material inequalities and political antagonisms” among those members (p. 168). If the gay community is a counterpublic relative to the larger dominant public, gay transmen can be viewed as a counterpublic relative to the larger gay community. Fraser (1992) explains that some counterpublics “are not always above practicing their own modes of informal exclusion and marginalization” (p. 124), and this can be seen in the attitudes and behaviors that some natal male gay men have exhibited toward gay transmen. Orbe’s theory of co-cultural oppression can be applied to this phenomenon in a similar manner.

Therefore, what this project offers to scholars in social movement, counterpublic, and co-cultural research is an increased attention to identification as it functions, to varying degrees, among members of social movements, counterpublics and co-cultures. The marginalizing behaviors performed by more dominant members of these groups toward some segments of their own membership can be at least partially explained by a lack of identification. In the specific case of natal male gay men and gay transmen, that lack of identification appears to be focused on the transman’s female body at birth, as well as on his early childhood acculturation into an anticipated womanhood. As quoted in Chapter 3, Szymanski (2006) explained that one factor contributing to the exclusion of transmen from a leather competition was the fact that transmen had not been “adequately indoctrinated into their gender’s culture” (Gender Divide section, para. 1-2). Likewise, Kailey (2003) wrote that “there are boundaries to ‘gayness,’ expectations of life experience that I have not had, expectations of certain behaviors into which I have not been socialized” (p. 259).

Given these concerns, I see this project as situated *between*, (a) the traditional definition of *man* as informed by the conflation of sex, gender, gender expression, and heteronormativity, and (b) the poststructural deconstruction of identity constructs such as *man* and *gay*. My claim that the term *man* has no stable definition leans more toward poststructuralist thinking, while my defense of the continued significance of the term pulls the pendulum back from this extreme. Because identity labels continue to hold such cultural and personal significance, they cannot be theorized out of existence, no matter how unstable they appear to be. Therefore, in describing the

concept of *man* as a contextual set of intersecting personal and social identifications, I am proposing a cultural shift, such that an individual, when hearing another person describe himself as a man, will no longer assume a stable cultural definition of this term, but will instead recognize that this declaration has a precise meaning only for the individual who made it, based on the identifications he has experienced in his lifetime. The individual hearing this declaration, even if he also identifies as a man, cannot assume that his own conception of the term is shared with the speaker because they have identified with different sets of men during their lives.

Limitations of This Study

Given its specific focus, this project was designed with obvious limitations, such as the manner of its construction. Because I chose to examine a variety of different types of sources (i.e., print media, televised and filmed media, online personal ads, and personal interviews), the study was necessarily limited in terms of the number of texts within each category. In this regard, my analysis could be framed as favoring breadth over depth. I believe this was necessary because it was my intention to examine both individual and cultural understandings of the term *man*. Therefore, limiting the study to any singular medium would not have provided sufficient insight. For example, a study restricted to print, televised, or filmed media might have provided an overview of how gay transmen are represented and, consequently, how they are perceived and understood within U.S. culture. However, it would have offered very little in terms of individual perceptions and understandings. Also, given my specific focus on gay transmen, it would have been difficult to locate a sufficient number of texts, in that there are relatively few in which gay transmen are addressed. Likewise, a project restricted to online ads could have been used to examine cultural understandings of manhood, but I feel that such a study would have been too narrow in scope given the limited audience for such ads. In other words, the audience for an online dating site for gay men could foreground communication between natal males and transmen, but would necessarily exclude understandings of the term *man* in a broader cultural context. Finally, a study restricted to personal interviews could have included in-depth conversation with a larger number of interview subjects, but it would have lacked attention to

cultural understandings of *man* beyond those offered by the interview subjects. In other words, natal males might have described the meanings they associated with terms such as *man*, *gay man*, and *transsexual gay man*, and gay transmen might have described how they perceive themselves in relationship to their understandings of the term *man*, but such conversations would lack direct examples of influence from various media sources. The design of this project allowed me to combine different types of sources in order to provide: (a) examples of media influences, which affect broad cultural understandings of *man*, as well as (b) individual perceptions of the meaning of *man* from subjective perspectives. In this way, the personal interviews were able to supplement the media texts while also providing me with the opportunity to ask particular questions to elicit particular types of information.

While other categories of marginalized men are mentioned, I do not devote significant time and attention to marginalizations based on race, ethnicity, class, education level, employment status, age, ability, or size, nor do I make a concerted effort to examine the lives of men who identify as heterosexual or bisexual. While I have made clear that the term *man* has no consistent definition for all men, it is also clear that the myriad ways in which men can be marginalized must also contribute to the ways in which the term *man* is perceived within a culture. Restricting this study to the concept of *man* as an identity construct also precludes extensive discussion of those who identify as gender variant, genderqueer, or some other nuanced gendered category. These terms of self-identification are also worthy of study, both in terms of the motivation felt by those who choose to utilize them, and also with respect to the ways in which they are understood by others and positioned within a society in which the identifications of *man* and *woman* predominate.

In addition to those who reject the term *man* for themselves, despite the fact that others might interpellate them into that category, there are also scholars who reject the very idea of singular or stable gendered identities. As noted in Chapter 1, Stoltenberg (1989) described manhood as a “cultural decision, a baseless belief, a false front, a house of cards” (p. 29). Likewise, queer theory has rejected the stability of all identity labels. As Jagose (1996) explains

in her foundational work on the subject, “queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire. . . . It calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as ‘man’ and ‘woman’” (p. 3). These types of poststructural arguments might not recognize the worth of a project such as this, yet I have defended the continued significance of the term based on its emotional salience for many men—particularly those men who have fought to achieve it. Should the term very gradually lose its cultural significance, it may be the case that it will one day lose its personal salience as well. This eventuality is perhaps a utopian goal for some, but it does not describe the culture in which we live today or in the near future. Therefore, while my lack of adherence to a poststructural theoretical position might be seen as a limitation in this study, it is because I draw a distinction between the theoretical construct and the lived experience. The interviews in Chapter 4 make clear that one’s identification as a man is not a thing of the past.

Despite this attention to the meaning of *man* on a cultural scale, this project does not include in-depth analysis of social movements. For example, there are men’s movements in the United States, including some groups dedicated to men’s rights and others focused on the goals of profeminist men; there is a broad GLBT movement devoting a large portion of its resources to the lives of gay men; and there is also a transgender movement containing a variety of groups seeking legal reforms and providing education and support, and some of these are focused on transmen specifically. While I feel that detailed analysis of such movements and their work is somewhat tangential to the primary goals of this project, it is clear that meanings associated with the term *man* are significant for any groups or movements that concern themselves with the lives of men. As McGee (1980) suggests, a “social movement is a set of meanings” (p. 233). Therefore, he states, “when people use new words—or obviously attribute new meaning to old words—we can assume that consciousness of their environment has ‘moved’” (p. 243). For McGee, the evidence of this movement of social consciousness can be found when there is a change in “public discourse” such that “descriptors of the environment have changed *in common usage*” (p. 243). The social meaning of *man* changes over time, as is the case with all language, and these changes impact the work of those groups involved in social movements; simultaneously, the actions these

groups choose to take can contribute to the evolving ways in which *man* is conceived in a culture. The same can be said of individual men, whether or not they associate themselves with social movements, in that the actions of individual men can slowly alter cultural perceptions of *man* as a concept, just as social norms can have an impact on the ways in which these men perceive themselves and behave socially. In short, men continually re-create manhood in their own image.

Sociology professor Kristen Schilt (2010) has stated that “when transmen transition into social maleness, the category of ‘man’ also undergoes transformation.” She explains:

As female-socialized men, transmen bring the gains of the feminist movement—the idea that there are many different and acceptable ways to live a life—into maleness. While this inclusion will not spark an instant gender revolution, over time it can bring a more expansive definition of what it means to be a man in arenas such as the workplace and the family. (p. 164)

In this way, the existence of transmen serves to stretch cultural meanings associated with manhood beyond the more narrow and stereotyped constructs of hegemonic masculinity. While not all transmen become involved with feminist communities prior to transition, the vast majority are raised by their parents and caregivers to live as girls and women—what Schilt refers to as having been “female-socialized”—and this socialization can have an impact on the ways in which they later perform manhood in a social context. Therefore, while this project is limited in the extent to which it addresses social movements, it engages subject matter that reflects back on the goals and activities of those movements.

The Potential for Future Research

It is clear from this project’s limitations that additional studies of *man* as an identity construct could, instead, examine those meanings of *man* associated with other forms of marginalization. To cite just one example, an analysis of media representations of Black men, or a series of interviews conducted with Black men, would produce scholarship containing insights radically different than those found in this project, yet the concept of manhood would be further illuminated. Also, just as this project examines transmen who are also gay, a future study could

consider intersecting forms of marginalization involving race, ethnicity, class, education level, employment status, age, ability, size, etc. As I noted earlier, individual members of the GLBT community may prefer to use particular terms to describe their gendered and/or sexual identities, and these differing preferences can sometimes be related to other salient identity constructs. For example, in a report from 2002, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force found “a strong reluctance among Black GLBT people to use the term ‘queer’ as a primary identifier of their sexual orientation”; instead, survey respondents expressed a clear preference for the term *gay* (Battle, Cohen, Warren, Ferguson, & Audam, 2002, p. 19). The Task Force suggests several possible reasons for this, including the perceived racism of some “White ‘queer identified’ activists” (p. 20). Johnson (2005) has proposed the use of the term *quare*, which he defines in multiple ways; among these, it has been employed as “African American vernacular for queer,” and it can also refer to one who is “committed to struggle against all forms of oppression—racial, sexual, gender, class, religious, etc.” (p. 125). Johnson and Henderson (2005) further elaborate on this term by explaining that it affirms “the inclusivity mobilized under the sign of ‘queer’ while claiming the racial, historical, and cultural specificity attached to the marker ‘black’ (p. 7). This goal—to recognize the poststructural thinking that allows for intersectionality, as well as the historical significance of an identity term—is similar to my own conception of this project, which recognizes the constructed nature of the term *man* even as it affirms the personal significance of *man* as a social marker of identity.

It should also be noted that any further studies could also be conducted with a focus on cultures outside the United States or, conversely, with a focus on particular co-cultures or regions within the United States. For example, in Chapter 4, Edward provided some cultural background on how the conceptualization of *man* in the southern U.S. might be somewhat different from the ways it is perceived in other regions.

Just as the concept of *man* could be studied through various categories of marginality, the meaning of *woman* could also be explored in this way. Such a project would also benefit from a focus on the life experiences of transwomen because, as with transmen, the cultural conflation of

sex and gender would figure prominently. However, an examination of lesbian transwomen and their relationships with natal females would not result in a mirror image of the present study because *woman*, as a cultural category, is not the mirror image of *man*, despite simplistic media references to “opposite” sexes and genders. A discussion of social status, power, and privilege among women would produce an end product that looked very different from the project I now conclude. Similar projects could also focus specifically on intimate partnerships in which one partner is natal male or female and the other is a transman or transwoman. Whether these relationships were framed as heterosexual, gay, or some other orientation construct, they could explore the meanings of concepts such as *man* and *woman* in a context of emotional complexity in both private and public spaces and scenarios.

One particular aspect of this project’s discussion of interactions and relationships between gay males and gay transmen concerns disclosure analogies. This was addressed directly in Chapter 4 when Bruce described his own disclosure of his trans status on a date with a natal male, only to discover that this male was anticipating a disclosure of HIV status. A similar scenario figured prominently in Nick Laird’s (2008) autobiographical essay, as described in Chapter 3. A study comparing different forms of personal disclosure could consider the similarities and differences between coming out as gay, coming out as transsexual, disclosing one’s medical condition, and revealing other facts about one’s history or social status. In doing so, it could examine not only the reasons for choosing to disclose information, but also the types of variables that are considered when one determines the best method of disclosure. In many cases, the reluctance to disclose personal information is related to a fear of rejection. Transmen, knowing that men are expected to be male, anticipate rejection on the grounds that they are not “real men,” but also because many potential partners prefer to date men with normative male bodies. Of course, there are also some transsexual men who prefer to self-identify as transmen rather than as men, in which case the definitional baggage associated with the term *man* might be less relevant.

The particular situation that Bruce and Nick Laird experienced suggests that different people might fear receiving certain types of revelations more than they do others. For instance, one man might be relieved to hear that his date is a transman because, for him, an HIV-positive status might carry a greater stigma. For a different man, these concerns might be reversed. In such situations, a transman might attempt to ascertain the other person's attitudes before disclosing. This comparison between these two particular types of disclosure suggests the directions that this line of scholarship could take.

While the current project examined how media representations of transmen, and particularly gay transmen, have impacted the meaning of *man* in contemporary society, I believe that additional research could examine how media representations of men have an influence on the lives of transmen. I am personally intrigued by the fact that two of the men I interviewed in Chapter 4 chose to reference the depictions of manhood performed by Jimmy Stewart as models for transmen to emulate. I would like to further explore the cultural significance of Stewart's performances in order to determine why some transmen single him out as iconic, given the number of actors who have offered filmed portrayals of manhood over the past century. Working on the premise that identification with Stewart's characters is particularly salient for some transmen, I would like to examine the characteristics of manhood he has portrayed. Given my contention that challenges to manhood are rooted in the assumed correspondence between sex, gender identity, and gender expression, I cannot help but speculate as to whether or not Stewart's iconic status would remain intact if it was discovered that his body at birth had not been conventionally male. While it is possible that such information would not have a particularly destructive effect at this point in time, years after his death, it seems clear that it would have made a major impact on his image at the height of his career. Similarly, if he had been a male who had not performed masculinity in accord with social norms of his time, it is unlikely that he would have been seen as an icon or model of manhood. However, there is clearly more to Stewart's image than the simple combination of male-bodiedness and masculinity, and I would like to examine the unique set of characteristics that might account for the fact that Stewart's name comes

to mind for contemporary transmen who are contemplating the meaning of manhood as they perform this identity in their own lives.

Another related topic of interest to me concerns the different attitudes expressed by transmen with respect to their own use of the term *man* as an identity label. As quoted in Chapter 4 from one of my interviews with transmen, Bruce stated that he identifies as “female-to-male” because it seems dishonest to call himself a man: “I just don’t feel like I can pretend that the female part of my existence didn’t ever exist. . . . I can’t deny the fact that I’m a female-to-male transsexual and so that’s just who I am.” Similar comments from Kailey are cited in Chapter 3. Conversely, there are transmen such as Teddy and myself who do not feel that our use of the term *man* is in any way deceptive. I believe it would be beneficial to explore the reasons behind this difference in attitude, since it would appear that those transmen who feel reluctant to use the term *man* for themselves are perhaps more inclined to see *man* as exclusively male.

Final Thoughts

While there are those who would examine both sex and gender through a poststructural lens, perhaps by interviewing those who do not identify with the conventional binary categories, I see value in examining the concepts of *man* and *woman* through the perceptions of those for whom they are most salient. A poststructural or queer theory, while valuable in some ways, is not fully adequate to the task of addressing the lives of those who negotiate their daily lives as men and women. Some of those who personally identify outside the standard binary categories may hope to see a world free of these constructs, and there are noble, egalitarian arguments underlying this vision. It is important to remember, however, that for many transsexual men and women, the early life experiences of their friends and family members trigger feelings of envy and grief because while they identified with some of these individuals, that identification was not recognized or honored. As photographer Dean Kotula (2002) writes of his own transition:

I want to recover my childhood, to be viewed as a boy and young man. . . . I want what was rightfully mine. . . . I’d like to walk alongside my dad and have him wrap an arm around me and call me “son.” (pp. 209-210)

For some individuals, *man* still matters, especially to those men who did not have the privilege of taking it for granted. In this project, I have argued that the motivation for discrimination against transmen is rooted in beliefs about the correspondence between physical sex, gender identity, and gender expression, but I have also suggested that the seemingly inveterate nature of these beliefs, for many if not most people, is matched by the equally persistent motivation of many transmen to be perceived as men. So long as *man* remains a significant identity label within the culture, it will remain salient for transmen.

FOOTNOTES

¹As I noted earlier, the meanings associated with the concept of *man* do vary by culture and across time. My reference to “relative stability” here refers to the stability of the term for an individual within his lifetime. It is the meanings associated with *masculinity* that change most rapidly during a single generation.

²With respect to Burke’s generic use of the term *man*, Celeste Condit (1992) explains that “Burke referred supportively to the women’s movement and to the expansion of women’s rights, but he portrayed this expansion as the inclusion of women under the sign of ‘man’” (pp. 350-351). Put simply, “In Burke’s writing there is basically one gender—man,” given that “male-gendered nouns and pronouns dominate Burke’s texts” (p. 350). In response she offers “post-Burkean” language. For example, while Burke refers to “man” as the “symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal” (p. 351), Condit refers to “people” as “players with symbols” (p. 352). It is left to her readers to determine whether or not Burke has lost something in the translation. Heather Graves (1993) is perhaps more generous in suggesting that Burke’s writing style qualifies as “an excellent example of l’écriture féminine” (p. 148), despite the fact that “many of his ideas are firmly aligned with the phallogocentric tradition” (p. 152).

³There are numerous variations of the acronym GLBT, with some including many more letters designating intersex, queer, questioning, ally, etc. The most common variant, LGBT, names “lesbian” before “gay” as a response to the historical use of “gay” to include lesbians without mentioning them by name, thereby erasing “lesbian” as a distinct social position that is not simply the female equivalent of “gay man.” In choosing to use GLBT, I am, first, avoiding the more convoluted addition of other letters beyond the primary four, as this would require additional explanation for each letter. Second, while I recognize the intention of those who place the “L” in the primary position, this reordering of the first two letters tends to prompt further questions as to why the “B” must be third, or why the “T” must be last, and I see this as a slippery slope with no obvious solution. Therefore, I view it as logical to place the “G” first simply because it represents the more inclusive category, i.e., there are some lesbians who do prefer to be called “gay women,” but I am not aware of any gay men who prefer to be called “lesbians.”

⁴As a subset of the gay male community, bears are, of course, an exception to this, and they will be addressed later in this chapter.

⁵Alfred Kinsey’s scale of sexual orientation ranges from a zero (“exclusively heterosexual with no homosexual”) to a six (“exclusively homosexual”) (Kinsey Institute, n.d.).

⁶I address the subject of “passing” with more detail in Chapter 4.

⁷I use the term *gay transmen* to refer to transmen who are attracted to men, bearing in mind that not all transmen who fit this description choose to refer to themselves with the word *gay*.

⁸Craigslist personal ads are visible for only very short periods of time, and are therefore not retrievable by readers of this project. Also, because the site forces the reader to select a city, one cannot view ads on a national basis. My sample was drawn from two cities in the western United States on March 18, 2011.

⁹This is the citation for all direct quotes from this film.

¹⁰This is the citation for all direct quotes from this film.

¹¹My own connection to Dr. O’Keefe is the fact that one of my essays, “The Constructed Life,” was published in a previous anthology edited by Dr. O’Keefe and Katrina Fox. This is the same book in which Tucker Lieberman’s (2003) essay appears.

¹²Scholar Will Roscoe (1998), who has written extensively on the subject of native North Americans, explains that a group of anthropologists and native peoples in the early 1990s had recommended the term *two-spirit* as a descriptor of gender variance to replace the term *berdache*, which they believed to be Western in origin. He points out, however, that *berdache* is, in fact, a Persian term, and is therefore Eastern in origin (p. 17). Its meaning had subsequently shifted over time as it was used in Europe and North America (p. 7). He also argues that the term is not inherently derogatory, and that “it came to be used not only as a pantribal term by natives themselves but as a personal name as well.” In his writing, he uses the term *two-spirit* when referring to “contemporary native people who have begun to identify as such” (p. 18). As Christian’s use of this term indicates, some White U.S. Americans and others have begun using this term to reflect their own gender variant identifications.

¹³A phalloplasty involves the harvesting and implantation of tissue from another part of the body to create a phallus of normative male size and an approximation of normative appearance. A metaoidioplasty reconstructs the tissue surrounding the penis (formerly perceived as a clitoris) which had grown larger as a result of testosterone treatments.

¹⁴Just as diversity within the transgender community has led to the proliferation of gender-related terms to describe transgender status, there are multiple terms used for non-heterosexual orientations. Individual members of these communities might find some terms more salient than others because particular associations are being made with respect to specific terms. For example, some might embrace the term *queer* while others prefer the term *gay*. I shall return to this subject later in this chapter.

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APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

To: Daniel Brouwer

STAUF

From: Mark Roosa, Chair

Soc Beh IRB

Date: 08/24/2009

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 08/24/2009

IRB Protocol #: 0906004076

Study Title: Cultural Perceptions of Man

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: NATAL MALE GAY MEN

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: NATAL MALE GAY MEN

1. What characteristics do you think of when you hear the word *man*?
2. How did you learn this meaning for the word? When was this? What happened?
3. Describe the first time you consciously thought of yourself as a man.
4. In what situations are you particularly conscious of yourself as a man?
5. Describe the characteristics you possess which you think of as typical of men or as manly.
6. What characteristics that you think of as manly do you wish you possessed, or possessed to a greater degree?
7. Describe a time when you compared yourself to another man or to men. How did you feel about yourself as a result of this comparison?
8. Describe the first time you thought of yourself as a gay man.
9. Have you used any other language to describe your sexual orientation? In what ways is this language more appropriate for you?
10. Describe the first time you told another person that you were a gay man. How did you feel at that time? How do you think the other person felt? In what ways did you feel that the other person understood you?
11. What is it about men that attracts you emotionally and/or physically? What makes a man attractive, handsome, sexy, etc.?
12. What comes to mind when you hear terms like *transsexual man* or *transman*? What would you be inclined to anticipate from such a person in terms of physical appearance? Personality? Behavior?
13. Describe any experiences you've had interacting with transmen.
 - A. If you **have** interacted with transmen:
 - i. How did you feel during these interactions?
 - ii. How do you think these men felt while interacting with you?
 - iii. In recalling these interactions, what characteristics that you consider typical of men were present in these transmen? What characteristics were absent?
 - iv. Was there anything about these interactions that felt noticeably different from your interactions with natal males?
 - v. During your interactions with transmen, to what extent were you consciously thinking about the trans status of these men? How often did you stop consciously thinking about it?

- vi. To what extent have you ever felt emotionally and/or physically attracted to transmen? How would you feel about dating or having an intimate relationship with a transman? If you have done so, what was that experience like for you?
- B. If you have **not** interacted with transmen:
- i. Describe what you think this interaction would be like. How do you think you would feel during this interaction? How do you think the transman would feel?
 - ii. How does it feel to imagine yourself attracted to a transman emotionally or physically? How would you feel about the idea of dating or having an intimate relationship with a transman?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TRANSSEXUAL GAY MEN

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: TRANSSEXUAL GAY MEN

1. What characteristics do you think of when you hear the word *man*?
2. How did you learn this meaning for the word? When was this? What happened?
3. What language do you prefer to use to describe your own gender? [Subject might say *man*, *transman*, *transsexual man*, *queer*, etc.] In what ways does this term feel more appropriate than others?
4. Describe the first time you consciously thought of yourself as a (*gender term*).
5. In what situations are you particularly conscious of yourself as a (*gender term*)?
6. Describe the characteristics you possess which you think of as typical of men or as manly.
7. Are there characteristics that you think of as manly that you wish you possessed, or possessed to a greater degree?
8. Describe a time when you have compared yourself to natal male men. How did that make you feel?
9. Describe the first time you told another person that you were a (*gender term*). How did you feel at that time? What was your perception of how the other person felt? In what ways did you feel that the other person understood you?
10. What language do you prefer to use to describe your sexual orientation? [Subject might say *gay man*, *queer*, etc.] In what ways does this term feel more appropriate than others?
11. What characteristics do you think of when you hear the label *gay man*? Describe how you feel this term does and/or does not apply to you.
12. Thinking in terms of sex and gender, to what types of people are you emotionally and/or physically attracted? When you consider your attraction to men, what is it about men that attracts you emotionally or physically? What makes a man attractive, handsome, sexy, etc.?
13. Describe the first time you revealed your self-identified gender and sexuality to another person. How did you feel at that time? How do you think the other person felt? In what ways did you feel that the other person understood you?
14. Describe how you've felt interacting with natal males since beginning your transition. How have you felt during these interactions? How do you think these men have felt? How do you think you have been perceived in terms of your gender and sexuality? In what ways have you felt inclined to alter your personality or behavior in order to be perceived differently by them?
15. Describe an experience you've had interacting with a natal gay male since beginning your transition. How did you feel during this interaction? How do you think the other person felt? How did you think you were being perceived in terms of your gender and sexuality? In what ways did you feel inclined to alter your personality or behavior in order to be perceived differently by this gay man?

16. Describe an experience you've had interacting with another transman since beginning your transition. How did you feel during this interaction? How do you think the other transman felt? How did you think you were being perceived in terms of your gender and sexuality? In what ways did you feel inclined to alter your personality or behavior in order to be perceived differently by this transman?
17. How would you feel about dating or having an intimate relationship with a natal gay male? If you have done so, what was that experience like for you?
18. How would you feel about dating or having an intimate relationship with another transman? If you have done so, what was that experience like for you?