

LIFE AS A QUEER TRANS MAN: IDENTITY MANAGEMENT
IN A NON-TRANS WORLD

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by

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DEDICATION PAGE

This thesis is dedicated to my loving partner, Jimmy Horowitz, for his tireless support, constant encouragement, and homemade dinners – even after my late-night seminars.

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ABSTRACT

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Queer transgender men – those who were assigned female at birth, but identify and live as men -- can face challenges when attempting to operate as gay men in gay male communities. For instance, past literature has indicated that queer trans men sometimes suffer rejection from potential gay male partners due to the non-traditional composition of their bodies. While sociological research on male-to-female transgender women abounds, there is significantly less scholarship on female-to-male transsexuals (FTMs) and, more specifically, on queer FTMs. This study adds to the current literature on queer transgender men by examining the ways in which they

engage in identity work. Drawing primarily on the symbolic interactionist theory of Erving Goffman, this qualitative project looks at the ways in which FTMs manage their identities as queer men when faced with disruptions to those identities. After coding the data of fifteen in-person interviews, I found that participants managed their identities by controlling their presentations, challenging traditional notions of gender and sexuality, using carefully constructed assertions of identity and belonging, reframing their bodies, and paying close attention to the social circles in which they move as well as how they interact with men once inside those circles.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Female-to-male transgender men (FTMs) are individuals who are born female, but identify as men. In their efforts to navigate the social world as men, FTMs may alter their appearance through specific aesthetic choices, the regular use of testosterone, and a variety of surgical procedures (Chivers and Bailey 2000). Dozier (2005) found creating a body that aligns with one's inner identity to be a primary reason for physical transition.

Experiences of FTMs raise interesting sociological questions about the relationship between sex, gender, and identity. In sociology, gender refers to the socially constructed identity that generally accompanies one's sex (Epstein 1988). That is, gender is one's sense of being a man or a woman while sex refers to an individual's biological composition (e.g. genitals, chromosomes, etc.) The majority of people have genders that match their sex. For instance, most women are biologically female and most men are biologically male. For transgender individuals, however, this is not the case; their sense of being a man or a woman conflicts with the physical sex they were assigned at birth.

Trans men can have a difficult time when seeking out physical relationships with gay men due to the female configuration of their bodies (Blanchard 1985; Devor 1994; Schleifer 2006), fear of being misperceived as a woman (Blanchard 1985; Devor 1994),

and general animosity between the trans and non-trans gay communities (Wiess 2004). This study examines the way queer FTMs manage their identities as queer men and how they contend with challenges to those identities. For sociologists, queer theory permits analysis of behaviors and identities that are situated outside of a normative, binary system of gender, sex, and sexuality (Valocchi 2005). In this way, queer encapsulates a wide range of gender and sexuality expressions as well as recognizes the way in which such practices are socially and historically constructed into social identities. My research questions for this study were: (1) How do queer trans men manage their identities?; (2) How do queer trans men explain their identities to non-trans gay men?; and, 3) How do queer trans men resist challenges to their identities?

This study not only adds to the limited amount of literature on FTMs and queer FTMs more specifically, but offers sociology the opportunity to theoretically explore the ways in which gender, sex and sexuality intersect. In addition, while this study intends to work from an identity management perspective, it also offers some insights into queer theory. It is possible that the data could be easily analyzed under a queer lens in subsequent projects. Valocchi writes that “rethinking sex, gender, and sexuality queerly opens up new questions for sociologists and new ways of thinking about old concepts” (2005:753), arguing, for instance, that there is theoretical value in studying gays and lesbians while keeping gender primary in the equation. Moreover, he notes the importance of discovering “what happens when the relationship between gender and sexuality becomes an empirical question and individual subjectivities and practices are

not assumed to be easily read off the dominant taxonomies or identity categories” (753). This study illuminates the ways in which participants arrive at labels of gender, sex, and sexuality other than those that might be assumed based upon dualistic, essentialist notions of bodies and behavior. While much sociological research has examined the lives of gay men and some reported on issues faced by those who are transgender, little has focused on participants who are both queer *and* transgender. This work allows observations to be made about not just non-traditional forms of sexuality, but how such sexualities are managed while simultaneously contending with a non-traditionally sexed body and, for many participants, a non-traditional gender identity.

Moreover, this study has practical implications. While gay males and trans women are frequent subjects of sociological inquiry, queer trans men are not. Queer trans men are, however, still part of the gay men’s community and are subsequently vulnerable to the same threats as their non-trans counterparts. One study found that low self-esteem was a barrier to trans people engaging in safer sex behaviors (Clements et al. 1999). The same study found that some queer trans men were hesitant to use protection because they were simply so happy to be having a sexual experience that confirmed their sense of self as a “regular” gay man. Others reported that they were more likely to take sexual risks because of the disconnect between their body and their mind. In addition, there is some degree of long-standing conflict between the transgender community and the non-transgender gay and lesbian community. For instance, Wiess (2004) contends that many gays and lesbians believe transgender people transition to escape their homosexuality.

From this perspective, trans men are masculine lesbians who would rather assimilate into society as straight men than stand out as “butch” (masculine) women. As well as ignoring the fact that not all trans men are particularly butch before or after transition, this argument also ignores the existence of queer trans men. This study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of queer trans men and the way they operate within gay male communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

FTMs are much more rare than their male-to-female counterparts, comprising only 1 in every 100,000 people compared to the estimated 1 in 30,000 who are male-to-female (DSM-IV 1994). It is possible that this estimate is low as it is based only on those who undergo genital surgery, which is less popular among FTMs than male-to-females (MTFs) (Schilt and Waszkiewicz 2005). Furthermore, FTMs are less likely to be in regular contact with psychiatric and medical establishments (Meyerowitz 2003) and “trans men” have a tendency to pass well as male after transition (Schilt and Waszkiewicz 2005).

The transmasculine community includes all who were born female, but do not identify as girls or women (Hansbury 2005). This community is diverse in the gender identities it encompasses as well as the sexual orientations. According to recent research (Hansbury 2005), the transmasculine community is becoming more heterogeneous, including those who may adopt any number of labels along a gender continuum. Some in the transmasculine community have identities that are solidly male and claim labels such as “man” or “man of transsexual experience.” Others adopt more radical labels such as “bearded female” or “gender outlaw” as a way of expressing a radical gender or simply

taking on an identity that feels accurate. This demonstrates the agency trans men have in experimenting with gender and creating gender presentations that seem to fit.

In past decades, trans people were often treated as disgruntled homosexuals who sought to conform to social pressures by living as straight men and women (e.g. Bailey 2003). Although a number of FTMs reported sex with men while living as women, this behavior was dismissed by medical and psychiatric professionals who saw it as an effort on the part of FTMs to deny their transsexuality and/or their attractions to women; the possibility that these individuals' attractions to men might be legitimate was not considered (Devor 1994). In the 1980s, the existence of gay FTMs – who both lived as and dated men – finally made its way into publication (Devor 1994). Devor found that 40% of his sample of transitioned men reported a sexual attraction to males.

While sociological research on male-to-female trans people abounds (e.g. Gagne, Tewksbury and McGaughey 1997; Gagne and Tewksbury 1998; Garfinkel 1967; Kessler and McKenna 1978; Mason-Schrock 1996; Schrock and Reid 2006), there is a dearth of academic research available on FTM transsexuals (Devor 1994; Dozier 2005; Schilt and Waszkiewicz 2005) and less pertaining to gay trans men specifically (Chivers and Bailey 2000.) What little research there is is often pathologizing, exceedingly clinical and otherwise disrespectful to its subjects. For instance, many studies assign to respondents pronouns that conflict with their inner identities (e.g. Blanchard 1989; Chivers and Bailey 2000). Some sociological research about gay trans men exists, but is weak in

scope or methodology – it may mention gay FTMs only briefly (e.g. Devor 1994; Dozier 2005) or contain an extremely small sample size (e.g. Schleifer 2006).

Despite the shortage of research on this community, it is known that trans men can face challenges when attempting to operate as gay men in gay male communities. Devor (1994) found a 275% increase in the number of FTMs who found gay men sexually attractive after transition compared to their level of attraction prior to doing so. Devor cites Blanchard (1985) when attributing this post-transition increase to a diminished level of fear about the femaleness of their bodies. Devor contends that many trans men in his sample were only able to explore an interest in men after their own male identities were fully intact; otherwise, they risked a challenge to their identities as men. Respondents in the Devor study reported that their pre-transition experiences with men had only highlighted the differences between their own bodies and those of the men they were with. Others studies have found pre- or early-transition trans men abstained from relationships with non-trans men to avoid being perceived in the female role (Dozier 2005). Trans men in another study indicated that their female genital composition caused identity crises for many gay male partners (Schleifer 2006).

Past literature has demonstrated the ways in which trans people create presentations with which they are content. Although gay trans men report challenges in romantic and sexual interactions with non-trans gay male partners, they are able to utilize an array of resources to create a presentation and sense of identity that aligns with who they feel they are. For instance, several articles address the agency trans actors have in

aligning their bodies with their inner senses of self. Schilt and Waszkiewicz (2005) examined the differences between trans men who feel the strong desire for genital surgery and those who do not. Their research indicates that testosterone is a priority in creating the desired appearance. Both the injection of male hormones and chest reconstruction surgery – the process of removing breast tissue, reshaping the nipple and recontouring the chest in a typical male fashion – were more essential for respondents than genital surgery or a hysterectomy. The writers argue that male secondary sex characteristics and traditional men's attire serve as a kind of "cultural genitalia" which suggests to others that a penis simply must be present (3; see also Kessler and McKenna 1978). Contrary to the findings of Devor (1994) whose FTM sample reported high levels of dissatisfaction over their female genital configuration, Schilt and Waszkiewicz (2005) reported that men in their sample felt their bodies were acceptably male with or without a penis. Men in this sample attributed little significance to their lack of a traditional male organ.

Schilt's (2007) individual work on trans men is also worth noting as it reveals the ways in which gender inequalities in the workplace exist solely on the basis of traits commonly attributed to men and women instead of the traits those men and women actually possess. By analyzing the workplace experiences of FTMs, Schilt discovered that trans men generally receive the same benefits afforded to non-trans men in the same field. She contends that her research provides a counter to claims that gender discrimination in the workplace is a result of cultural capital; instead, the fact that trans men are granted male privilege on the job despite the fact that their training, skills, and behavior are still

largely the same indicates that sexism in the workplace is based upon more than the idea that men and women have different abilities.

Other scholarship looks at the way sex and sex characteristics are forms of gender expression. Dozier (2005) maintains that most sociological literature asserts that gender is generally dependent upon sex without addressing the way in which sex or perceived sex may influence presentations of gender. She demonstrates the effect of the body on both gendered behavior as well as perceptions of that behavior. She contends that trans men whose physical traits do not consistently convey them as male must rely on performance to assert that they are men. For trans men who are consistently perceived as male, gendered behavior becomes less important and there exists less need to adhere to traditional norms of masculine presentation such as stereotypically masculine mannerisms or attire.

Past literature has also addressed the way trans men and women engage in various types of identity work to keep their identities strong and intact. This is sometimes done through reframing the body in a way that poses less conflict to the identity of its owner. Schleifer (2005) detailed the way some trans men incorporate their female genitals into sexual play with non-trans gay men. For these trans men, their genitals simply made them unique. Special focus was paid to testosterone-induced clitoral growth and new, more masculine terms were employed to refer to their female parts. Trans men and their partners, for instance, responded to the clitoris as if it were a penis. The same article found that “by narrating a uniquely homosexual masculinity in which penetrability

reinforces the sense that one is a man, gay FTMs can mitigate the femininity of their female sex characteristics more readily than heterosexual FTMs can” (16). This underscores the ability of trans men to make their bodies – and identities -- their own.

Another type of identity work employed by trans people is the use of narrative constructions. Some literature has shown the way in which trans people create narratives that reaffirm their identities by recalling their history in a way that validates their status as transsexual. For instance, Mason-Schrock (1998) found that MTF transsexuals used instances of early crossdressing and a lack of athletic prowess as evidence that they were destined to transition. Likewise, over-involvement in distracting activities and exaggerated masculine pursuits were also cited as methods of denial. In addition, trans support groups tend to perpetuate these narratives collectively by providing clues as to the types of experiences true transsexuals have, guiding newcomers to search for those experiences in their own lives and ignoring experiences that contradict the common transsexual narrative.

Similar research has demonstrated the way trans people reframe past sexual experiences to assert a sense of self. Schrock and Reid (2006) examine the way the MTF transsexuals recount sexual stories while adjusting for information they feel might delegitimize their status as trans women. These threatening activities included masturbation with women’s clothing, sexual activity with women, sexual intimacy with women with the use of female attire and sexual interaction with men. Trans women who felt the presence of these experiences in their pasts might indicate to others that they

aren't actually trans – just a simple crossdresser – explained away erotic crossdressing by defetishizing it. For these respondents, their crossdressing was not a fetish and it wasn't about sex. They argued that non-erotic crossdressing in childhood proved they were true transsexuals and distanced themselves from autoerotic crossdressing by claiming they did not depend on crossdressing for arousal. Similarly, these trans women reframed sexual experiences with women as a type of lesbian sex or by stating they tried on the “feminine” role during intimacy. To make sense of their experience with tranvestic sex, the participants generally said they wore women's clothes to bed simply because they enjoyed the confirmation from partners that they were a woman. Along these lines, sex with men did not indicate that they were gay or bisexual males; instead, the participants explained they had mistaken their femininity for homosexuality or that being with men was the only way they knew how to play a feminine role.

Theoretical Framework

The majority of sociological literature on identity management studies its use in marginalized communities such as those with alcoholism (Jarvinen 2001) or sexually transmitted diseases (Nack 2000). One of the most frequently referenced articles on identity work looks at the way the homeless actively manage the stigma of their situations in order to maintain their dignity, respect and sense of self (Snow and Anderson 1987). Using Goffman's (1963) assertion that stigmatized people take measures to protect themselves from the harmful effects of that stigma as much as possible, the writers define identity work as “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present and

sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (1987:1348). They contend that this process involves the manipulation of physical surroundings, attention to personal appearance, purposeful interaction with or avoidance of others, and actual assertions of identity. They found that the homeless in their sample engaged in three basic behaviors to manage their identities: distancing themselves from the homeless role or other homeless people, embracement of the homeless role or other homeless people, and fictive story telling about grand adventures that are likely not to have happened and are unlikely to happen in the future.

This project will take a similar theoretical approach. Drawing primarily on the symbolic interactionist work of Erving Goffman, I am interested in the ways in which gay FTMs manage their identities as gay men. Goffman’s (1959) concept of dramaturgy suggests that life is a type of stage on which we are constantly managing the impressions we make. That is, we give the performances we want others to see while working to minimize any interruptions to those performances. On stage, we may engage in stigma management or in any number of defensive practices. In his book on stigma, Goffman (1963) addresses information control and personal identity. He maintains that when there is a “discrepancy between an individual’s actual social identity and his virtual one,” the possibility exists for others to know of that discrepancy – people may either know in advance or they may eventually uncover it (41). Because of this, one must take on the task of managing information that might discredit their social identity. To do this, one may be selective in sharing information, may conceal information by simple omission, or

may withhold or lie about information altogether. Analyzing queer trans men through this theoretical lens does not imply that their identities as queer men are in any way false or inauthentic. Their identities are as valid as any non-trans men's. Thus, the issue is not that queer trans men must maintain false presentations as men; rather, they must maintain presentations as men without those presentations being *considered false by others*.

Building on this framework, my study is concerned with the ways in which queer trans men prevent interruptions to their identities and performances as men. Snow and Anderson (1987) – as well as the majority of other literature on identity work -- tend to rely heavily on Goffman's notion of stigma management (1963). I plan to focus on the ways queer trans men maintain specific identities as queer men when faced with challenges to those identities. The need for management arises when the queer trans man realizes he may be perceived in a way that is unfavorable to him and is incongruent with who he believes himself to be.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

My research was a qualitative project consisting of in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Because I aimed to show the way individual identities are actively managed, qualitative methodology was a necessity. Statistics can show little about one's internal processes and there is no need for the generalizability offered by quantitative methods (Esterberg 2000). According to Esterberg, quantitative methods are "not particularly useful in revealing the meanings people ascribe to particular events or activities nor is it well suited to understanding complicated social processes in context" (2). Thus, by using qualitative methods to explore the experiences of queer trans men, I was able to discern from the data not only what participants do, for instance, but also why they do it and what significance it has for them. Such methods allow for self-reflection on the part of the participants, creating an atmosphere in which the researcher is granted access to the mental processes of those being interviewed. In that way, qualitative methods are particularly important for discovering how participants think about themselves, their identities, and their interactions with others.

In addition, Esterberg (2000) argues that interviews in particular give researchers the ability to understand what it's like to live life from the perspective of their

participants. More specifically, the semi-structured nature of my interviews helped to give direction to the interviews while still allowing respondents room to talk.

Customizing the interview to the responses of the research participants results in a much more free and flexible dialogue in which it often becomes clear what matters most to the group being studied. This flexible interview format was essential, particularly because I was conducting interviews with a marginalized population whose voices are quite often unheard as spoken in their own words. My use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews provided participants with a platform from which to be heard.

Due to the relatively small number of queer FTMs specifically, I had difficulty locating a sufficient number of participants in one location. For this reason, I expanded my sample pool to include those from a number of cities in two separate regions of the country. I initially located my participants via ads posted on internet message boards as well as through referrals provided by early participants. To facilitate their comfort, I set up meetings with those who respond to my ads at a location of their choosing. I used a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix) that was divided into multiple sections designed to address each of my research questions. Specifically, I asked questions about basic demographic information; feelings about the body, transition status, and how participants believed themselves to be perceived by others; participants' experiences disclosing their transgender status to other gay men; problems participants have had, if any, in disclosing that status to potential gay male partners; and a small set of concluding questions.

The sample consisted of fifteen trans men who identified as transgender and queer in some way. Because many of my participants identified with gender and sexuality labels other than “gay” or “man” and a handful did specifically identify with the term “queer,” I have opted to refer to them in this way. While “queer” and “gay” often overlap, the former is often thought by those who self-identify as such to be more flexible, inclusive, and revolutionary. Born from the theoretical works of those like Michel Foucault, “queer” attempts to critique gender and sex categories that those in their movement do not believe to be fixed or innate, but highly malleable and socially constructed (Beasley 2005). For many, to be queer “necessarily...involves deconstructing mutually reinforcing neat divisions of identity binaries such as men/women and heterosexual/homosexual” (162). That is, those sympathetic to queer thinking are often interesting in demonstrating both the fluidity and artificiality of systems of gender and sexuality that they feel labels like “gay” or “lesbian” continue to reinforce. Beasley argues that the attention of queer theory to identity deconstruction is often “in practice directed toward discounting gender and its categories,” explaining one reason my transgender participants may have been inclined to identify with the ideology.

Of my participants, four were from a large urban city in the Northeast, and eleven were from various metropolitan areas in the South. This not only provided a greater number of participants, but enhanced the diversity of the sample. While there was a fair deal of geographic diversity in my sample, it was relatively homogenous on other ways. For instance, ten of the fifteen were in their twenties or younger, while only one was in

his early thirties and four in their early-to-mid forties. In addition, all were white and most were relatively well-educated, meaning they had attended at least some college. All but two of my participants were on hormones and all but two were living primarily as men full-time. Further demographic information about my sample can be seen in the chart below (Table 1). The presence of “unsure” indicates that the respondent had not yet decided whether they wanted the treatment or procedure.

Table 1. Respondents’ demographic information

Name	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Testosterone (T)	Chest Surgery	Genital Surgery
Blake	26	Transgender	Queer	Yes	Post-op	Unsure
Brian	21	Female-to-male	Queer	Yes	Post-op	Non-op
Larson	42	Genderqueer FTM	Queer, bisexual	Yes	Post-op	Unsure
Kevin	26	Genderqueer, male	Pansexual	Yes	Pre-op	Unsure
Mack	19	“fruity male”	Gay	Yes	Pre-op	Unsure
Moe	40	Male, trans man, genderqueer	Bisexual	Pre-T	Pre-op	Unsure
Kolby	31	Genderqueer male	Pansexual	Pre/Non/Unsure	Pre-op	Unsure
Billy	29	Male	Pansexual	Yes	Pre-op	Non-op
Nick	20	Androgynous, FTM	Gay side of bisexual	Yes	Pre-op	Unsure
Dwayne	45	Male	“opportunistic slut”	Yes	Post-op	Pre-op
Lyle	45	Man of trans experience	Gay	Yes	Post-op	Unsure
Owen	28	Man, FTM	Gay	Yes	Pre-op	Unsure
Matthew	32	Male	Gay	Pre-T	Pre-op	Non-op
Cory	26	Androgynous, genderqueer, boy	Queer, gay “if pressed”	Yes	Post-op	Non-op
Mason	21	Trans man	Bi-curious	Yes	Pre-op	Non-op

I recorded and transcribed the interviews for this analysis. I read each transcript numerous times, highlighting relevant quotes. Next, I looked for patterns in interviewees' responses – a process called open-coding (Esterberg 2000). In doing so, my goal was to analyze the data without preconceived expectations about what should be there. I then identified prominent themes in the data and analyzed those themes from an identity management perspective. All identifying information of the participants has been changed, including name and cities of residence.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

My participants managed their identities by paying careful attention to the ways in which they presented themselves to the world as queer men, as well as the way they explained their identities to partners and protected against challenges to those identities by way of romantic and sexual rejection. I identified six primary themes present in the identity management of my participants: (1) attention to physical appearance, (2) the challenging of traditional norms of gender, sex, and sexuality, (3) verbal assertions of identity, (4) reframing the body, (5) a methodological approach to dating, and (6) a strategic selection of partners.

Attention to Physical Appearance: Surgery and Hormones

Snow and Anderson (1987) argue that part of identity work involves attention to “cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance” (1348). All of my participants – regardless of hormone and surgery status – paid close attention to the physical way they presented to others. Despite the fact that several worried that it was still largely unsuccessful, all at least attempted to use their bodies to convey to others the sense that they are male.

Although none had undergone genital surgery, they all endeavored to live in the world as men in ways that did not involve a penis. That my participants expressed such a desire to exhibit particular gender cues, regardless of actual genital status, is understandable. Schilt and Waszkiewicz (2006) contend that that facial hair, a flat chest, a male voice, and traditionally male attire serve as a kind of “cultural genitalia” which suggests to others that a penis must be present (3; see also Kessler and McKenna 1978). The need for appropriate cultural genitalia is expressed in Mack’s advice to younger trans men: I guess I would just tell them to, I dunno, try to pass and...ugh [laughs]..and, well, I know everyone tries to pass anyway, but you have to really, like, figure out how to get everything correct.

As indicated by Mack’s statement, the need to appear decidedly male seemed important to all participants. Appearing male was also of concern to Moe, who was pre-transition and believed that he was generally perceived as female. In a discussion about dating gay men generally and referring to his own “crush” specifically, he said, “And I feel like once I can present as more male...as something more visceral for him to react to...then I might move in a little closer.”

For Moe, being pre-transition and being unable to present himself as the man he perceives himself to be, served as obstacle to his dating gay men. Whether gay men would be disinterested solely because of his pre-transition status, Moe *felt* as if they would and this perception prevented him from approaching gay men in the way he would have liked to.

Like Moe, Matthew was also pre-transition. He, too, felt he was unable to pass as a man. He did indicate, however, that he would “feel better about [him]self once [he could] pass as male” and was disappointed that he believed himself to be perceived by other gay men as a “dyke” because he is “slightly butchy.” He believed that gay men saw him “as a lesbian until [he] start[s] talking about [his] partner and using male pronouns regarding him.” He felt that hormones and chest surgery would help correct these chronic misperceptions of him.

Both those who were pre-op and those who were post-op equated a flat chest with increased peace of mind. Kevin, who had not had chest surgery, said that he’s currently “not comfortable at all” and doesn’t like “being felt in the chest area.” He suspected that having a traditionally male chest would “take [him] to a better place” sexually.

None of my participants had undergone any kind of genital reconstruction surgery and none were adamant that they wanted it. Several such as Nick and Blake indicated that they contemplate the idea of having genital surgery, but are still unsure about whether it is for them. Dwayne was the only man interviewed who said that he most certainly intended to have it, but was nervous about what the outcome might be – research has shown that many trans men are hesitant to have genital surgery because they feel it fails to yield acceptable results (Cromwell 1999). Other participants like Billy and Larson felt that they might more seriously consider surgery if the technology were to improve. Mason, who had not yet had chest surgery, simply did not feel like he wanted any kind of genital surgery, explaining that, “I hate having breasts -- even as I was female-bodied and

labeled myself as a lesbian, I bound my chest...aesthetically, I wouldn't need to have lower surgery, I'm totally fine.” Still others went beyond being disinterested in genital surgery for fear of substandard results and actually liked the genitals they currently had. Cory, for instance, had “no reason to get surgery” because he “actually very much like[s] [his] body the way it is.”

In general, even though there were some respondents who contemplated whether to have surgery and a couple who would certainly have it if the options were better, none felt an urgent need to change the shape of their organs to reflect a more traditionally male appearance. While some felt that it might be nice to have a penis, none appeared preoccupied with the thought, deciding instead that it mattered very little in their identities as men. Billy pointed out that the presence of visible breasts, for instance, was much more likely to lead to the misperception of him as a woman than his genitals, which few people actually saw.

That few participants were fully committed to the idea of genital surgery is confirmed by other work. In particular, Schilt and Waszkiewicz (2005) found that that, while testosterone and chest surgery are priorities of FTMs in creating the desired appearance, genital surgeries were much less so. This could be due to two primary factors. The first is that it's possible the use of testosterone and the appearance of a flat chest – whether through surgery or binding – create enough “cultural genitalia” that participants felt little need for changing their actual genitals (3). A second possibility is that my participants simply didn't need a penis to feel comfortable in their identities as

men. For instance, Dozier (2005) contends that “particular sex characteristics such as a penis or breasts are not as crucial to the perception of sex as their meanings created in both social and sexual interaction” (304). Thus, once one is perceived as a man, the physical composition of that man becomes largely irrelevant. The idea that the penis does not actually make the man may also be a result of shifting values. Cromwell (2003) speculates that a new kind of transgender culture which allows for more individuality in gender construction and less adherence to traditional gender norms has resulted in diminished emphasis on the need for bottom surgery. It is possible that my findings support Cromwell’s theory. Because participants were part of this contemporary transgender culture, they may have felt less need to undergo genital surgery and experienced more freedom to create a body in which they were comfortable, even if that meant keeping their original genitalia.

In addition, it is plausible that the sexualities of the men in my sample made them particularly disinclined to desire any kind of genital reconstruction surgery. Some research has found that gay FTMs are able to use their original genitals during sex with gay male partners without posing a conflict to their identities as gay men (Coleman and Bockting 1991; Coleman et al. 1993). Coleman and others (1993) contend that the fact that queer FTMs are able to have successful physical and emotional relationships with other gay men without first having lower surgery calls upon researchers – and perhaps the public more widely – to examine traditional notions of sexuality that privilege the biological composition of the body over the identity that inhabits it.

While few participants of the men I talked with seemed dedicated to having bottom surgery, most did indicate that other types of transition were important to them because it encouraged others to view them in a way that reflected their actual identities. Brian, who had already completed chest surgery, said that after transition, he felt as if a burden had been lifted. Once self-conscious of his chest and in pain from “binding” (the process of compressing the breasts to achieve a more masculine shape), Brian felt his new chest helped him present himself accurately to others.

Kolby and Dwayne also felt that transition had – or, in the case of Kolby, would *eventually* – make dating gay men easier by allowing them to present in a way that accurately reflects their identities. Kolby said that physical transition would ensure that potential partners would “see what [he] want[s] them to see” while Dwayne expressed delight with men who exclaimed that they’d never have been able to tell he was not assigned male at birth.

Many of the men I interviewed were greatly concerned about having female breasts. In general, they felt discomfort around their breasts for two reasons: 1) because of the way it caused men to perceived them, and 2) because of personal dysphoria over having them there at all.

Owen indicated a desire for chest surgery, stressing that a flat chest would make him more comfortable in his own skin, but also make it easier to interact with other gay men. He disclosed that he had suffered rejections from gay male partners on the basis of

having breasts. While he was on testosterone, he felt that his breasts were still a “female signifier.”

Similarly, Nick felt that chest surgery would make a difference in his ability to satisfactorily move within the gay male dating scenes. He indicated that surgery for him would not only allow him to “get partners who are gay” but also increase his level of confidence in attempting to do so. With regard to dating gay men prior to chest surgery, he said, “I know that I have a...little bit of a fear of rejection that keeps me sometimes from approaching [gay men].” Another participant recalled the ways in which testosterone therapy had allowed him to “feel more comfortable approaching a wide variety of people” and expressing his attractions to men, something he found harder to do before transition when he felt more of a need to prove his masculinity.

Interestingly Owen speculated that it might be the confidence that comes with transition that attracts more dating success. About transition, he said:

Your confidence level is gonna increase, you know, further along in your transition. And I think confidence is really important. In my experience, it's a key factor in the success of sexual hookups, you know. And, you know, in most acceptances, I've generally had that...I'd flirted with gay men before and it just wasn't...I mean, now it's like I'm more of a brother, you know. And I get more acceptance and stuff. So, if you're asking for their permission for you to exist then, you know, then it's up to them... but if you demand it initially as a given, you know...then they'll go with that... I think that's kind of the psychology behind it.

Through transitional procedures like chest surgery and the injection of male hormones, respondents helped to solidify the external presentation that they were the men they knew themselves to be. Goffman contends that transsexuals attempt to create a front stage impression that will foster the idea that everything is the same behind that stage

(1971). By creating an outward appearance that reflects to others the true nature of their inward identification, my participants could maintain some control over the way they were perceived by others. This is in accordance with similar research which found that transgender respondents expressed that it was often not enough to simply identify as a certain gender, but that they also needed to appear as that gender in order to be accepted as such by those around them (Pusch 2005). In his study of transgender college students, Pusch found that those interviewed felt they would not be fully accepted until their appearance reflected the gender with which they identified. Other research found that transition allowed gay FTMs to feel more at ease with potential sexual partners (Schleifer 2006). Similarly, many of the FTMs in a different study felt more comfortable exploring their attraction to men after beginning to live as men themselves (Devor 1994). Devor speculates of his own participants that “it is only when they feel solidly established as men that they can begin to indulge their sexual curiosity about men...without having it threaten to dislodge their identities as men” (15).

Challenging Traditional Notions of Gender, Sex, and Sexuality: Femininity, Genderbending, and Activism

Research has shown that some FTMs become more feminine once they begin living as men. In particular, Dozier (2005) reported that an “increase in male sex characteristics creates both greater internal comfort with identity and social interactions that are increasingly incongruent with sex identity” (305). In other words, once one is perceived to be a man, there is less need to convey that manhood through appearance and

behavior. This was often the case with my participants, many of whom expressed an interest in playing with gender or projecting effeminacy.

For instance, some such as Kolby and Nick considered themselves “passable” as feminine men, meaning that they felt they were generally perceived as such. Kolby, for instance, indicated that he would prefer to be seen by others as “pretty effeminate, but definitely male.”

Lyle, a leather-wearing “man with a transsexual past” and a penchant for needlework, also liked “breaking stereotypes” on a daily basis. He explained that his interest in sewing was a kind of “leftover” from his life as a woman, but that he refused to give it up, despite inquiries from friends and family as to whether being a man meant he eventually would. Lyle’s decision to be free and open in his presentation is a declaration of who he feels himself to be. In a way, the honesty in his performance reflects not only not only his identity as man, but as man with a history of living – and being socialized – as a woman.

Some participants became increasingly feminine after beginning to live as men. Blake, for instance, had an avid interest in presenting alternative forms of masculinity – or subverting the notion of masculinity altogether. Throughout the interview, he indicated that physical transition had allowed him to embrace his own femininity and present in a way that is truer to himself. Interestingly, transitioning to live as a man has allowed him to behave less like a stereotypical one. While he is now confident in presenting in any way he pleases, he admitted that, prior to transition, he cared quite a bit

about others' perceptions of him and would alter his behavior accordingly. When asked how he'd most like to be perceived, he said:

Blake: I used to be more aware of trying to control it. I used to be very...especially before transitioning, I used to be very involved in engineering my presentation because I wanted to be read as differently than would normally be off my body.

Blake: How did you want to be read?

Interviewer: I wanted to be read as a man. Or at least, I wanted to be assumed to have masculinity. Umm...and when I started looking male, I stopped caring about how masculine I was...and then after a while, I was just like, 'I'm gonna do what feels good and feels natural and not worry about the reception. Or try to predict it.'

Cory also enjoyed wearing feminine attire post-transition. While he reported that he had not enjoyed it growing up or as a young adult pre-transition, he began doing it with the new-found comfort he discovered after chest surgery. Unlike Blake, who often engaged in feminine performances on stage, Cory preferred presenting as feminine in more common settings such as restaurants and gay bars. While he identified and lived as male, he said that he also enjoyed femininity. He did, however, express frustration that queer FTMs are expected to be more masculine than non-trans queer men:

I have never been terribly masculine, but I've always felt like a boy. I have just always felt like a girly one. This is one reason I think people are surprised that I am FTM. They ask why I'd transition if I like dating men and wearing girls' clothes. I tell them I transitioned because neither of those traits makes you a girl. Bio gay guys do these things all the time, but nobody assumes they must really be women inside. But somehow... I don't know...my being FTM and a feminine gay boy seems to confuse people.

The fact that many of my participants expressed an interest in non-traditional forms of masculinity – or in ignoring conceptions of masculine performance altogether – may be partially related to their age. In his study about the identities of those on the

transmasculine spectrum, Hansbury (2005) argues that the majority of those who identified as “genderqueer” are notably younger than those who do not. Hansbury created a scale of transmasculine identities, ranging from those who are strongly identify with binary notions of maleness to those who are less-binary identified. For Hansbury, genderqueer FTMs adhere less to binary ideas of masculinity and often adopt a constructionist view of gender. It must be noted that the gender-fluid participants in my study did differ in identity from the way “genderqueer” is conceived of in Hansbury’s work. While Hansbury’s genderqueer population is composed mostly of those who do not fully identify as male, who do not wish to medically transition and who are often part of the lesbian community, my gender-fluid participants *were* typically male-identified to some degree, *did* generally value physical transition, and were *not* functioning in primarily lesbian circles. That said, while not all of my gender-fluid respondents fit Hansbury’s notion of “genderqueer”, they were interested in toying with gender and challenging traditional ideas of what it means to be a man.

The men I interviewed also reflected a very similar demographic to that identified by Hansbury in other ways. In contrast to Hansbury’s notion of more binary-identified FTMs who tend be older, have limited education, and come from working-class backgrounds, those he described as genderqueer are typically in their late teens or 20s, white, educated, and from middle or upper-middle class origins. Hansbury attributes this demographic split to the fact that society has recently become more accepting of transgender issues, to the internet’s ability to provide young FTMs a venue in which to

connect, and to “youth’s love of joyful anarchy and maturity’s more conservative desire for stability” (246). Moreover, he speculates that these demographic differences may indicate that a relative amount of “privilege is necessary before one can choose to step into the margins” (246).

While not all classified themselves as official activists, the majority of my respondents were interested not only in rejecting traditional norms of gender but also of sexuality. For instance, they frequently adopted sexuality labels such as “queer” or “pansexual” – meaning that they recognize more than the two genders they feel the term “bisexual” implies – and gender identities such as “fruity male” and “FTM” instead of “man” or “male.” In addition, Mack, Kevin, and Moe, and Kolby expressed frustration over fellow trans men who pressured them to be less feminine, to identify as fully male, or to transition faster. Moe questioned what he considered to be the constructed, heteronormative nature of tops and bottoms, or those who penetrate and receive penetration during intercourse, and was particularly interested in activism. Blake, who enjoyed performing in female Kimonos at Radical Faerie gatherings, also involved himself in more public demonstrations of protest. According to Hennen, Radical Faeries are a group of gay men interesting in publically transgressing gender norms through enacting various forms of feminine behavior (2008). At the time of the interview, Blake had recently appeared in a metropolitan gay pride march wearing what he described as a “fairy princess dress”:

I marched with the pink and black block...they’re sort of the radical homosexual agenda --lots of them are in it -- but they seem to be like anarcho-queers. Far

radical left wing. And the one we did last year was a real radical queer march...and we didn't have a place in the march, we just jumped in! And we had a huge coffin that said 'queer' down it and were just kind of mourning the loss of the radicalness in the gay movement here...and there am in my bright pink fairy dress and high heel boots...lots of pink puffs and sparkles!

Moreover, over half of my sample chose to identify as something other than the more traditional labels of gay or bisexual. With regard to sexual orientation in particular, four identified as queer, three identified as pansexual, one identified as "bicurious," and one chose to identify as an "opportunistic slut." Most also took on alternative forms of gender identity titles. Instead of identifying as men, seven included a transgender identification in their gender label, six included "genderqueer," two included "androgynous" and one preferred the term "fruity male." Blake, for instance, explained that he chooses to identify as queer and transgender because he has "specific disagreements" with the binary structure of traditional gender and sexuality options. He was active in challenging social hierarchies he felt oppressive or problematic through his expression of his gender and sexuality. He objected to the idea that there are only two genders as well as to what he considered to be a "heterosexual" way of defining sexuality. Larson, another participant who opted to identify as queer, explained that queer is "more fluid" than bisexual because bisexual often indicates to others only that he is equally into non-trans men and non-trans women when that is not the case. For him, queer allows more flexibility in attraction.

Kolby and Billy were two other examples of those who adopted labels they felt allowed for the most range of desire. Both shared that they identified in such a way that

the gender and genitals of their partners were of little importance. In particular, Kolby explained about his queer identity that “it’s not necessarily a normal identity and I don’t...like to constrict myself with labels, but I am open to anyone...I do not restrict my interest to people based on the biological...or on gender identity.”

As evidenced from the quotes above, many of the men in my sample chose to identify with queer as opposed to more conventional labels such as gay or bisexual. My participants’ experiences with the term queer seem to be in alignment with most scholarship on queer identity. In particular, Johnson explains that “queer...opens up identity categories and give[s] voice to those who feel marginalized by identity politics” (2007:120) while Warner (1999) writes that queer “opposes society itself...not just the normal behavior of the social but the idea of normal behavior” actually existing in the first place (27).

It is possible that the desire of my respondents to express femininity could also arise from a need to challenge what they see as problematic gender and sexuality systems. A number of theorists have argued that gender-blending, camp culture has traditionally served as a form of gay unity in times of hardship and oppression (Goodwin 1989; White 1994). Similarly, Kleinberg (1989) noted that “effeminacy acknowledged the rage of being oppressed in defiance” while machismo in the gay male community “denies that there is rage and oppression...telling the enemy one is as good as he is because one is like him does not appease him; often it makes him more vicious and furious because somehow his victim seems to approve his scorn” (109-110).

Moreover, Halberstram (1998) holds that creating alternative forms of masculinity may serve to untie the relationship between being male and having masculinity by subverting masculinity in its dominant form. If this is true, my participants' non-traditional male performances may help provide a space for them to exist. By challenging the common relationship between being a man and behaving "like a man," they may also be challenging the seemingly implicit connection between being a man and having a male body.

Interestingly, many researchers argue that transgender people fail to challenge a binary, hierarchical gender system (e.g. Elkins and King 1996; Gauthier and Chadioir 2004; Jeffreys 2003; Kessler 1998). For instance, in their work on the way transgender men use the internet to find community support, Gauthier and Chadioir (2004) contend that "transsexuals themselves do not question the fundamental tiers of [the prevailing gender classification system], but rather only whether they will be allowed to construct gender mobility within it" (394). Along the same lines, scholars insist that transgender people tend to construct highly exaggerated gender performances (e.g. Kimmel 2000; Shapiro 1991) or adhere to more conservative gender norms than their non-transgender counterparts (Kando 1973). In contrast to such claims, the men in my sample appeared to neither perform caricatures of manhood nor passively accept the current gender system without a second thought.

My findings *are*, however, in alignment with other work, which found that FTM respondents were dedicated to engineering "ways of being male that did not offend

women” (Johnson 2007:116). Johnson’s participants were able to acknowledge oppressive, patriarchal gender structures and find a way to be men who were not problematic for women. That is, they wanted to be “a different kind of guy” (116). The men in my study seemed disinterested in attempting to assimilate into dominant masculinity.

Verbal Assertions and Emphasizing Maleness: We’re Not Straight!

Previous literature has revealed that there are many ways trans people make sense of their sexual relationships in the past and in the present. Straight transgender men in one study reported having sex with straight men pre-transition to gain acceptance, avoid stigma, sexually experiment, or maintain a male buddy relationship (Devor 1994).

Schrock and Reid (2006) reported that male-to-female participants in their study portrayed their past identification as gay men as mistaken. In other words, they “straightened out gay sex” in order to maintain a consistent identity as women, relying on sexual scripts in which women are submissive and men dominant. What is interesting about my findings is that the men I talked to never claimed to have mislabeled themselves as straight women nor did they have the need to justify their experiences with men.

Unlike the straight trans women in the Schrock and Reid study who lived as gay men prior to transition, there was little stigma attached to my participants having sex with men while female-bodied. Likewise, while Devor’s straight FTMs were careful to explain the non-sexual reasons they had engaged in sex with men prior to transition, the men in my research likely had less desire to justify such experiences for they are actually attracted to

men. One participant, however, did the reverse of the straight trans men in Devor's study by explaining that he had tried to date women for a while pre-transition but never felt satisfied by it – it felt like a joke to him and he could not become aroused.

Unlike Schrock and Reid's (2006) participants, the primary problem my participants had with the perception of relationships was a result of *others'* misunderstandings, not their own. If straight trans women in the Schrock and Reid study mislabeled themselves as gay men, the queer trans men in my sample were mislabeled *by others* as straight women.

For instance, Billy shared his experience in a local BDSM group in which he was involved:

Billy: If I'm in an alternative kind of group where most people are generally open-minded and fluid about gender and sexual orientation and things like that, most people don't care. If I'm in more straight groups, then most men will perceive me as female. And I think that they do that in order to justify their own bi-curious tendencies.

Interviewer: How do you know they perceive you as female?

Billy: Because they come out and say that to me.

Interviewer: What do they say?

Billy: As long as you have a vagina, then I am straight.

Billy's comments indicate that he believes others tend to define his sexuality – as well as his gender – around that status of his sexual organs. This reflects both the popular misconception that gender and sex are synonymous as well as the ways in which gender identity and sexual orientation are so frequently conflated. Because Billy has a vagina, he must be a woman. Further, because he has a vagina and has sex with men, both he and his male partners must be engaged in heterosexual sex.

Kevin, Mack, and Lyle's experiences parallel Billy's. Each felt as if their genders and sexualities were misunderstood. Both Kevin and Mack were constantly faced with the assumption that their liking men somehow made them straight while Lyle was frustrated over the fact that his own boyfriend failed to treat him like a queer man. In telling me about a recent breakup with his long-term male partner, he explained that he recently realized his partner never really understood his identity as not only a man, but a *gay* man specifically:

He [ex-partner] said to me, like, 'I always treated you like a man.' And I'm like, 'yes, I know that, I appreciate that,' but the problem was he was treating me like one of his dumb hetero poker buddies that lives out on [suburban city], he wasn't treating me like a *gay man*. But he would say to me, like, 'I treat you like a man, but you react like a girl.' And that's not an accurate statement because he treats me like a man and I react like a *gay man*, you know, and he said he felt I needed to toughen up and it's like, you wouldn't say that to, like, a gay guy or whatever...that you need to toughen up...but he's just...he's not aware of a spectrum of masculinity and that's fine...it's just another thing...it's one thing how I identify, but it's how other people you know, like, see me...you know, like, he was seeing me, but only through his own sifter.

Lyle's encounter with his ex-partner reflects the ways in which the intersection of gender, sex, and sexuality in the lives of queer trans men can be misunderstood, even by those closest to him. While Lyle expressed frustration over this, he was eventually able to explain that he did not feel his reactions were that of a straight woman, but of a gay man. Neither his femininity nor his sensitivity made him a woman; they just made him another kind of man. Additionally, it was not enough for Lyle to simply see himself as a gay man. He found it difficult to view himself in a way that was different from the way he knew others saw him. Much of Cooley's sociological theory sought to explain the

way the self is constructed in relation to others. For Cooley (1964), part of the way one sees himself is through the way he imagines that others must see him. That is, identity is developed through a process of viewing oneself through the eyes of those around them. In this way, Lyle struggled with the fact that he felt his partner did not view him as a gay man, making it challenging to maintain an identity as such.

That many of my respondents were forced to constantly correct perceptions that they were straight women as opposed to queer men may be a result of a society that both strongly correlates gender to sex, conflates gender identity and sexual orientation, and grants stronger authority to the physical body than the choice of personal self-identification. Even academic scholarship often resorts to attributing more significance to respondents' physical sex over their actual identities (e.g. Chivers and Bailey 2000; Dickey and Stevens 1995) by misusing pronouns and referring to queer FTMs as heterosexuals. Shleifer (2006) also makes note of the academic tendency to consider the body more important than identity. In his own study of gay trans men, he writes that "in other sexological studies, gay FTMs are classified as heterosexual because the authors view them as biological females who erotically desire biological males...this approach excessively privileges the materiality of the body over the discursive and international strategies that individuals use to negotiate their bodies, selves and desires" (60).

Emphasizing Maleness

Another way men in the sample engaged in constructions and assertions of personal identities was through emphasizing maleness, queerness, and belonging. Some

participants stressed the fact that they were men when disclosing their transgender status to others. For instance, Mack explained the simple, straight-forward approach he takes with partners: I just hope that they know I'm a guy and if they don't, I'm like 'hey, I'm a guy' and if they really wanna know, 'I'm trans.' In this way, Mack allows his transgender status to take a backseat to his status as a "regular" guy. His being transgender is presented as secondary, a characteristic that casually describes not *what* he is, but what kind of *guy* he is. For Mack, being transgender was fairly inconsequential to his identity as a man, and he presented his trans status in this light.

Brian, Nick, and Kolby also focused on their manhood when coming out to those they would like to date. For instance, Brian and Nick said that they try to emphasize the fact that they are male, despite their bodies, while Kolby varies how he frames his disclosures based upon what he thinks the person will most accept. While Kolby did think disclosure was important when meeting potential dates, he also felt his phrasing of the disclosure was important. For this reason, he engaged in a process of "reading" men – or gauging how they might respond – then tailoring methods of disclosure unique for each individual. Similar in all of Kolby's approaches, however, was the insistence the he is male.

Cory explained his status in a similar way, explaining that he is a "boy with a different kind of body." In disclosing to partners, Cory tended to stress the fact that "boys come in all kinds of bodies" and that having been born female didn't "make [him] any less of a boy, just a different kind of one." For Cory, stressing the fact that he is

indeed a man was fundamental in coming out. He was not particularly interested in framing his situation as a man trapped in a woman's body, a common transsexual narrative (Meyerowitz 2002), but as simply having another type of man's body. In this way, having a vagina, for instance, was just a different way to be a guy.

For all of these respondents, the physical composition of their bodies took was secondary to their identifications as men and boys. In disclosing to potential partners, these participants emphasized the fact that they are men – or boys – while downplaying the state of their bodies or their gender and sex assignments at birth. Just as they reframed their bodies, they also strategically framed their disclosures. In doing so, they relied on verbal assertions of personal identity like those conceptualized by Snow and Anderson (1987). The men in my sample were forced to constantly assert that they are indeed queer men. Interestingly, Mack, the man who combats constant assumptions that he's a straight woman, also confronts the assumption of interested women that he is a lesbian. To the lesbians who misperceive him as one then want to date him, he says, “‘Ma’m, I’m not a girl. I’m sorry.’ [laughs] ‘I like guys. And I am one.’” Mack must remind people constantly that he is not a straight woman, nor is he a gay one. Mack must, in fact, clarify that he is not a woman at all – and that, while he's gay, he isn't a lesbian. He must repeatedly state that he is actually a gay man.

Reframing the Body

Another way men in my sample were able to use verbal constructions to affirm their identities as men was by reframing their bodies in a way that made them more

comfortable. In his work on frame analysis, Goffman writes that “definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events...and our subjective involvement in them” (1974:10f). That is, we use frames to shape our current reality – both for ourselves and for others – as well as to direct how we respond to it. Gitlin elaborates by explaining that “frames are principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (1980:6). While Snow (2007) contends that frames serve three primary functions, only two are useful in this research: the way they can be used to emphasize what is important and what is not as well as the way they manage to tie together the most important aspects in order to create one specific picture instead of another.

Nick was one respondent who engaged in reframing his body in a more masculine manner. For instance, he preferred to think of his organs as similar to any other males. When asked how comfortable he was with using his vagina during sexual play, he responded that “the g-spot and prostate are the same thing to me.” Nick perceived his body to be just like any other male body – parts may have appeared in a non-traditional format, but they were fundamentally the same. Through physical transition, he had come to see himself as inhabiting an “intersex” state in which his body was both male and female to some degree. He added that this “works for [him].”

Billy, who happens to work in a medical field, says he understands the human body, but is still uncomfortable with certain parts of his own. That said, he indicated that

he had little problem using female terminology in formal situations in which it was probably appropriate: To some extent I am okay with people saying, well, ‘you have a vagina’if I go to my doctor, for example. Yeah, fine, whatever. I mean, I’ve studied biology, I understand these things, you know, I’m gender dysphoric, I’m not delusional. Billy did not have a problem with talking about his genitals in traditionally female language and did not feel this made him female. For him, having a vagina was a medical reality irrelevant to the fact that he was also a man. It is worth noting, however, that it is not only the transgender person who engages in the reframing of their body. Billy went on to explain that partners can play a role in bringing about bodily comfort during sexual activity by interacting with a trans man’s body in a way that reflects that he is being perceived as male. Larson also indicated that it is possible for partners to *interfere* with a trans person seeing their body in the way that makes them most comfortable. For instance, partners have treated his body in ways that led him to believe they did not really comprehend that they were with another man:

Larson: They were mostly really good guys...I just felt a little bit weird because they were still perceiving my body largely as female. Even though they knew I was trans...they didn’t recognize it...there are certain ways you orient to a body that really respects their gender...

Interviewer: Why did you think they were perceiving you as female?

Larson: Because of the words they used and the...behaviors...sexually...like I could tell...like there are ways you can relate to a trans body that doesn’t make them feel like they have a female anatomy. So...that wasn’t an issue of disrespect...it was more an issue of no previous experience...with a trans guy.

In this way, participants were able to frame their bodies as sufficiently male. By highlighting the ways in which their bodies were male, they downplayed the ways in

which they might be perceived as female. By stressing the fact that men's bodies come in many configurations, they created a space in which the validity of one's manhood did not depend upon genitals. In short, they were able to foster the idea that, despite their bodies, they were indeed men.

Methodological Dating

I use the term “methodological dating” to describe this section because my participants were very strategic in the way they pursued relationships with other men. That is, they actively developed methods of informing potential partners of their trans statuses, paying a great deal of attention to disclosing early as well as educating partners after the disclosure.

I had anticipated some traditional stigma management techniques (Goffman 1963) to be present in my sample, but this was not the case. In particular, I had suspected my participants might express a degree of concern with “passing” (73) and “covering” (102). Much of the previous literature on identity work focuses on marginalized groups (e.g. Jarvinen 2001; Nack 2000; Rochelle and Kaufman 2004). For instance, Rochelle and Kaufman explored the way homeless youth both attempted to pass as non-homeless as well as downplayed the tension caused by the stigma once it was disclosed. In this way, it was easy to hypothesize that trans men might seek to “pass” as non-transgender men as much as possible in their interactions with potential partners to avoid having their performances as queer men interrupted.

While some of the men I talked with had initially engaged (or *attempted* to engage) in interactions with partners without disclosing early on during transition, they generally decided to stop doing this as it became frustrating and partners often reacted poorly. By the time of interviews, my respondents no longer attempted to “pass” or “cover.” To avoid any potential problems, they learned to be out about their trans statuses in all interactions. They took control of the situation, deciding when to disclose and how to frame their disclosures to garner the most success. It could be argued that minimizing the potential for rejection helped these participants minimize challenges to their identities as queer men. Because gender and sex are so tightly correlated in Western societies, it is possible that any rejection on the basis of physical composition may threaten a transgender person’s sense of authenticity in the gender with which they identify and choose to present. Those in my sample, however, did not escape challenges to the legitimacy of their identities when attempting to operate within gay men’s communities. Two of the primary problems they encountered are explored below.

Problems Operating Within Gay Male Communities

All of the participants complained of problems with acceptance by the gay male community. This is in accordance with other studies which show that queer trans men do face challenges in the dating arena (e.g. Blanchard 1985; Devor 1994; Schleifer 2006). The majority of my respondents reported some level of difficulty in their interactions with prospective gay male partners in particular. They experienced this difficulty in two primary ways: through a rejection of their non-traditional bodies and

through the identity crisis their bodies posed to many of the gay men who did have sex with them. For instance, my participants frequently reported that some gay men had expressed a lack of interest in sexually interacting with their non-traditional bodies and that many of those who *were* willing to be sexually intimate expressed confusion over what sex with a trans man would mean about their own identity.

A few men expressed a concern that they might face rejection from gay male partners, although they never actually had. For instance, Moe and Matthew both were concerned about the fact that they did not have a traditional male penis. While Matthew found partnership with a man who incidentally turned out to be trans himself and, therefore, happened to understand his situation, Moe had avoided pursuing gay men for this very reason.

Most of the men interviewed indicated that they had already experienced rejection from gay male partners to at least some degree. Kolby, for instance, described one gay male date who realized he was FTM while kissing, then got up and walked away. Similarly, Dwayne explained that when disclosing to potential partners on the internet, he is often outright rejected or simply never hears from them again. He went on to speculate, “[They are] just so phallo-centric maybe. Really just looking for a dick.” Billy shared these sentiments, explaining that, “As far as gay men go, I get along great with them to some extent, but they can never date me or be intimate with me...because the idea of a vagina just creeps them out. I can’t change that.”

Owen also had trouble with a gay male boss “warning” other gay men of his transgender status. Owen explained that his boss seemed shocked how many gay men Owen “had a good time with” and was perhaps “jealous” that men that he might find attractive himself would be willing to date a trans man. Lyle had similar difficulties in the gay male communities. Although he was 45 – older than most of the gay men he associated with – he felt like everybody treated him “like a little brother” instead of “dating material.” Like other participants, Lyle recounted one particular instance in which a gay man suddenly lost interest in him after learning that he was transgender. This led him to increasing frustration over the state of his non-traditional body. He went on to explain that he felt little sympathy for non-trans people with sexual or romantic troubles. Lyle was aware that others had legitimate relationship problems, but consistent rejections had begun to make him wonder whether it was more challenging to have a body and gender that is often read by others as incongruent.

The second problem my participants seemed to experience with gay male partners was the conflict that being with an FTM – or the prospect of being with one -- appeared to pose to the identities of gay male partners. Kolby said: I’ve noticed...a lot of gay men won’t really have a problem with the physical thing, but they feel like...or, well, I have noticed maybe that some of them feel like it’s kind of a challenge to their identity...that it makes them not gay anymore.

Billy expressed the same concern when he said that partners “get into that whole ‘what does that make me?’ thing.” Specifically, he said that partners will

express an interest in him only to later question what being in a relationship would mean about their own sexual identity.

Several respondents expressed irritation over the degree to which they felt partners worried about being intimate with an FTM. Kolby said that “someone else’s identity doesn’t influence yours...I think about that problem a lot...like, someone else’s identity somehow effects [a gay man’s] identity and that is threatening.” Dwayne felt similarly, saying that he wished people would “quit worrying about how it affects [them].” When asked if he thought gay men worried about being with him because he is transgender, Dwayne said:

Yes, because a lot of the...a lot of the lesbians think we all betrayed them...’cause I know a lot of them think that and it has nothing to do with that. And, you know, then a lot of gay men are like, well, you’re not one of us. And it’s like, umm, yeah You know, they just get too worried about how it affects them when it doesn’t. It doesn’t at all.

Dwayne felt not only that trans men were sometimes rejected for their non-traditional male bodies, but also sometimes excluded from being part of the gay male community at all. Matthew echoed the same sentiment, stating that “it feels as if the bio-men think we [transmen] are intruders or outsiders or something.” For both Dwayne and Matthew, being trans meant that they often felt as if they were on the sidelines of many of the communities in which they knew they actually belonged.

My findings here are in alignment with other research which has shown both that the prospect of being with an FTM can pose an identity crisis in some gay men (Schleifer 2006) and that some gay men are uninterested in FTMs who lack a traditional

male penis (Devor 1994) Because sexual organs are often fundamental in “sexual imagination and identity” (Weeks 1989:77), some gay men expressed an unwillingness to date FTMs and the men in my sample appeared constantly aware of it. Regardless of how my participants responded to rejection – or the threat of potential rejection – they all developed techniques to attempt to prevent it from happening. In general, they focused on finding men who would enjoy their bodies rather than reject them and affirm their identities rather than question their validity.

Techniques for Affirmation

Many of my findings are in line with Goffman’s theories on the presentation of self (1959). For instance, Goffman argues that events in a given situation constantly threaten to contradict or discredit the presentation an actor is attempting to project. He writes that “when these disruptive events occur, the interaction itself may come to a confused, embarrassed halt” (12). This disruption can lead the actor whose presentation has been discredited to feel ashamed while it may lead those watching the presentation to feel anger or hostility. Goffman further contends that in social situations, an individual is expected to live up to the presentation he has given – that is, he is expected to be who he portrays himself to be. In order to avoid awkward challenges to a presentation, a social actor may engage in a variety of “defensive practices” (13) in which he is able to “safeguard the impression fostered...during his presence before others” (14).

When faced with rejection for being trans, some respondents were able to devise an array of techniques that both enabled them to have more success in dating queer men

as well and maintain strong, stable senses of themselves as men. This is important because such a rejection can function as an implicit challenge to the legitimacy of a trans man's claims as a queer men. In other words, being dismissed as a potential partner can effectively say either "you are not one of us" or "you are not really a man." The trans men in my study utilized a number of strategies to prevent situations that might prove awkward or result in rejection. These strategies included educating potential partners and disclosing one's trans status early in a relationship.

Educating Partners

Many of my respondents expressed that they had grown tired of educating in general or seemed frustrated that others frequently relied on them to play the expert. For instance, Billy explained that he had inadvertently become a trans spokesman for his university's GLBT group. He was the only trans person involved in the group, so when the group campaigned to implement a transgender-inclusive non-discrimination policy on campus, he was quickly "volunteered" as "the poster child" for the movement. Similarly, Dwayne was tired of feeling like the sole transgender voice in social movements. He said, "I don't want to be a poster...I didn't want to be a poster for anything. You know, I was very active politically pre-transition, so I felt like I already gave. And now I could just live. You know?"

The experiences of trans men like these may be common among those who suffer some form of marginalization. In their study on workplaces that were purported to be gay friendly, but in actuality were not, Giuffre and others (2008) demonstrated the ways

in which sexual minorities are often forced to act as role models for the minority group they represent. This requires not only providing a face for that group, but making certain that face is a good one.

Because my participants were frequently the only transgender men others had met, they were also expected to answer a variety of personal questions about their bodies, lives, and sexual preferences. Most were turned off by questions they considered to be bizarre or invasive and directed at them solely because of their transgender status. Billy once fielded a question about whether he'd had a penis created from an amputated finger while Kolby was sometimes faced with accusatory questions about whether he was "really a girl." Billy, a professional in the medical field, explained that it was scientifically impossible to use a finger to construct a penis while Kolby generally ignored such questions. For Kolby, such questions simply did not deserve a response. He admitted, however, that he discloses himself as transgender if inquiries come from those who are "respectful" in approaching him. Dwayne was another participant forced to contend with personal questions about his anatomy:

Dwayne: ...at the time I was transitioning, I worked in an office, and that didn't go well. People were all like, oh my god, look! And they got all stupid. And, um, people ask you kind of invasive questions.

Interviewer: Like what?

Dwayne: They ask you about your body. Like, I don't walk up to people and ask them about their body. People always assume they can ask and I don't even know where that comes from.

Interviewer: Just because you're trans?

Dwayne: Yeah. Yeah, it happens a lot. I don't get it – I mean, I'm not asking about their penis. Well, sometimes I am. But that's different! [laugh]

Dwayne felt as if people assumed that, when it came to trans people, no questions were off limit. He was particularly frustrated with the fact that he felt non-trans people would respond to similar questions with offense or hostility, yet these same people did not hesitate to accuse trans people of over sensitivity when they failed to respond to such questions positively.

Blake and Lyle also reported that people were quick to ask him things he felt they would not ask of non-trans people they meet. While he admits that it can seem encouraging that people are so interested, he felt it to be unacceptable early in a relationship. For Blake, others were quick to ask questions that were “inappropriate” soon after meeting, but perhaps acceptable later on while Lyle felt as if invasive questions were almost always problematic because of what they so often imply. To Lyle, invasive questions such as those about his body, serve only to “put you in this box or that.” He felt that he was frequently asked questions about his body so that others could determine whether he was “really a man yet” – something that, according to Lyle, people mistakenly assumed was dependent upon genital surgery status.

That my transgender participants were frequently asked questions they felt to be invasive is supported by other sociological research (Conley et al. 2001; Giuffre et. al 2008; Pusch 2005). Giuffre and others (2008) found that, in addition to being forced to serve as minority role models, their gay and lesbian respondents were also forced to field inappropriate questions about their sexuality. Likewise, the men I interviewed seemed willing to answer such questions, despite their perceived inappropriateness. It is worth

noting, however, that some research indicates such questions are not always asked with malice. In fact, it is possible that these questions are asked in a genuine effort to convey interest or develop understanding (Conley et al. 2001; Pusch 2005).

While most of my sample had experienced some level of irritation with certain questions – or questions framed a particular way – many still took control of how they were perceived by educating those they met. Kolby said that, while he doesn't always feel accepted by the gay male community, he does feel accepted by his gay male friends. After jokingly attributing this to his ability to pick "good men" as friends, he acknowledged that he makes an "effort to educate them." When asked if his gay male friends were initially accepting of and knowledgeable about transgender people, he explained:

Kolby: A lot of my friends knew at least a little bit...or I mean some of them knew stuff or it wasn't really right and I had to re-educate them [laugh].

Interviewer: What kind of misconception did they have?

Kolby: A lot of people auto assume what you're going to do surgery-wise...like 'cause I told you, I'm not sure about everything I want to do physically so a lot of people assume 'oh, you're gonna do this and this and that and that, then you'll be a guy' and I'm, like, 'no, that's not how it works.'

Kolby's comment about common misconceptions as to the way transition actually works is similar to Lyle's assertion that people are quick to ask about surgery status so that they can decide for themselves the authenticity of the trans person's sex. Through education, both are able to correct these misunderstandings. While he does not necessarily respond to the invasive question about the state of his genitals, Lyle does

take effort to explain to the inquisitive that genital surgery is largely irrelevant in one's status as a man or woman.

Owen also finds himself having to teach others about issues important to him. While Kolby finds himself educating gay male friends about being transgender in general, Owen often teaches partners what exactly he likes and doesn't like about his body – including how he prefers it to be referred to – during sex. He explained that letting partners know what he is comfortable with helps create a better environment for all parties during sexual play, indicating that he did not want his body to be a “minefield for anybody but himself.” He felt that if he could educate partners about what he liked beforehand, he could avoid as much as possible many instances of awkwardness, dissatisfaction, and gender dysphoria.

Others claimed that education was fundamental to creating and sustaining a satisfying long-term relationship. Brian jokingly advised younger queer trans men that non-trans gay male partners are “not all bad.” He did, however, express the need of queer trans men to work harder than most at achieving harmonious relationships and acknowledged that constant education can be exhausting, explaining, “I think it can be tiresome. And sometimes it can seem like it's not...changing anything for lots of people, but if you're really wanting to make, like, long-term relationship work, it's totally worth it.”

While respondents like Brian did report that constant education was frustrating, they also felt it was generally necessary. In this way, the data suggest that part of

creating successful presentations as queer men depends on the willingness, ability, and interest of queer trans men to educate those who know about their transgender status. Goffman (1959) contends that “when an individual plays a part, he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them...they are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess” (17). In the case of queer trans men, it may be necessary to educate those who know the status of their assigned sex what being transgender actually means. For instance, if a potential partner knows nothing about transsexuality and assumes his date is male-bodied, he may react negatively to when he inadvertently discovers otherwise. This discovery may lead the partner to feel anger or hostility and may produce an “embarrassed halt” (12) in which the performance is interrupted because the trans man’s presentation has seemingly been discredited. Trans men prevent these disruptions by educating partners about who they are. By successfully teaching partners that they are indeed queer men – despite their physical configurations – they maintain their performances because their manhood is not questioned; instead, their manhood is *explained*.

Being Up-Front

Other techniques to prevent interruptions to their identities as queer men involved strategic disclosing to prospective partners. Through this method, participants were selective about when they disclosed and were careful about how they framed their situations. Most respondents engaged in this strategy in one way or another. Matthew,

for instance, has always been up-front with partners. In fact, his current partner has “known from the start that [he’s] trans.” He indicated that while he has told some people only to have them “pull away,” most do not. He felt that “being up-front is best if you’re planning on anything intimate.”

Blake has also thought a lot about when and how to disclose to friends as well as potential partners. He had experimented with disclosing a number of ways, but recently decided to try developing a friendship first. For Blake, developing platonic friendships with people to whom he is able to disclose before the relationship turns romantic allowed him to eliminate from his dating pool men who demonstrated that they were not receptive to the prospect of being intimate with a trans man.

Dwayne, who frequently found dates on the internet, was also adamant about letting people know early on in a relationship or encounter. In explaining how he typically discloses, he said: I just come right out and tell them. Because I don’t want the hassle. If they’re totally closed off to that, then why bother? I just don’t want the hassle. If you really aren’t open to that, let’s figure it out in the email. I’d rather just be up-front. Know ahead of time I guess? Dwayne felt that, by discarding men who were uninterested in sexual play with a trans man, he saved not only time, but energy. He would not spend days corresponding with someone who would fail to show up to an in-person meeting nor would he invest himself in a relationship that would not move ahead. In this way, he minimized the degree of rejection he might feel if the person decided they were not attracted to him.

Mack, who explained to confused strangers that he was a guy in a simple, straight-forward manner, was also quick to inform potential partners of his transgender status. Despite also saying that he felt his previous gay boyfriend preferred “a real penis” to his own genitals, he did not appear overly bothered by any lack of interest on the part of someone else. When explaining how he typically discloses to potential partners, he said, “I would just be like “hey, I’m trans, is that okay? If it’s not, I don’t want to date you.”

Moe also wanted partners to know from the start of a relationships, expressing a desire to date men who were already familiar with him and his transgender situation: I think that [potential partner] would have to be someone who knew me already in some capacity. I’m pretty active in the LGBT community and I would rather the somebody know from the beginning. Owen, Matthew and Kevin also preferred partners to know their status early in an interaction and talked specifically about the role of confidence in disclosure – both the need for confidence when disclosing as well as the confidence that disclosure itself can bring. Owen explained his typical approach at disclosure below:

I just go into it rather confidently...knowing, you know, I am not looking for their approval...and it kinda needs to be in a playful, flirtatious way. Not in a – it can’t be scary, it can never be scary. You need to be a little smart about how you do it. Confident, you know. ‘You want it, take it or leave it.’ You know, that type of...just as an example, I’ll often do a playful, you know, ‘well, I’m a big bottom with an extra hole to prove it.’ Fun...disarming, you know.

Owen not only approached his disclosures with confidence, but used his trans status to lighten the situation and put potential partners at ease. Like Owen, Lyle felt that both confidence and positive framing was important when telling potential partners:

Yeah it's kind of...I think pretty much the same way, but I think the key to it is confidence. It's like...I know I have a lot to offer and I got so sick to death of sitting in support groups with all these guys complaining about how they didn't have a dick. I mean, that's so annoying to me. I mean, instead of making the whole picture about what you don't have, it's like, I make the whole picture about, like, I have so much to offer. I might not have this one thing to offer, but I have like a whole bunch of things to offer, you know, and I think that is true with my life in general.

For Lyle, one must not only exhibit confidence in disclosure – he must do so by engineering the disclosure to minimize his lack of a traditional male penis while highlighting what he does not lack. Matthew also seemed to feel that confidence was more likely to produce a preferable response, advising others to “be happy with yourself first. Self-confidence can go a long way with how others perceive you.”

While Owen, Lyle and Matthew felt disclosing confidently was important, Kevin felt that the process of disclosure could actually *lead* to increased confidence. His interaction with a man he had just met reflects why it might feel so important to my participants that they disclose before a sexual encounter – or relationship – goes too far. For instance, he had a less favorable experience in which a potential gay partner grabbed his pre-op chest and realized he was not physically male. The interaction ended, his performance interrupted. After taking some time off from the dating scene, he decided to return and take a new approach to disclosures by letting potential partners know soon after meeting them. Like others in the sample, Kevin learned through experience that it was better to come out as transgender before investing too much in relationship or sexual encounter. In this way, he was able to play a more active role in disclosure as opposed to

passively accepting that someone was about to find out on their own. By taking “control of the situation,” Kevin was able to feel more secure about such interactions.

In general, all of the men I spoke with preferred to disclose to partners early on. While some learned this only through trial and error – that is, after repeatedly having men find out before they had chosen to disclose – they all arrived at the conclusion that sooner was better than later. A word of advice from Kolby nicely sums up what appears to be the consensus among those in this study. When asked whether he thinks some methods of disclosure work better than others, he answered, “Yeah, don’t surprise them!”

Like education, early disclosure minimizes – at least as much as possible – any interruption to my participants’ presentations as queer men. While rejection is still possible following disclosure, approaching the situation on one’s own before things get too serious allows the participant the opportunity to minimize any interruptions that might occur by taking control of the situation, coming out on their own terms, and ending early on a relationship that will not prove supportive of his identity.

Strategic Selection of Partners

In addition to disclosing early and then educating potential partners, some respondents also chose those partners selectively – that is, they were selective about the kinds of men they considered dating and created dating pools of men with whom they felt comfortable. It appears as if participants had learned to screen out men they felt

might be a poor match. Most of the men I interviewed were aware that they engaged in this process. According to Blake:

Blake: I filtered before we got to the making out part.

Interviewer: How did you filter?

Blake: By weeding them out, making all sorts of snap judgments by, like, their clothing and where they work and how they talk about themselves.

Interviewer: How can you tell? I mean, what's your system?

Blake: I tend to be more into the radical lefty sort, people who have interesting college experiences they can bring up pretty quickly, if they, I dunno...if I get a good energy off them...it's more of intuition than a check list.

Kolby also engages in a kind of filtering. Instead of just filtering out men he suspects will be less than receptive to having a trans man as a partner, however, he uses a similar process when choosing exactly how to disclose to particular people. Specifically, he decides how to frame his disclosure based on what they think the man will comprehend most easily. When asked how he gauges what kind of guy might understand more quickly and what kind of guy might take longer, he responded, "I dunno...it's like really small social cues and stuff and I guess like kind of if they know other trans people."

A number of those interviewed also expressed the need to find a partner with a specific role they felt would function well alongside their own. Moe was particularly interested in what are known as "tops" (referring to those who prefer to penetrate during intercourse) and "daddies" (older, paternal men he assumed would be tops) in the gay male communities. He hoped these men would care less about the fact that he did not have a traditional male penis. Blake, Owen, and Cory also had a strong preference for tops and seemed to believe that, as transgender men with non-traditional bodies,

receiving penetration – or, being “bottoms” – worked in their favor. In particular, Blake said:

If top men are interested in penetrating, then I’m going to be fine. I’ve got plenty of holes that are happy for that...if they want to be penetrated, I’m not so interested in penetrating generally...I can’t duplicate the experience of being penetrated by a [non-trans man]. So, you know, I’m a bottom – why would I date another bottom?

Blake seemed to think that he was well-suited to be a bottom, at least in some small part, because of his transgender status. Having additional places to use during penetration helped him in his interaction with tops. Like Blake, Owen was also interested in dating tops and disliked acting as a top himself. Owen not only identified as a bottom, but was aware that this identification was a fortunate one, given his non-traditional body:

Owen: I like hot tops because they’re fuckers, you know...and I like to be fucked and that’s an easier pairing than someone who’s just very cock worshipping then they’re not going to be into me...you know, that’s just how it’s going to be...so...yeah, I’m a bottom. I think it’d be rather difficult to be a top...and I’ve been requested to top...and that’s something I don’t like to do...that’s something that makes me uncomfortable...and if I had a cock -- I mean I’d love to have a cock, come on – but I think that’s when I start to get really gender dysphoric is with a strap on... and it starts making me feel like an imposter and I really don’t like that and so.. I do think that my top brothers would have a harder time...

Interviewer: Do you think [being a bottom] is a strategic thing?

Owen: I think maybe. Um, as you’re just developing your sexuality as a gay FTM that you’re figuring out who you’re attracted to in the gay male world anyway you know and you like being fucked, it’s kind of easyish in it’s own way ‘cause [tops are] not cock focused, you know.

Owen, much like Blake, felt he had something to offer tops that non-trans men did not. While he did not like topping and would “love to have a cock,” being a bottom appeared to work for him, allowing him to play a role in which his body not only posed little problem in sexual encounters, but was often seen as an added bonus. Cory

expressed a similar sentiment, saying “As a bottom, a dick would almost be wasted. As a bottom, my pussy is not.” During the interview, Cory was clear that he had no desire for a penis and would prefer to keep his current parts, even if genital surgery were affordable and aesthetically pleasing to him. He felt as if the sexed nature of his body suited his role as a bottom quite nicely, and he said that he would actually dislike having a penis or additional body hair.

A handful of respondents were also interested in dating “daddies” – older men who prefer to date men considerably younger than themselves. Most felt that they were perceived by men as significantly younger than their actual age. They generally attributed this to their having been born female. That is, they appeared young because they were often smaller, smoother and more youthful than had they had a traditional male puberty. They also enjoyed the security and support they found in partnering with daddies. Some even speculated that daddies were more likely to be tops.

Like several of my participants’ interests in tops, Moe’s interest in daddies also seemed to revolve around the configuration of his own body as well as whether he perceived such men to respond positively or negatively to that configuration. Moe had indicated that he was very *attracted* to daddies, but also felt they might be more accepting:

Umm, a [professional] and drag queen [who] owns [a local gay business], actually and...is for all intents and purposes married to a trans man. And he told me, ‘well, you need to find a top because they aren’t so penis-centered.’ And I was like, ‘well, daddies aren’t so penis-centered, so maybe...’ But I don’t know, I’m...it just seems unreal...I could never have that.

As illustrated by the quote, it is evident that Moe carefully considers the extent to which men will be accepting when choosing who to pursue. In this way, Moe was actively engaged in finding types of men he thought might be open to the idea of romantic or sexual interaction with a trans man.

Owen also expressed an interest in daddies, explaining that when he first began transitioning, he “looked like [he] was eleven” and actually had “pedophiles after [him].” He went on to explain that daddies have always been the kind of men who have “gotten [him] weak in the knees.” Blake was another who indicated a predilection for older men. When asked why he admitted that he had a “really intentional daddy thing” in which he sought out older men because he felt they would have more of a sense of themselves, be more stable, and provide more safety and comfort. He shared his thoughts on the role youthfulness plays in the lives of queer FTMs. In referring to very youthful-looking trans men, he said:

They tend to be men who are heavily involved in the twink scene because they already...especially when they are early in passing, the skinnier, taller ones blend very easily and present this image of boyish masculinity that is really sought after...so, if you already look like a 15 year old boy, go into a scene that’s focused on a hot muscle neighbor boy, it makes it very easy to get into that.

As reflected in Blake’s comment, it appears that youthful-appearing trans men manage to use that appearance to move more successfully within the gay male communities.

Like Owen and Blake, Nick also mentioned looking younger than his actual age and the role that played in the men he chooses to date. At twenty years old, he was happy to be mistaken as a teenage boy. When I asked him why, he said that he had a

“kink” for an “older men-younger men sorta thing.” He went on to say that he felt his attraction to daddies was partially related to his own transition in that they could teach him things about growing into a man, such as how to wear a tie or change a tire – coming-of-age lessons he felt he missed out on during his teen years as a female.

Daddies were also a good option for Cory, who also felt as if he looked significantly younger than his actual age:

I like that I look young. Sometimes I even worry about aging, but am thankful I will always look younger than I would had I not been born female. It is like the minute I began living as a boy – when I, admittedly, was still a teen -- older men were all over me. And I may have been eighteen, but I looked twelve. I have had some ask me where I go to high school even since I have entered into my twenties. I used to pretend that it bothered me, but really I liked it. Because there is a dynamic there with daddies and boys in the gay community that I think really works nicely for me. I know I play into it a lot, acting younger than I am when I’m around older men, I try to act like a young boy without acting unintelligent and I’m good at it – but, then again, I have noticed a lot of that among, you know, the under thirty trans guy community. It may work differently for straight trans guys or trans guys in the dyke community, I don’t know enough to say – I have never been in the dyke world – but in the gay world, it is totally a good thing.

Cory’s youthful appearance allowed him to enter into daddy-boy relationships quite easily. While it is impossible to say whether such participants would still prefer daddies and tops were they to have been born with traditionally male bodies, the fact remains that they appeared to use parts of their trans statuses to attract specific kinds of partners. In this way, they were able to downplay the aspects of their bodies they felt some gay men might not like while promoting – or, in Cory’s case, exaggerating – the aspects other gay men would.

In dating daddies and tops, these participants hoped they would limit the amount of rejection they were likely to receive due to being transgender. In dating tops, my participants were setting themselves up for sexual encounters that they felt relatively safe about pursuing. For them, tops were less likely to reject them on the basis of their lack of a traditional male penis. In fact, they often felt they had something to offer tops that non-transgender men did not: multiple ways of offering penetrative intercourse. Part of my participants' attraction to older men may be similar to their attraction to tops. It seems to them to work for their situations. In many ways, my respondents were able to take their situation and use it to their advantage.

Research supports the idea that bottoming may play a particularly important role in the lives of queer FTMs. That is, some studies have found not only that queer trans men are able to comfortably engage in penetrative sex with other gay men (Coleman and Bockting 1991; Coleman et al. 1993), but that gay bottoming as an FTM may provide a kind of validation that other sexual activities may not. For instance, Schleifer (2006) reported that gay FTMs in his study are actually able to use their non-transitioned bodies in a way that “reinforce[s] their masculinity and heighten[s] sexual pleasure” (71). Specifically, he concludes that “narrating a uniquely homosexual masculinity in which penetrability reinforces the sense that one is a man, gay FTMs can mitigate the femininity of their female sex characteristics more readily than heterosexual FTMs can” (71).

While some of the men preferred dating daddies and tops, some specifically sought out bisexual men as partners. Nick was one participant who acknowledged doing this, explaining that bisexual men are “going to be pretty much okay with it.” He went on to explain the difference between dating gay men and dating men who identify as bisexual: With gay men, what I perceive being the problem most often dating trans guys is they’re like ‘oh my god, a pussy, I don’t know what to do.’ But, bi guys have experienced that before, so they’re dealing with a guy who just has a little bit of a different setup...or whatever.

Cory and Kolby felt similarly. After attempting to operate in exclusively gay male circles as teen, Cory quickly began to feel that gay men were largely “intolerant” of trans men both as partners and as valid gay men. While he now operated as a “passing gay guy” in gay male circles, he had a strong preference for men who identifies as bisexual because he felt they were both more open as well as more familiar with what it is like to feel excluded from other gay and lesbian community. While many of my participants felt bisexual men to be more accepting than gay men, they sometimes worried about the fact that bisexual men were also attracted to women. In particular, Kolby elaborated:

Bi guys are better usually, like...they’re not as hung up on the physical part I guess and sometimes it can be a little...uhh...invalidating I guess in a way. I mean I like the idea that a person I like is going to be comfortable with me physically so, you know, that’s a good side, but then I’m always afraid that well they like girls too so maybe they see a girl.

Kolby concluded by saying that he felt that sexual partnerships with gay men were more validating than those with bisexual men, although those with bisexual men may be more easy to find. This parallels similar findings which have indicated that queer trans men are sometimes hesitant to date men who identify as bisexual. According to Schleifer (2006), FTMs may fear that bisexual men's attraction to women may mean bisexual partners actually perceive them as a woman in some way. For this reason, some queer FTMs may prefer to date men who only like other men. In dating a man who only likes other men, an FTM may feel as if the partnership necessarily recognizes his manhood.

While some respondents attempted to locate non-trans partners who fit a certain set of criteria, some also found satisfaction by partnering with other trans men. In general, partners who did this felt as if their partner would most definitely understand their status, respect them as a man, and be okay with dating a trans person. While Larson admitted to meeting one gay FTM who did not enjoy dating other FTMs because he preferred a traditional penis on a partner, Larson still found trans guys to be a great dating pool. In particular, he said that his transgender body bothers him if he's in a "meat market setting," but if he is around a lot of trans guys, he simply "feel[s] normal."

Billy was another respondent who liked dating other transgender men. While some participants acknowledged the benefits of dating other trans men, they also enjoyed dating non-trans men as well. Billy, however, had a strong preference for having trans men as partners. In fact, he considered other FTM partners as perfectly suited for his

tastes – he liked masculinity, but also enjoyed female bodies – as well as for his comfort level.

Others in the sample minimized threats to the presentations by creating potential dating circles of close friends they felt knew them – and their transgender status – fairly well. After facing rejection from a gay man who felt his breasts and realized he was transgender, for instance, Kevin temporarily left the dating scene. He was able to return to dating once he met a group of men he felt understood his situation: Well, I guess the way I overcame that is just...I met some really nice people that I got to know more on a friendship basis first off and that really helped. And it kind of got me back to a comfortable point where, you know, I was like, ‘I want to try this again.’

Moe was equally interested in dating men he was already friends with, explaining, “I just don’t feel like I’m going to date anybody until they know. They’re going to have to be my friend first. And woo me. Just...I’m not going to set myself up for [rejection].” In his comments, Moe acknowledged that his interest in dating friends was a “defensive practice” (Goffman 1959:12) to protect him from disruptions to his presentation as a queer man.

While participants were generally strategic about the individual men they tried to date, many also involved themselves with specific gay male subcultures in which to socialize and find prospective partners. Specifically, over half of my participants were heavily involved in alternative scenes – the leather, bear (defined below), radical faerie, BDSM, and pansexual scenes in particular – and many regularly moved between them.

Respondents generally indicated these scenes to be relatively accepting of trans men in a way they felt mainstream gay male scenes often were not.

For instance, Cory had recently become involved in the BDSM (an acronym that stands for bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) community through a boyfriend he was seeing. While he had no initial interest in engaging in BDSM activities, he felt welcomed by the people who did engage in them. He reported that he often spent time in such spaces because he found them tolerant and “socially progressive.” In particular, he said:

I just feel more at place, even though I’m really a novice at BDSM itself. The people are used to challenging themselves or, you know, at least being challenged by others, so they’re very self-aware and open and expect the same in others. I feel no problem coming out as trans in such circles whereas in other circles, I may be much less likely to be open about that if no sexual play is involved...I may not be open about it at all. BDSM groups just seem a lot more affirming...like everyone is okay with everyone else. Or, at least, that is how it seems to me so far – as someone who is still sort of an outsider.

Other men also found that people’s reactions to their disclosures vary by the social circle they are currently involved in. When asked how reactions vary by group, Billy explained:

If I’m in an alternative kind of group where most people are generally open-minded and fluid about gender...and sexual orientation...and things like that, most people don’t care...if I’m in more straight groups, then most men will perceive me as female. And I think that they do that in order to justify their own bi-curious tendencies.

Interestingly both Nick and Billy found that these alternative groups not only allowed them comfort in their identities, but comfort in their bodies as well. Both reported with relief that the ways in which they were able to appear naked at such parties.

Nick gave an example of one party in which a man was able to tell he was transgender after seeing his naked body, even though he was pre-op, the man recognized the fact that his face and “body pattern” were male, something he considered to be quite “nice.” For Nick, those in these spaces seemed to be both more knowledgeable about and accepting of trans people. That he relayed the story of the man who realized he identified as a guy while seeing him naked is indicative of this.

Billy had a very similar experience in alternative sexual communities. In the following dialogue, he describes his comfort with appearing nude and his feeling of acceptance in such communities more generally:

Billy: I go to fetish parties and stuff like that I can be both top or bottom usually the bottom requires some level of nakedness. And I have no problem with that...it took me a while...the first time I went I was like oh my god these people are going to freak out you know But, in getting to know that social circle and getting to really know them and the way they think, and seeing the level of acceptance of not just trans people, but of all kinds of people...like a lot of people who are body type acceptance and fat acceptance and age acceptance and stuff, I realize my body isn't that much different than anyone else...so if they can accept those kinds of things, they should be able to accept me too ...

Interviewer: Since you've been involved in the BDSM kind of community, has that been liberating to you at all to be round people who are accepting?

Billy: Yes. Because when I found groups like that I have kind of become more comfortable with my body to the fact that I could actually be naked in front of strangers which – not like strangers but a group of people I don't really know...strangers And it's kind of relieving to find people who have done their homework and have done research on transgender and transsexual...and know the diff between gender identity and sexual orientation. It's really relieving to not have to explain it.

While Nick and Billy were primarily involved in BDSM communities, others engaged in different queer subcultures. In particular, several men I talked with explained their involvement in the “bear” community – a group of heavily bearded men who can

often be seen wearing blue jeans and flannel shirts (Hennen 2005). According to Wright (1997), resistance is at the foundation of bear culture – that is, bears attempt to counter what they see the “self-conscious, exaggerated masculinity” of other gay men (26) while providing a space for men who are marginalized from those gay male communities.

According to Hennen, bears focus more on “camaraderie” than “competition” and reject the “body fascism” they see in mainstream gay male circles by welcoming hairier, heavy set men into their groups (2005:27). This may be one reason several of my respondents seem to have found some degree of acceptance from bear-identified men.

Owen and Blake were two of the participants involved in the bear scene. Both felt that those in this social group were more likely to embrace trans men than other gay male groups they considered to be more trendy and mainstream. When asked about his experience in the bear community, Blake said:

Interviewer: Do you think that the way trans men are seen in the leather and bear communities are seen differently than they are in the [trendy, mainstream gay male neighborhood] scene at all?

Blake: Yes.

Interviewer: In what way?

Blake: I think that gay men who are further out...or who are further marginalized from mainstream whatever...seem more open-minded to other people who are marginalized...and among the bear people who already have a rejection of normative male gays who are looking for a body type...so it becomes more about spirit...and it becomes more a conversation about spirituality with sex...at least about energy exchange...

Interviewer: Do you know many trans men who are in more mainstream scenes?

Blake: I know a small handful and they tend to be men who are heavily involved in the twink scene because they already...especially when they are early in passing, the skinnier taller ones blend very easily and present this image of boyish masculinity that is really sought after...so, if you already look like a 15 year old boy, go into a scene that's focused on a hot muscle neighbor boy, it

makes it very easy to get into that...but I think that it has to do with an external body type...and I know a handful but a very small handful. Because I don't hang out there.

What is particularly notable about Blake's last comment is the possibility that even the men he identified as operating primarily in the "trendy", mainstream scene may choose to do so because of the look being transgender provides them. The approach of young-looking trans men who reside in the mainstream gay circles identified by Blake and Owen appears similar to the approach of participants like Nick who were happy to appear young because of their preference for older men or those like Blake and Owen who were fortunate to identify as bottoms and, because of being transgender, felt they had something extra to offer in that arena.

The fact that half of the men I interviewed were heavily involved in subcultures they found to be accepting of trans men and nearly all of the remaining participants had engineered ways of identifying typed of men they expected to be the most welcoming – whether daddies, tops, bisexuals, or other FTMs – is supported and explained by other research. For instance, Snow and Anderson's (1987) homeless sample engaged in selective association with other individuals or groups. They associated with those who affirmed the identities they wished to project and disassociated from those who posed a threat to those identities.

Along similar lines, my participants also engaged in selective association of individuals – in this case, they were selective in building a dating pool of potential partners and in choosing who to date. The careful selection of partners serves as a

“defensive practice” (Goffman 1959:12) whereby my respondents limit the degree to which their performance is likely to be interrupted. By restricting their dating partners to those they feel are prone to be more accepting – whether liberal men, daddies, tops, friends, or specific subcultures – they are able to protect against disruption to their performance and therefore prevent challenges to their authenticity as queer men. It is also possible that the tactics employed by my participants not only seek to minimize interruptions to their performances as gay men, but to specifically affirm their status as queer men at the same time. Schleifer (2006) found that for gay FTMs in his study, “erotic activity with partners who can perceive them as men served to produce and affirm a sense of their bodies as male and of themselves as gay and as men” (71).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I sought to explain the ways in which queer trans men manage their identities, the way they explain those identities to partners, and the methods through which they protect against challenges to the authenticity of their identities as queer men. In general, I found that the men in my sample managed their identities through controlling their presentations, challenging traditional notions of gender and sexuality, using carefully constructed assertions of identity and belonging, reframing the body, and paying close attention to the social circles in which they moved as well as how they operated with men inside of those circles.

Following Goffman's (1959) work on presentation, I argue that my participants engaged in "defensive practices" (13) that served to protect them from rejection. Goffman asserts that any performance risks interruption if audience members – or co-performers – feel a performer lacks the characteristic he has implicitly conveyed himself to possess. When this interruption occurs, the performer is discredited, the authenticity of his performance questioned. For my respondents, rejection for their transgender status served as an interruption to their performance. When faced with rejection, they were also faced with a challenge to the presentation of themselves as legitimate queer men.

The men I interviewed were active in taking steps to prevent that disruptive rejection from occurring.

In addition, I found that this group of men specifically engaged in the forms of identity work conceptualized by Snow and Anderson (1987), including: cosmetic face work and arrangement of personal appearance (e.g. transition), selective association with other individuals or groups (e.g. open-minded men, tops, daddies, bisexuals, friends, other trans men, and subcultures) and verbal construction and assertion of personal identities (e.g. emphasizing that they are men, that they are queer, that they belong, and that they are not straight). Through physical transition, my participants modified their appearance to manage the impression they wished to make on the men around them. In selectively associating with specific kinds of men as well as identifying specific communities in which to find them, they were active in limiting the chance that they might face rejection upon disclosing their transgender status. They also engaged in the types of verbal constructions and assertions of identity laid out by Snow and Anderson. In asserting that they are not straight, emphasizing their maleness and stressing their fit in the gay male community, they helped to ensure others would also agree.

Two patterns not specifically included in Snow and Anderson's concept of identity work are the challenging of traditional norms about gender, sex, and sexuality as well as the reframing of the body in a what participants believed to be a more typical male fashion. Incidentally, both reframing the body and challenging convention can play a large role in helping to convey – both to the self and to others – that their body does

not pose a contradiction to their identities. Like the MTF transgender participants in other studies who used a variety of techniques to narrate and affirm their identities as women (e.g. Mason-Schrock 1996; Schrock and Reid 2006), my own respondents reframed their bodies in such a way that what would often be considered by some to be “female” suddenly became “male” or “intersex” or “another way to be a guy.” This served to quiet any difficulty their bodies might pose to their legitimacy as men – for their bodies were not female, just a different form of male. Likewise, working to deconstruct traditional notions of gender, sex, and sexuality not only allowed participants to challenge the notions on ideological principle; in addition, challenging the seemingly unquestionable link between gender and sex and expanding or eliminating the acceptable range of gendered and sexed behavior also helped to make room for their own complex identities.

Strengths and Weaknesses

There are several features of this study that I consider to be primary strengths. First and foremost, it is new research on a largely ignored group of men. The majority of academic research on transgender people is focused on those transitioning from male to female. Even sociological research that does pertain to FTMs tends to focus almost exclusively on the experience of those who are straight. Secondly, my sample size is considerably larger than other research on gay trans men. For instance, Schleifer’s study of gay trans men – probably the most similar to mine in topic and methodology – contains a sample of just five participants. While a sample of fifteen is still quite

modest, it contributes to knowledge about a population that is understudied both by being ignored altogether or by existing only with extremely limited sample sizes.

Thirdly, I gathered participants from several areas throughout the United States, allowing the results to reflect more diversity of experience than if they had been from the same city, or even the same region of the country. Lastly, conducting this research through in-depth, qualitative interviews allowed for greater understanding of the processes involved in wrestling with issues of identity, sexuality, and meaning. While quantitative data would have provided a wider sample of queer trans men's experiences, the data would have been less detailed, given the forced-choice responses contained in most survey questionnaires. Talking for an hour with each of my respondents and using an interview guide that had structure while still allowing conversations some flexibility means that I was able to uncover not just what a particular participant experienced, but what that experience meant for them.

In addition, while this research was not overtly concerned with policy, it is possible that a more extensive and longitudinal qualitative study of the same topic could contribute to programs designed to help queer trans men by understanding the way they navigate the gay male world. Their mental, medical, and social needs can be better met by documenting the ways in which they manage their presentations, interact with potential gay male partners, and experience concern over their bodies, identities, and place in the larger queer community.

One primary drawback of this study as it stands, however, is its fairly

homogenous composition. While there were several middle-aged participants, the vast majority were in their teens or twenties. All were white and fairly well-educated and residing in large, urban areas. That said, this sample does appear similar to demographic data compiled on FTMs in the United States. Forshee (2008), for instance, indicated that FTMs are generally under thirty-five, relatively-well-educated, and highly concentrated in the several areas from which I drew my sample. I do suspect that data such as this – as well as the typical demographic profile of my own sample – is related in some part to gathering respondents through the internet, a technology that is likely to be most easily accessible by white, young, educated, middle-class Americans.

A second weakness may be somewhat related to the homogenous composition: many of the men in my study passed along new contacts to me via word of mouth, meaning that many were already friends with one another. In this way, participants were active in recruiting others who seemed eager to take part. This is not inherently problematic and the participants appeared to enjoy being so helpful. Some felt proud to be helping out with research on their own community. However, it is possible that my participants' experiences were so similar because they were similar kinds of men. Because some of the men in my sample operated within the same social, sexual, and political circles, it is conceivable that my findings do not accurately represent queer trans men in other circles. It is worth remembering, however, that while diversity is almost always a positive feature of any research, qualitative samples do not need to be representative. Because of this, qualitative research does not attempt to make universal

statements about an entire group of people, rather only about those they interviewed.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest that queer trans men are, like all people, actively engage in identity management. In particular, the experiences of these queer trans men illuminate the ways in which they think about their own identities and encourage others to think similarly. The interviews also reveal the ways in which participants strategically involve themselves with those they feel are most likely to receive their presentations in the way they intend. That is, they were active in findings communities which would validate the fact that they are indeed queer men. In general, the data suggest that the marginalized must exert a good deal of effort in building social networks in which they feel comfortable. However, this appears to be particularly necessary in the case of transgender people, who contend not only with membership in a marginalized group, but with chronic misperceptions from others outside of that group.

While it may seem unfair that my respondents felt the need to engage in such practices in order to be viewed the way they view themselves, these practices nonetheless did allow them to control how they were perceived as much as is probably possible. In this way, participants maintained a degree of agency over who they are and how they are perceived. The significance of their ability to wield some level of control in this area can not be overlooked, considering the fact that transgender people are frequently faced with questions about the legitimacy of their identities from the general public, speculations about the nature of their identities from medical practitioners who

control access to transition, and theorizing about the implications of their identities from non-transgender academics in a handful of fields. This research indicates that the trans men in my study were able to take control of their identities in a world that is generally hesitant to allow them to do so.

One unanticipated finding worth noting is the non-traditional gender presentations of the majority of my sample. Although this was not a focus of my research, it warrants attention because it runs contrary to the assertions of much past literature on transgender identity as well as the process of physical transition. For instance, many researchers focus on the ways in which trans people reify the gender binary (e.g. Lorber 1994), support patriarchal domination (e.g. Raymond 1980), and justify their identities by creating useful narratives or explaining away unfavorable events (e.g. Mason-Schrock 1998; Schrock and Reid 2006). My results do not support theoretical arguments which attempt to demonstrate the ways in which transgender people contribute to an oppressive and rigid gender binary in a way that non-transgender people are not frequently accused of doing. Contrary, to Schrock and Reid's work, which argues that transgender women at first defy the gender binary as "men" who dress or act in a "feminine" manner but eventually give into that binary and are "co-opted" back into the system once they begin to "pass" successfully as straight, feminine women, the participants were not transgender men interested in carrying out a hypermasculine, heteronormative presentation of manhood once they successfully "passed"; instead, they demonstrated an avid interest in challenging the traditional gender norms – and

sometimes the gender binary more specifically – as queer men. This suggests there may be a need for researchers to reconceptualize notions of transgender and transsexual in a way that recognizes that there is as much – if not more -- gender and sexual diversity among even post-transition trans people as in the general population.

Future Research

Future research on queer trans men is essential due to the extremely limited amount of research on this population. When a group is marginalized in the broader society, it can be further marginalized by academia through its exclusion from research that seeks to assist – and understand – it. To ensure that I was being respectful of my participants, I was constantly aware of what they were saying, how they were saying it, and how I was presenting their words and their identities within this thesis.

Due to the limited demographic diversity in my own sample, it would be useful for future work on queer trans men to broaden its scope by attempting to include a wider variety of respondents. At the very least, researchers should remain cognizant of the fact that the ways in which issues of gender, sex, and sexuality are treated vary cross-culturally, as well as by race, class, and ethnic lines within the same Western culture.

For future research, researchers should focus on pre- and post-transition men in separate projects as there is a difference between a trans man recalling how his dating experiences changed with transition and speculating about how he suspects it might change. It might also be of use to explore how non-operative, non-hormone, queer trans

men manage their identities without the assistance of traditionally male physical indicators – or, in the absence of “cultural genitalia” (Schilt and Waszkiewicz 2005:3).

APPENDIX

I. Background

- A. How old are you?
- B. How would you best describe your gender identity?
- C. How would you best describe your sexual orientation?
- D. Describe where you feel you stand transition-wise.
 - a. Have you taken hormones? If not, do you intend to?
 - b. Have you had chest surgery? If not, do you intend to?
 - c. Have you had lower surgery? If not, do you intend to?
- D. When did you first know you were FTM?
- E. When did you first know you were attracted to men?
- F. Describe the ideal gay man, if you have one. What is he like? What kind of traits does he have?
 - a. How close do you feel you are to this ideal?
- G. Describe how you feel your gender is perceived by the general public?
- H. How do you feel your sexual orientation is perceived by the general public?
- I. How happy are you with the way you feel you are perceived?
- J. Are you currently in a relationship?
- K. Where do you go, if anywhere, to meet potential gay male partners?
- L. How would you describe your current level involvement in the gay community?

II. Experiences explaining status to gay men

- A. Do you feel trans men face any unique challenges in dating gay men? If so, what are they? If not, why not?
- B. How do you typically explain your status to potential gay male partners, if at all?
- C. Do some methods of disclosure work better than others? Why or why not?
- D. Describe your experiences, if any, of disclosing your trans status to gay men in general.
- E. Describe your experiences, if any, of disclosing your trans status to potential gay male partners.
- F. What patterns, if any, have you noticed in how potential gay male partners have reacted?
- G. How do you feel gay men in general have reacted?
- H. Are some men more accepting than others? Is there a certain kind of guy you look for? Explain.

III. Experiences managing identity as gay/bi man

- A. How would you describe the way you try to present yourself to the world?

- B. What is important to you when preparing to go out to meet with socialize with other gay men? What kind of things do you think about?
- C. How out are you about your trans status, if at all?
- D. How does your level of outness (as trans) vary place to place, if at all?
- E. How do you feel you are read by gay men, gender-wise?
- F. How happy are you with the way you are read by them?
- G. Describe your level of comfort with your body.
- H. What level of comfort do you have with using female terminology in references to your body? (If applicable) Why do you feel that way? If you do not use traditional female terminology, what terms do you prefer? Why?
- I. What level of comfort do you have when sexually intimate with a gay male partner?
- J. What factors determine that level of comfort?
- K. What role, if any, do you feel physical transition has played/is playing/will play/could play in your interactions with prospective gay male partners? Explain.
- L. Describe any good experiences you=ve had when disclosing to potential gay male partners? How have those experiences impacted you, if at all?
- M. Describe any bad experiences you=ve had regarding your gender identity or sexual orientation within the larger gay community, if any at all.

IV. Experiences with challenges to identity as gay/bi man

- A. Describe any bad experiences you=ve had when disclosing to potential gay male partners? How have those experiences impacted you, if at all?
- B. Describe any bad experiences you=ve had regarding your gender identity or sexual orientation within the larger gay community, if any at all.
- C. How respected do you feel your gender identity and sexual orientation are by the gay male community? (If applicable)
- D. How respected do you feel your gender identity and sexual orientation are by gay male partners you have had?
- E. If you have ever suffered rejection from a potential gay male partner, what has been your response? If you haven=t, why do you think that is?
- F. If you have ever suffered rejection from the gay male community in general, what has been your response? If you haven=t, why do you think that is?

V. Concluding questions

- A. What would you like the gay male communities to know, if you could tell them anything?
- B. What would you like prospective gay male partners to know?
- C. What advice would you give other gay/bi trans men who are worried about their place in the gay male communities?

D. Is there anything else you=d like to talk about?

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