

1-30-2012

Transgender Transitions: Sex/Gender Binaries in the Digital Age

Kay Siebler

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/englishfacpub>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Please take our feedback survey at: https://unomaha.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8cchtFmpDyGfBLE

Transgender Transitions: Sex/Gender Binaries in the Digital Age

KAY SIEBLER, PhD

Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, Missouri, USA

To cite this article: Kay Siebler PhD (2012) Transgender Transitions: Sex/Gender Binaries in the Digital Age, Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 16:1, 74-99, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2012.632751>

Contemporary representations of transgendered people often reinforce rigid gender binaries of masculinity and femininity, leading transgendered individuals to feel they must seek out hormones or surgery to “correctly align” their bodies with their gender. Cultural texts (e.g., films, television, Internet, digital texts) reinforce this “pre-op or post-op” ideology for trans identity. The pre-op or post-op MTF or FTM binary mandates an alignment with the heterosexual gender system (feminine female or masculine male). In this article, the author focuses on trans identities and how representations codify the need or desire for surgery and hormones and examines the paradoxical reification of gender and sexual stereotypes (particularly dichotomization) by electronic media for transgender consumers of these media at the same time that these same sources provide an abundance of information for those who would otherwise not be made aware of the resources available to them. The competition between marketing of products and services for transgender individuals and provision of otherwise nonprofitable information for the same individuals ranging from normalizing, informing of sources of help

and health information is examined as well as the use of the Internet as a medium for transitioning individuals to share their experiences. This article argues that instead of a culture of hormones and surgery, teachers, medical professionals, and counselors should embrace and educate towards acceptance of trans identities and bodies that does not rely on the mandate of hormones or surgeries. Finally, the impact of the dissemination of information in the uncontrolled environment of the Internet illustrates the impact of culture on media and vice versa.

KEYWORDS

queer identity, transgender, gender, genderqueer, intersex, Internet, electronic media, sexual reassignment, hormone treatment

Tim Curry, in a black corset, big-girl-cha-cha shoes, elbow-length black gloves, and sexy garters, will forever be the quintessential queer for a generation of Americans. But that generation, of which I proudly count myself a member, is now just a bunch of geezers. What Curry's character of Dr. Frank-n-Furter in the cult classic *Rocky Horror Picture Show* did for us was show us queerness that could be celebrated, queerness that could be embraced, queerness that was hip, and cool. If we did not want to be just like Curry *and* his character, we wanted to be his friend. In fact, many of us spent a better part of our teens and twenties learning to perform his specific brand of queer in our rooms, at parties, and in the front of movie theaters all over the country.

The Rocky Horror Picture Show (1975) provides a celebratory portrayal of a "Transvestite from Transylvania," although we never see Dr. Frank-n-Furter out of drag. The language of the time did not accommodate anything but transsexuals or transvestites. There was no such term as "transgender" or the umbrella term of "queer" other than as an epithet. Judith

Butler's theories on gender as performance were yet to be written. Yet for the fans of this film and musical (the London musical *The Rocky Horror Show* debuted in 1973), Dr. Frank-n-Furter was not a drag queen—although the character self-identified as a transvestite. He was not trying to perform femaleness. He had a sexy bulge in his black briefs; there were no breasts in his laced-up bustier. He was the first media representation of a delightful transgender person before we had the language to describe him as thus. He was dancing on the grave of the oppressive systems that rigidly link sex with gender and sexuality; he remains a glorious model for people who play with gender. He thrilled us, even if—in the mid 1970s—we did not know exactly why. We knew he was bolder, different, and seemingly more fun and joyful than any other transvestite we had ever seen on the silver screen.

At that time Dr. Frank-n-Furter's ambiguity was part of the appeal. Today we are far less comfortable with the sort of ambiguity embodied by transgender people. We want them to be either/or: pre-op or post-op, transvestite or transsexual. There are few representations in mainstream media of a transgender person who defies these categories. Characters or people may define themselves as transgender, but they are modifying their bodies into the accepted codes for masculine male or feminine female. Unfortunately, the Internet serves to reinforce these binaries. Locating a transqueer identity online, that is, a person who is not “transitioning” with hormones and surgery to a specific gender identity, is difficult. What the digital realm tells users and viewers is that “trans” means “transitioning,” not moving outside of systems defining sex and gender. As Meta Carstarphen and Susan Zavoina write: “Images in mass media affect the way individuals define who they are and who they strive to be through the portrayal of men, women, sexuality, and social roles. This is part of our culture—part of our socialization. Images structure meaning and a sense of reality to our world. These images, in turn, reflect and influence our perception of self” (1999, pp. xvi–xvii). There are few documentaries, websites, chat rooms, films, or weblogs that portray a transgender person who is not interested in hormones and surgery. In the

Digital Age the identity of “transgender” is used to describe someone who is “transitioning” (using hormones or surgery to recreate or re-align their physical body to “match” their gender). The Internet, television, and film are the primary ways these transgender-on-the-way-to-transsexual identities are codified—and learned. Because no messy identities (those outside the gender/sex binary) get screen time, people adopt the belief that transitioning defines trans identity.

Pop culture representations of trans people transitioning are easy to come by. There is Max (formerly Moira) on *The L Word*. The Showtime series *Transgeneration* profiled the lives of several transgender young people of all demographics and geographic locations ... but to the person they are seeking out hormones or surgery. *Boys Don't Cry*, the story of Brandon Teena, portrays a transgender person who binds hir¹ breasts and uses prosthetics to pad hir crotch. Currently, there is a digital divide between an identity that defies the sex/gender/sexuality systems and the codification of rigid sex/gender/sexuality. Today, a person surfing the net or consuming more traditional media will only be presented with transsexuals and transvestites who reinforce the rigidity of the gender system.

For all the strides we have made as a culture of embracing and complicating queerness in the Digital Age—for all the communities and groups that the Internet offers to queer folks finding their way in the world—we have taken a step backwards in relation to breaking out of the gender/sex binaries. What we internalize from these trans representations is that people must be either/or. Surgery and hormones are required in order to be a content transqueer and that means being a masculine male or feminine female. Capitulation to the sex/gender/sexuality ideologies is neither transgressive nor queer.

THE DANGEROUS MOVES OF DEFINITIONS

Before we go any further, we need to first enter the prickly business of defining terms. By naming and defining, we inherently create taxonomies and borders, keeping some out and other in. But people claim identity for

themselves by naming and defining the group with which they identify or belong. Robert Hill, a queer media theorist, defines queer as something that moves *against* the binaries of sex, gender, and sexuality. He writes: “Queer shares with postmodern perspectives the refusal to be positioned as solitary and intact. Queer is a category that no one can ever fully own or possess because it requires shifting identity to practice. It explores the processes that make things supposedly normal in order to overturn them; and it announces and enacts alternatives to the sex, gender, identity, desire vectors of hetero- sexuality” (Hill, 2004, p. 87). Queer is the umbrella term for people who resist the binaries. There are various identities within the context of identifying as queer. People who were, 20 years ago, described as “hermaphrodite” (people having biological characteristics of both sexes) now name themselves “intersex.” Language shifted because the intersex community wanted to name themselves rather than being named by the medical profession. One will occasionally still encounter the term “hermaphrodite” in reference to a person who is intersex, but the preferred term of those claiming the identity is intersex.

Only in the past 20 years has the intersex community come out and talked about their experiences. Previously, when an intersex child was born, pediatric surgeons were called upon to “fix” the baby, that is, create a distinct penis or vagina. As the child grew and went through puberty, hormones were given to ensure the surgical assignment had been “correct.” Most intersex babies grew up not knowing what had happened to them. Today, medical professionals are more attuned to the sensitivity of the intersex individual and counsel parents on letting their child decide who he or she will become. Yet in a world where gender is a primary way we interact with the world, raising a child to be gender-neutral is no small feat.

A transsexual may or may not come into the world intersex. A transsexual is an individual who undergoes hormones and surgery in an effort to feel at home in hir body. Transsexuals are identified as Female-to-Male (FTM) or Male-to-Female (MTF). A transsexual may identify as intersex, but once zhe begins the transition to create a distinctly male or female body, zhe moves into the

category of transsexual. Once a transsexual has transitioned for any period of time, he or she may no longer identify as trans as he or she feels zhe is now accepted as a masculine male or feminine female.

A transgender person is someone who occupies the borderlands between communities and identities. A transgender person may be intersex, but may not be. With the feminist and gay/lesbian rights movements of the 1970s, the term “transgender” was coined. At that time, most transgender people eschewed the idea that they needed surgery or hormones to modify their body. Today transgender people see hormones and surgery as a way to “pass” in a heteronormative world that mandates a rigid gender/sex binary. In her 2010 dissertation on the issue of trans identities, Nicole Saltzburg uses the terms “transfeminine” and “transmasculine” to denote gender identifications under the transgender umbrella. Saltzburg writes:

Transgenderists are individuals who live part- or full-time as members of the opposite sex. Emotionally, they need to maintain certain aspects relating to both their masculinity and femininity and are frequently interested in hormones (and occasionally cosmetic surgery), but not Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS). *Genderqueer* (GQ) individuals challenge societal gender norms and live in a way that questions gender assumptions. They believe in the choice to self-identify and that identities might change over time. (2010, p. 5)

Yet these terms seem problematic in that we continue to fall back into the gender/sex binaries when attempting to articulate these identities. When describing transgender people, Saltzburg defines them as “members of the opposite sex.” When speaking of transgender people, these either/or binary categories of sex and gender do not fit. The language and mindset of “opposing sexes” limit in the very way that transgender/genderqueer people historically have defied the taxonomies. Saltzburg makes note of this complexity as well. She writes:

Crossing (cross dressing) is thought of as a radical act, as it defies the gender binary and challenges our assumptions about gender. Passing is an act that reinforces the gender binary, and because of this it is the path of least

resistance. This is not to imply that passing is easy, necessary, or even desirable to some. However, it explains why many transgender communities favor passing, as it allows transpeople to assimilate in a way that is more comfortable for them and for those with whom they interact. (pp. 13–14)

As with any marginalized group, assimilation has its own sets of benefits and problems. For any individual outside the dominant paradigm, there are always acts of assimilation to make moving about in that dominant culture less fraught. However, the act of assimilating can also cause people to feel as if they are selling-out their identity to accommodate an oppressive culture that demands homogeneity.

Genderqueer or transgender people reject the terms “transvestite” or “cross dresser” as ways of describing themselves because these terms imply a superficial or playful performance of gender. Griffin Hansbury (2005) writes about genderqueer identity, specifically in relation to transmasculinity. He argues that transgender people who go “No-Ho” (i.e., eschew synthetic hormones) conflate the categories of “genderqueer boi” and “butch dyke.” The transgender/genderqueer person rejects and resists categorization: “The Genderqueer has an identity that is unrecognizable in the gender binary” (Saltzburg, 2010, p. 18). As Leslie Feinberg, a self-defined transgender warrior, describes the identity in the film, *Outlaw*, that profiles hir life (Lebow, 1994): “Not everybody who is differently gendered is gay.” Feinberg uses two overlapping circles to clarify hir theories of transgender identities. In drawing circles that overlap each other on a mirror, Feinberg says,

The gender community is really predominantly heterosexual and bisexual or asexual ... Here is the lesbian/gay population [in one circle]. Not everybody in it is transgendered. Here is the gender community [in another circle]. Not everybody in it is gay. I’m in this part that overlaps [pointing to the area of the circles that overlap]. That’s me, right there. I’m gay and transgender. And it’s like a foot in one of each of two row boats. I have a personal interest in not seeing them go in opposite directions. (Lebow, 2001)

Feinberg, as a gender warrior, defies the either/or categories and instead identifies as both/all. Saltzburg's research found this to be indicative of the transmasculine people she interviewed. "Many participants conceptualized genderqueer as a **"both/neither" identity**... This means there is a sense of being more than one gender at a time, or being in between genders" (*bold in original text*) (2010, p. 43). Feinberg describes this identity as a transgender warrior; Saltzburg defines it as genderqueer. Both are articulating the identity of those who actively resist and defy the gender binary. Therefore, this population is less likely to feel the need for hormones and surgery. These are the people whose perspectives and identities are disappearing or lost to us in the Digital Age.

In 1993 Firebrand Books published Leslie Feinberg's novel about coming of age as a "Stone Butch" lesbian in the 1960s (*Stone Butch Blues*). Feinberg became a champion of transgender identities and histories. Since it was first published, the book has been translated into Dutch, Hebrew, Chinese, and Italian. In a New York WBAI radio program (2004), Feinberg read from the tenth anniversary edition "Afterwards." Zhe read, "With this novel I planted a flag. Here I am. Does anyone else want to discuss these important issues?" With the novel, the identity of being transgender—an identity distinct from transsexual and transvestite—was added to the rainbow umbrella that queers stood under and for. Feinberg's voice and presence is one that is nationally and internationally identified within the queer community, specifically as a transgender person. At the time of this writing, Feinberg is ill, but continues hir activism via hir Facebook group where zhe posts political news and rallies for a variety of causes that zhe has committed hir life to: queer politics, labor rights, prison injustices, Palestinian rights, and women's rights. The Digital Age, digital texts, and digital rhetoric allow Feinberg to communicate and motivate would-be activists. Zhe is a symbol for a movement and an identity. Yet hir specific brand of transgender identity seems lost in the cacophony that trumpets trans identity as defined only by hormones and surgery.

PASSING ON THE QUEER

On the Internet, most people say “no thanks” to the queer and are instead most interested in “passing” by adopting tropes of very stereotypical masculine or feminine gender expressions. The model transqueer body replicated, codified, and displayed is one where hormones and surgeries are part of the embodiment. What is important is “passing” as a “typical” (heterosexual) male or female. Saltzburg (2010) notes:

[F]or transmen, being perceived as male is important, because feeling male is a core piece of their identity. Therefore, access to medical interventions such as hormones or surgery to minimize or erase female characteristics is particularly important for this subgroup of the transmasculine community. (p. 74)

Roen (2002) states that academic and activist representations of transgenderism advocate “crossing” rather than passing, noting that it may be more acceptable to engage in surgeries and use of synthetic hormones (crossing) than to leave one’s body alone, potentially “passing” as a different sex because of how gender is being performed and read. The transgender communities may exclude people who are not authentic enough (masculine or feminine enough) to “pass.” The phenomena of “passing”—or tutorials on how to pass—are particularly prominent in online communities.

Although the dominant representations imply that the ultimate objective for the transqueer is to transition completely, or at least as much as can be afforded, there are transgender people who insist on not transitioning. Regarding the participants in her research, Saltzburg (2010) writes that “some said they identified as genderqueer because they have no intention or desire to medically transition. Radclyff shared, ‘I’m not going to transition, I’m not FTM ... I’m most comfortable in that in-between place that gender queer allows’” (p. 44). Another participant in Saltzburg’s research, Bert, stated, “I’m uncomfortable in the body I’m in, but I don’t see myself as just being exclusively female or feminine” (p. 44). The unfortunate reality is that because there are few, if any, representations of Radclyff or Bert’s identity in new media and in digital spaces,

fewer people are likely to feel comfortable in the “in-between.” Saltzburg does not divulge the age of her participants, but Radclyff’s and Bert’s comfort with ambiguity is a throwback from a previous generation. The unfortunate reality is that because there are few, if any, representations of Radclyff’s and Bert’s identities in popular media and digital spaces, fewer people are likely to feel comfortable in the “in-between.”

Where many media theorists have argued that the Internet offers a disembodiment—a way of transforming the physical body into a digital identity—that is liberating, the Internet more often serves to reinforce a rigid trans body type. For example, in his research regarding online ads by and for transgender people (2010), Daniel Farr discovered that there was very little play within the categories of trans people. Descriptors of identity were reduced to “FTM” and “MTF,” using easy shorthand that simplifies, as opposed to complicates, the gender system. Farr writes, “The use of MTF and FTM are problematic when engaging with transgender persons given the *mélange* of embodiment and social enactments, but were exceptionally common terms among the personal ads” (p. 91). Farr found that the majority of people posting ads included descriptors about their bodies, with the focus on convincing their audience they were “real” men or women (p. 93). “Many [FTM’s] not only mention the size of their phallus, but its functionality as well, which serves to bridge sex-gender to create and perhaps eroticize the ‘chick with a dick.’ Near universally, the referencing of genitals was present only among those seeking casual encounters” (pp. 93–94). Instead of transgender/genderqueer being an identity that flows between and through the boundaries and borders of the sex/gender systems, trans people are codifying those systems in the way they view and present their identities and the physical realities of their bodies in the digital sphere. By seeking acceptance within the sex/gender mandates of our cultural moment, the people who are, at heart, transgender warriors, codify the systems that exclude them. The Digital Age facilitates this *unqueering* from online ads, to video weblogs, to trans community websites that focus on transitioning with the

ultimate objective of passing.

The Internet serves to define what is acceptable rather than accept all that is possible. Karen Ross writes, “Being online occurs simultaneously with being offline so that the real body is both playing at being boy/girl, gay/straight, black/white, but also eating a real sandwich or drinking a real cup of coffee” (p. 33). There is connection between the cyberself and the “real body.” The physical body can begin to mimic the cyberself— or the person creating the cyberself begins to think about ways to recreate the body to mimic the cyberself. The Internet encourages people to write narrow descriptions of their physical bodies as they relate to masculine and feminine gender norms. In turn, these users of the Internet begin to think of their physical bodies in relation to these norms and create a specific “real life” body that matches the cyber reality.

In writing about chat rooms and queer populations, Douglas Harrison writes about the limiting parameters that people self-impose when identifying themselves and seeking out others online. Harrison writes that these virtual rooms and communities serve to reinforce, rather than disrupt, stereotypes. The shorthand that people use online to describe themselves and others reinforce stereotypical, one-dimensional ideas of what it means to be queer (2010, p. 288). Harrison argues that the person in the chat room uses essentializing language that limits rather than complicates identity. He writes:

The conventionality of screen names; those ubiquitous emoticons; chat room shorthand such as ASL for age, sex, location; VGL for very good looking; IMM for instant message me; BB for bareback (unprotected) sex; PNP for party and play (a euphemism for having sex while taking hits of popular circuit drugs)—these rhetorical conventions become the primary units of self-expression. This system of signaling drastically narrows individuals’ expressive potential. (Harrison, p. 288)

The very dialogue created in chat rooms is reduced to superficial, stereotypical, and brief speech that limits rather than expands connections and diversity of identities.

Transgender people may rely on these sorts of cyber-connections more

than other groups within the queer community. There has been limited research on transgender people and online communities (Gauthier & Chaudoir, 2004). Despite the dearth of research, it makes sense that transgender people would seek out online communities more than other queer populations as they are a minority within a minority. Transgender people face disproportionate violence (Lombardi et al., 2001). People of minority communities find that the Internet provides a feeling of safety and anonymity (Farr, 2010, pp. 89–90). But as transgender people may seek out on-line communities to escape violence and find acceptance, these communities may only accept them if they have certain gender characteristics. The dominant narrative found in online queer spaces is one of reductive definitions of trans bodies and trans identity.

In order to achieve these stereotypical gender identities, transqueers must pay for and consume lots of products, from underwear especially designed to facilitate passing to sex-reassignment surgery. For MTF transqueers, this means adopting the Barbie aesthetic to as great degree as possible. The reason the Barbie aesthetic is perpetuated and encouraged on film, television, and in digital spaces is because it sells products. Self-help and make-over programs feed into the capitalist culture where one must buy one's way to the desired gender identity. This is especially true of transgender populations. In order to be Barbie, whether one is a trans or ciswoman (born female), one has to purchase one's way into the body, makeup, and clothing required.

Slavoj Zizek, a cultural theorist who writes about consumption and capitalism, has called consumerism the "ideological fantasy": where industry within the capitalist system has become so effective at convincing consumers that it is working *for* them, they are unaware that they are being manipulated. In Zizek's capitalist "ideological fantasy" the consumer not only refuses to realize he/she/zhe is being manipulated to purchase products, but also the individual associates product consumption with his/her/hir identity (1989, p. 28). In Zizek's theory, the consumer/viewer comes to believe that buying products will make him/hir/her a better person and that advertisers have the consumers' best interests at heart. In order to be accepted, a transqueer must consume specific

products and surgeries, embodying a rigid feminine or masculine identity. The people consuming these products and surgeries have come to believe that their lives are better because of this consumption; they will be better people, happier, and finally find their “correct” place in the gender system through this hyped consumption.

THE FTM BODY: OUR RIGHT TO STARE

Transgender bodies are discussed, displayed, and regulated much more rigidly on the Internet than the physical bodies of others within the queer community. If one is transmasculine, one must have breast reduction surgery; if one is transfeminine, one must have breast augmentation. Neither trans-masculine nor transfeminine people are presented without the regimen of hormones to heighten those culturally defined masculine and feminine body ideals. Transgender people who resist capitulation to dominant gender norms are difficult to find in the virtual world. Popular television shows and films reinforce gender rigidity, and online fan sites debate and celebrate these representations. Max, the trans character on *The L Word*, is a fascinating example of how online fans expressed mixed responses to fictionalized trans people. In season four (2006), the character Moira was introduced, a slight, butch lesbian. By mid-season Moira was transitioning to Max with the help of hormones, cross-dressing, and crotch stuffing. Top surgery was discussed. Max has transitioned across three seasons. He is referred to as a “trans-man” instead of a “butch lesbian” because of his choice to use hormones. Max is no longer considered a lesbian because he uses hormones, but without surgery, Max still has the vagina and breasts that code him as female (Edwards, 2010, p. 167). Among the lesbian and trans communities there was much Internet discussion about the Max character. One online viewer expressed typical frustration with Max’s gender ambiguity on the “After Ellen Forum” electronic bulletin board, writing: “Also, L word STILL has no butch characters. Moira/Max does not count because he’s a transgender man which isn’t the same thing! L word is making it look as if the natural progression for butch women is to eventually become transgender” (Edwards, 2010, p. 168). Many online lesbians expressed frustration

that finally there was a butch lesbian on *The L Word* and she turned out to be trans, echoing what Judith Halberstam refers to at the “butch/FTM border wars” (Coogan, 2006, p. 18). It seems no one was willing to see Max as a transgender person, where binaries of sex and gender are queered. News media tells us there is either/or, we cannot see anything else, we cannot *be* anything else. Queer, in relation to transgender people, is not really queer in the Digital Age. Instead trans- gender people are reduced to very un-queer definitions of masculinity and femininity, maleness, and femaleness.

One could argue that transgender people do disrupt in one way: they mess with the notion of the body, the physical manifestation of their bodies. In the Digital Age, this “messing” involves surgeries and hormones—posting video blogs attesting to these body transformations. However, instead of creating a new narrative of sex and gender, new media have pushed us back to traditional ideologies where a body = sex = gender. These regressive models of sexuality, sex, and gender feel far less “queer” than they purport to be. Robert Hill writes that “[queer practice] is assisting in the creation of new narratives that challenge what can be said and that interrogate taboos around sexuality, notions of the body, and identity for all groups” (Hill, p. 90). An important question in this Age of Digital Queerness regards these narratives of the body. Are they reinscribing a gender undivorced from sex and sexuality? There seem few if any ways of being queer that allow for opting out of “re-aligning” one’s biology with one’s gender.

TRANS BODIES ARE TRANSITIONING BODIES

In the 1970s, queer culture invented the word “transgender” to describe something outside of the clear boxes of “transvestite” or “transsexual,” but by the turn of the 21st century the culture, the community, the media, and individuals were running back into the boxes of masculine = male and feminine = female. There is no coincidence that this conservative gender shift corresponded with the advent of the World Wide Web. In the Digital Age one is only transgender for the short time while one is transitioning from one sex to

another.

To disrupt this dominant narrative of “trans means transitioning,” one must look back to predigital world documentaries such as *Outlaw* (Lebow, 1994).

Outlaw is a small bio-narrative of Leslie Feinberg in which Feinberg, often addressing the camera directly, talks about what it means to be a transgender person. Zhe is seen in hir home with hir partner Minnie Bruce Pratt and talking with other transqueers. In the film, Feinberg reflects on hir life and politics. The opening scene shows Feinberg working out in a gym. Zhe is wearing a tank top so hir arm muscles are visible. Zhe addresses the camera, talking to the filmmaker and the audience about this setting and how hir body is displayed.

There is a history of transgender people being told to strip or being forcibly stripped. That your body can be examined by ... any prison guard, any institutional attendant, etc. Any gang on the street. And so I had to weigh two things in deciding to do this shoot. One is the question of how I view my body as a transgender woman is very important to discuss. And another is that it be conducted from a position of dignity and strength. And that’s why I chose the gym. (Lebow, 1994)

The film does not display hir body in any way that would be considered voyeuristic. The fact of hir masculine body is presented to the audience, but there is no unveiling or scrutiny of breasts or lack of breasts. What do we make, then, of the genre of video weblogs posted on YouTube and other sites where young transgender people unveil their bodies, to be painstakingly examined, scrutinized, and discussed? Pre-Stonewall, what the prison guards and others forcibly required of Feinberg and others, the current digital generation of trans youth are performing voluntarily as a rite of passage, the final step in their transition to socially sanctioned gender/sex alignment. Instead of being forcibly stripped according to ideologies of power (police, prison guards), the Digital Age trans youth are stripping for the camera, an act of “proving” their gender as normal/right to their virtual audience.

Feinberg’s suggestion that hir body is on display in the opening shots seems tame compared to what transgender people post on YouTube. Through

the ease of YouTube, young people are proficient at posting short videos of their trans bodies, a way of proving the authenticity of their transition, but these videos also allow their bodies to be examined in the ways Feinberg describes as humiliating in the context of transgender history. It is not uncommon for a trans person to post a series of video weblogs on YouTube to show the process of what that person's body looks like before, immediately post-op, and then incrementally post-op as his body heals. In these videos, the young person scrutinizes his scars and reports how he feels the surgery went. There is rarely a reflection on or analysis of the politics of these unveilings or the voyeurism the videos encourage. There is no commentary on the rationale or politics of removing breasts. Because younger trans teens are first exploring who they are through online connections, younger transqueers see these videos and learn that they need surgery and hormones as soon as possible in order to align their sex with their gender.

In the digital culture, the normalization of surgical modifications to align one's body with one's gender dominates YouTube. Searching "breast binding" or "top surgery" on www.youtube.com reveals a plethora of home videos by young FTM transqueers who have created "how to" videos of binding and engage in public unveiling of their chests, post-op. These breast binding and top surgery clips reinforce the belief that there are really only two sexes/genders and a transgender person is just performing an illusion in order to pass as something he is not until he can afford surgery. The subtext of using a bandage, something that we see as healing a wound, implies that his body is something that needs to be healed/fixed. These people are *wounded* by cultural gender norms. The use of a bandage to bind their breasts would offer that analogy: the breasts are a wound or something broken on the body and therefore have to be bandaged.

Weblogs and YouTube clips coupled with excerpts from television and film provide rich fodder for analysis. A breast-binding scene on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2006), where Miles is demonstrating how he hides his breasts in order to pass as male, is out of place in a show that ordinarily

focuses on makeovers of straight men's wardrobes and living spaces. Other men on the show are not required to display their bodies to "prove" their maleness. Perhaps the audience is supposed to see Miles' *body* as a makeover project: instead of his wardrobe or living quarters needing a makeover by the Fab 5, his body is what needs the help of the show's hosts. These breast binding rituals are seen as fodder for public consumption, putting the FTM body on display, creating a freak show out of these bodies for the nonqueer audience and acting as a "how to" instruction manual for the trans audience. These weblog home videos provide detailed narratives of the transition from breast-binding to surgery to postsurgical healing. The display of the postsurgery "man chest" is acutely important in these clips. The unveiling and the display of the (finally) male body are ways to show the world that the transqueer is really a man because his breasts are gone. There is little if any discussion of genital surgery, although there are quite a few videos that include references to hormones. The important marker of femininity is breasts, so the important marker of masculinity is lack of breasts. The FTM transqueers primp for the camera with their new "top" in masculine muscle poses. They are proud to be finally fully masculine by virtue of having their breasts removed. There is little or no commentary on why this surgery is important to their identity and no theorizing about what it means to be transsexual as opposed to transgender or why surgical modification of their body was necessary to feel "at home" in their body. The audience who views these clips is not called upon to challenge thinking about the gender/sex binaries that put pressure on these individuals to surgically modify their bodies. The audience becomes a voyeur in the transqueer's surgical transformation without questioning why the surgery or binding is needed and how these acts may be damaging to a person's body or psyche. The gender system is reinforced rather than queered.

For many queer youth, surgery and hormones are their "coming of age" ritual. Many trans youth save money so that the moment they turn 18, outside the parental consent laws for medical treatments, they can seek out hormones and surgery. In her research on transgender rural youth, Mary Gray found

precisely this phenomenon. She profiles AJ, a trans teen living in the rural South. Gray writes, “AJ turned eighteen and immediately started physically transforming his body to match his sense of gender identity” (2010, p. 292). True to his generation, AJ set up a website to chronicle his transition, right down to the most intimate details. “AJ created a detailed website giving the browser access to photos of his leg hair, recordings of his voice changing, and at various stages of the website, photos of his clitoris as it grew with testosterone, expressing a desire to help other people like himself who needed to know ‘how it’s done’” (Gray, 2010, p. 292). Gray theorizes that AJ’s website is a way he “circulates knowledge” of what it means to be transsexual—no longer transgender. AJ’s example shows how the gender system dictates what a body must go through to be acceptable. Sites such as YouTube offer “how to” videos on sex/gender alignment protocol.

Many of these how-to testimonials come in a series where the audience can view the transition in several installments covering several weeks, months, or years. Home video weblogs similar to AJ’s are posted to YouTube frequently enough to create a genre of pre- and post-op trans surgeries. These home videos are awkward and rough, typically featuring the trans-gender person addressing the camera directly. These young trans folks offer advice and sing the praises of hormones and surgery. There are not any cautionary tales or people posting videos arguing *against* hormones and surgery. Commentaries on reasons to resist hormones and surgery are not part of this genre. If such videos exist, they are difficult to locate. The sheer number of videos and websites that promote surgery and hormones, creating the reality that there is no way to be transgender without surgery and hormones, eclipses any other arguments that may be out there.

Another layer to these YouTube weblogs are the viewer comments that accompany them. The viewer comments allow the audience to record a response to the video they have just viewed. The person who posted the video has the right to remove comments, so the comments may not reflect what is actually posted, but rather an edited version. Still, these comments provide

another layer of digital connection between audience and post-op transsexual. In response to a top surgery post by a transman whose screen name (SN) is charlesasher, a viewer posted, “watched this a week or two before my surgery, and I was so overwhelmed. Made me cry really hard. So thanks, I needed that. Great video. =).” Another viewer post for this same video was, “wow, your reaction was so powerful. It makes me even more excited about my surgery on Friday!” Viewer comments that indicate other transqueers are getting courage for surgery or hope for surgery after viewing the video blogs are quite common. These YouTube postings become tutorials and online mentors for transqueers who learn that reconfiguring their body is a necessity. Posting a comment to the top surgery video “Almost One Year Post-Op Top Surgery” by (SN) KingsNJazz, a viewer wrote, “I’m digging the look. Wow I hope I get results like that.” Again and again viewers express envy and admiration for the body displays in these top surgery video blogs. The comments reflect that a body that passes for a beefed up, ripped, hyper- masculine torso is the ultimate goal. It is not enough to have the breasts diminished or removed. The chest must look like the cover of *Men’s Health*, hairless, gleaming, pecs and abs sculpted. This is a very different view of the trans body than what is presented in *Outlaw*. The mandate for surgery and a specific hyper-masculine body type resulting from surgery is rigidly reinforced.

THE “HAPPILY EVER AFTER” OF POSTTRANSITION

What are the long-term or long-range effects of transitioning to a rigid gender mandate, especially as a teen or early adolescent? What we do not know, trans or not, are the long-term effects of body modification, especially in regards to synthetic hormones. As young transgender people are seeking hormones as the first step to living the transgender lifestyle, people as young as 13 and 14 are seeking out hormones, either through the guidance of a physician, ordering them online, or buying them from others within the transqueer community. They are feeling a need for these body modifications because of the texts they consume. The mandate is clear in the Digital Age:

trans is okay, but that means a specific body aesthetic that mimics the heteronormative, misogynist culture of masculine and feminine ideals. The health risks of hormones are not addressed in any of the YouTube pre/post genre videos, but when one considers the recent research that showed a clear connection between years of postmenopausal synthetic hormone use among women and breast cancer and heart disease, one wonders what happens when synthetic hormones are taken from the time a person is late teens or early twenties.

Some feminists critique the use of body-shifting hormones and reconstructive surgeries as classist (only available to those who have the money). Other feminists grapple with the issue of surgeries and hormones, recalling the Second Wave mantra of “Love Your Body” in its “natural” state because hormones and surgery capitulate not only to cultural standards of the body but also capitalist consumption. The counterargument to this critique is that most people modify their body to conform to cultural gender standards. Whether it is by removing hair, applying make-up, working out at the gym, dieting, getting breast augmentation/liposuction, or getting braces for one’s teeth, all of these acts are manipulations of the “natural” body to conform to gendered standards of appearance. The trans “norms” of breast removal, hormone treatments, shaving off Adam’s Apples, and “bottom surgery” may not be so different. The distinction may lie in degree. Yet there is something to be said for that feminist mantra of loving one’s body, accepting one’s body, celebrating one’s body—and saying a loud “fuck you” to the mandates of the gender system.

UNVEILING THE TRANS BODY

In the pre-Internet world, displays of trans bodies were few and far between. In the film *The Crying Game* (1992), we get a short glimpse of the female trans body and how the character tucks his penis to appear female, but the scene was considered extremely sensational. Full frontal male nudity is not something to which American moviegoers are accustomed. In the film *Normal*

(Anderson, 2003), the MTF trans character is beautifully portrayed by Tom Wilkinson. We watch his slow transformation as he first begins to cross dress in public and then live as a female, finally culminating in surgery to transform his maleness to femaleness. His body is never on display.

The film *Transamerica* (Tucker, 2005) is a departure from these films in that both the pre-op male part (penis) and the post-op parts (breasts and vagina) get fleeting screen time. It is interesting to note, however, that the actor who plays the trans character in *Transamerica* is biologically female (Felicity Huffman) whereas the actors playing the trans characters in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Normal*, and *The Crying Game* are biological males. Perhaps because the MTF trans character in *Transamerica* is played by a female, the standards of “female body on display” apply; the movie going audience needs to, wants to and insists upon seeing his body. In the films *Transamerica*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, and *Normal*, the relationships the trans characters create and how they work around and through homophobia are central to their stories. But the viewing of the trans characters’ bodies is not, unless the actor playing the trans person is female. This double standard regarding which bodies are on display—which bodies the voyeuristic audience is allowed to gaze upon—and which are not, is reinforced with films featuring FTM trans characters. Even the documentaries that one would hope would not present a trans body for salacious public viewing, succumb to the mandate that we must see, have a right to see, analyze, and critique the female body.

In the documentaries *Boy I Am* (Feder & Hollar, 2006) and *Black and White* (MacDonald, 2006), the approach to the subject of transgender identity is handled with compassion and care. In both films, the target audience is more academic with theories on gender and sexuality woven into the stories of the trans people profiled. The primary use of these films is more likely in a college classroom with a discussion facilitated by a professor. The context for viewing these films varies significantly from films screened by television stations or home-produced video blogs. Yet both of these films also include many minutes

of trans bodies revealed. In *Black and White*, even the cover of the DVD case and the film promotional materials picture a black and white photograph of the transperson who the film is about, naked from the waist up. The photo shows the trans person looking askance at the camera, defiant. Scrawled across his body are the words, "I AM NOT A MONSTER." In the film, the trans person profiled, Mani Bruce Mitchell, talks to the photographer (Rebecca Swan) of the discomfort she had with his body throughout most of his life and how she still works to overcome the shame put upon him by the culture. One has to wonder how Mitchell feels about the cover photo. Is the filming of these trans bodies exploitative or educational? If the latter, is it necessary for us to understand their bodies, to gaze upon their naked selves, in order to understand their gender struggles? Or is this satisfying a prurient desire in both the filmmaker and the viewing audience to gaze upon these bodies that refuse the male/female binary of sex?

TRANNIES ARE THE NEW BLACK/"CHICKS WITH DICKS"

The cultural curiosity of trans identity permeates popular media. From Ru Paul's or Tyra Banks' talk shows to *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* or *Law and Order*, the laptop screen and the television screen bring us images of MTF transgender people as an intriguing oddity or amusement. Transgender people, typically in various stages of surgical and hormonal transitioning, are appearing on the "hip" television programs with predictable regularity: *Nip and Tuck* (Famke Janssen plays Ava Moore), *America's Next Top Model* (Isis King plays herself), VH1's *I Want to Work for Diddy* (Laverne Cox plays herself). ABC's *Dirty Sexy Money* (Candis Cayne plays Carmelita), *Ugly Betty* (Rebecca Romijn plays Alexis Meade), and *All My Children* (Jeffery Carlson plays Zoe) are popular television shows that have clamored onto the "Trannies are the New Cool" bandwagon. The Internet discussions (blog posts and comments on fan websites) regarding these characters connect these television shows to the digital world. Some may argue that the mainstream presence of trans people is revolutionary, but as many media theorists have pointed out (Clark, 1969; Leifer,

Gordon, & Graves, 1974; Berry, 1998; Hart-ley, 1999; Padva, 2007), the presence of a traditionally marginalized group does not necessarily equate to advancement. MTF people are typically portrayed as high drag. They have big hair, lots of make-up, push-up bras, and large implants that they are happy to display through low-cut bodices. They often carry the stereotypically gay catty (snap, snap, swish) attitudes that straight audiences love. The MTF transqueers can easily be read as gay men dressing in drag and playing to the stereotypes both of hyper-feminine females and comedic drag performers. A thread on a Facebook discussion board (“Nigel, is this your daughter/son?”) focused on transgender people, making a direct connection between trans representations on television and “real world” trans people. The posts (presumably written by nontrans people) contained references to stereotypical trans identity. A person using the screen name of Jessica posted, “I’ve seen transgender people on television, and there’s always something different about their voices and their body shape. I think MTV Real World had a chick with a d*** recently” (“Nigel,” 2010). The vernacular of “chick with a dick” reflects how the complexity of trans identity is reduced to male/female—the genitalia; the physical manifestation of the body is what counts. To further codify the sex/gender connection, body aesthetics of MTF trans people *must* ascribe to hyper feminine ideals. Femininity costs money and means body modification.

In *Girl Inside* (Gallus, 2007), the filmmaker follows Madison, a college-aged transgender person, as she goes through the gradual steps of transitioning to female: first her Adam’s apple is shaved, then she takes hormones, finally the genital surgery. The most interesting parts of this film are the relationships that are portrayed. Madison has a close and loving relationship with her 80-year-old grandmother who accepts her transition and attempts to teach her about the standards of femininity, and tutors Madison in the power that resides in being feminine. This hyper-feminine fixation can be attributed to a postfeminist cultural moment where people have been duped into believing that feminine sexual power is a form of real and sustained power within the culture. Rosalind Gill, in writing of cisfemales (women who were born female) and the

effects of media on their bodies, states:

One of the most striking aspects of post feminist media culture is its obsessive preoccupation with the body. . . . [f]emininity is defined as bodily property rather than (say) a social structural or psychological one. Instead of caring or nurturing or motherhood being regarded as central to femininity (all, of course, highly problematic and exclusionary) in today's media it is possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key (if not sole) source of identity. (Gill, p. 255)

Transgender characters such as Laverne Cox on *I Want to Work for Diddy*, Carmelita on *Dirty Sexy Money*, and Isis King on *America's Top Model* all fit the "chick with a dick, gay Barbie" stereotype of MTF transqueers. Cox has an interview clip on the VH1 website where she talks about trans politics, the lack of portrayals of transqueers on television, and connects the struggles of transgender people with the Civil Rights movement ("Transgendered People On Television," 2008). She is articulate, smart, and politically astute. But these dynamics of her politics and intellect never make it to the *I Want to Work for Diddy* show where she plays a stereotypical "gay Barbie" with big hair, Valley Girl language, and glamorous fashion. This image is reiterated in Cox's casting in the reality show *TRANSform*. In *TRANSform*, Cox plays one of three Charlie's Angels-type trannies who do makeovers of cisgender women (VH1, 2010). The promotional materials for this show, entitled *TRANSform Me*, pose Cox and her two co-stars (Jamie Clayton and Nina Poon) with hair dryers and hair products instead of guns but striking a pose that calls back to the Charlie's Angels television show logo of the 1970s. The postfeminist illusion is that these transgender women are taking up the Charlie's Angels torch by doing makeovers instead of fighting crime because they are, after all, Barbie beautiful. One could argue that *all* women in pop culture media outlets, trans or not, manifest the Barbie Aesthetic. If they did not, they would not be on the screen. The interesting twist with *TRANSform Me* is that the trans women are so Stepford Wife feminine that they can give advice to cisfemales on how to be/become/buy-their-way to the ideal femininity.

The only MTF transqueers who are allowed to escape this hyper-feminine, make-up and product-dependent aesthetic that permeates the MTF representation in the Digital Age, are trans *children*. Tyra Banks on her talk show *The Tyra Show* aired an episode on transgender children in January 2010. Because the market has been saturated with MTF transgender adults, media puts a new edge on the topic by talking about children who identify as trans. On one episode of *The Tyra Show*, Banks brags that “*The Tyra Show* has the daytime exclusive” of airing interviews with transgender children. She follows that statement by interviewing two children, a six-year-old (Josie) and her transgender sister, Jade. The parents sit by the two tykes, smiling nervously. Jade describes being transgender as having a birth defect. Banks reduces that analogy to hinting that the birth defect is the child’s penis that is “just not supposed to be there”—again distilling the trans identity to genitalia (2010). Although all the people (from the children to the parents) interviewed on this episode of *The Tyra Show* are articulate and on-the-mark in talking about the complexities of being transgender or having a trans- gender child, the format and Bank’s own approach gives the program a sensational quality, as if the concept of a transgender child is bizarre. The focus is, if not an unveiling and displaying of the body, a discussion of body parts that define biological sex.

The above genres of reality shows or talk shows show trans people talking about their “real” lives for the consumption of the audience. Candis Cayne, a MTF transqueer, has made the cross-over from reality show to serialized drama. According to Ryan Baber at Reuters.com, ABC’s *Dirty Sexy Money* was the first television show that cast a transgender person to play a transgender character in prime time. The character Carmelita (played by Cayne) is a transgender person who is involved with a married man. The actor Candis Cayne (a.k.a. Candi Cayne) blurs the line between drag queen and transgender person. She is often described as a “female impersonator” (ETonline, 2007) or “transsexual” (Roberts, 2007). Other web postings or online articles describe Cayne as transgender. Some interviews avoid the politics of naming altogether

by simply referring to her as a spokesperson for an unnamed cause or describing her as having “transitioned” (“Access Extended,” 2010). Cayne’s identity as a trans person cast to play a trans character is seen as a victory by many in the queer rights community. The issue of casting nontrans people to play trans people is an abiding critique, similar to the critique leveled against directors who cast straight actors to play gay and lesbian characters.

We see this in transfeminine representations where legs, cleavage, youth and the Barbie aesthetic are primarily portrayed. There are no other sorts of representations to counter this hyper-sexualized, hyper-feminine ideal that pivots on capitalist models of gender facilitated by product consumption. “The body is presented simultaneously as women’s source of power *and* as always unruly and requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever narrower judgments of female attractiveness. Women’s bodies are evaluated, scrutinized and dissected . . . and are always at risk of ‘failing’” (Gill, p. 255). In order *not* to “fail” at being female or feminine, both cisfemales and trans- feminine people must resort to surgery and consumption of more and more products that define femininity. The body, be it female or trans, is not acceptable in its natural state.

DIGITAL TRANS BODIES OF MATTER

Digital space, films and television shows serve to teach transqueers what the current standards are for being trans in this world. These texts codify just one version of trans identity that transqueers must manifest to be accepted. Angela McRobbie and Janice Winship analyzed the discourses in women’s magazines and how a highly restrictive femininity is constructed, centering on romance, domesticity, and caring (2004). As a result, females of all ages in the culture internalize that restrictive femininity and aspire to it by dieting, buying beauty products, and dressing to accommodate. To an even larger degree, this is true of trans people who feel they have to be über-feminine or hyper-masculine to prove their identity as “real” or true females/males. The standards of beauty and the standards of body are hooked into the capitalistic culture of

consumption: consuming undergarments made specifically for trans “passing,” consuming clothing, makeup, and beauty products, consuming various types of surgeries. Without this consumption mandate, would there be these rigid gender standards of how to be trans? Most media theorists argue that the capitalist culture creates the *need* for body modification or body insecurity. If there were no body insecurity, there would be no need for the products. Therefore, it is the goal of the marketers to make the viewing public feel insecure enough to buy. We trust our screens to inform us how we should be, perceiving it as “real.” Zizek writes, “The postmodern universe is the universe of naive trust in the screen which makes the very quest for what lies behind it irrelevant” (*Plague*, p. 134). The technology of this postmodern moment creates both disillusionment and creates the idea that technology is reality; objective reality and technology become blurred. What technology delivers to us, we believe to be real; the virtual reality of the computer screen is confused with the physical world in which we live. Therefore, the information, language, and representations encountered in that virtual world are seen as truth. The ramifications of new media reinforcing the rigidity of the sex/gender systems results in the demand for more hormones and more surgeries. Zizek believes the virtual world inside the screen “jeopardizes our most elementary perceptions of our own bodies. It cripples our own phenomenological attitudes toward the bodies of others. We suspend our knowledge of what actually exists and conceive of that surface (the computer interface) as directly expressing the soul” (1997, p. 137). Yet we believe we are not affected by the cyber-texts we consume.

In research conducted by Bryson et al., regarding queerness and digital texts, they found people were in denial about how much they folded the digital world into their own. Bryson et al. write, “It was relatively common for participants to describe daily practices of living as highly mediated by a range of Internet technologies and spaces, and their lives as relatively insulated from any cybercultural ‘effects’ or ‘affects’” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 798).

Websites, films, and television are making gender more rigid. New media

may support alternative genders, but only those alternative genders that require the assistance of hormones and surgery. Carroll and Gilroy (2002) wrote about treatment approaches for transgender people. Rather than counseling patients to assume either a male or female role, counselors are more likely to encourage patients to explore other identities and options even as the screen-mediated world sends the opposite message. Carroll and Gilroy challenge counseling educators and counselors to embrace a “trans positive” approach, affirming various gender identities. These counselors will have little chance of success against the digital onslaught of gender/sex binaries. The Internet feeds trans people the notion that gender means capitalist consumption with images, banner ads on web pages, and websites that exist only to sell products to transqueers. The website *Susan’s Place Transgender Resources* is an example of a hybrid site that initially purports to provide “resources,” but getting products to help one pass is the dominant function of the site. The name suggests that there may be some support groups listed or organizations that advocate for trans people. And there are, but there are also various links to surgeons, places to buy clothing, where to shop, what kind of surgery is available, and where to buy prostheses. The “academic” link is empty. The *Transgender Care* website is one that focuses on surgery, hormones, and hair removal; the “care” advertised has a cost, both literally and figuratively.

If only one argument or way of being transgender is presented, there is no choice but to capitulate. Judith Butler (1990) writes that gender is a “regulatory fiction.” Teresa de Lauretis (1989) argued that gender is the product of various social technologies, including film and media. We now must add the Internet to that list. The Internet and the representations of transgender people add another level to both Butler’s and de Lauretis’ theories. The “fiction” portrayed with reality/talk shows and YouTube becomes all too real to the people who are viewing them. While a viewer may dismiss sitcoms and Hollywood films as fiction, aspects of new media are consumed as “reality.” Gender is not only a product of these social technologies but also created by them. Transgender

people are caught within the gender-web, trying to create a body that matches what is presented as the authentically male/female and masculine/feminine. The one thing that prevents people from capitulating, it seems, is money. The class divide between those who can afford new bodies and those who cannot looms large here. In the documentary *Boy I Am* (Feder & Hollar, 2006), Nicco has a benefit in the queer bar he works for in order to raise money for top surgery. He talks about the politics of asking people for money for surgery that some view as elective. To Nicco the surgery is not elective; it is a mandate. He can't be who he believes he is without the removal of his small breasts.

Transqueer representations of buff, tattooed muscles in tank tops or push-up bra cleavage are declaring the same phenomena: "gaze upon my body proof of my socially-sanctioned gender." Buck Angel, a muscular, tattooed, bald man who harkens back to Mr. Clean, has a well-known body that matters in the digital space. Angel is not afraid to queer his image by letting us know that he does not have a penis. The line Angel is most known for is, "It isn't what is between your legs that makes your gender" (*Buck Angel Entertainment*, 2010). Angel resists the mandate of being fully female or male, although Angel has had top surgery and presumably is taking hormones. Angel has a web site devoted to his own brand of queer politics and his "Public Cervix Announcement" is popular on YouTube (2010). Angel's web- site *Buck Angel Entertainment's* (<http://buckangelentertainment.com/>) tag line promises "Agency, Advocacy, Lectures, Workshops and Media Projects." His public service announcement (PSA) about cervical cancer screenings advises transmen to continue to get annual pap and pelvic exams. Responses posted by viewers are overwhelmingly hostile, calling Angel a "monster" and a "synthetic male" (among other things). He also has a YouTube PSA on transgendered women getting prostate exams.

Buck Angel's website, as well as websites such as *Transgender Law and Policy Center*, *Transgender Forum Community Center*, and *National Association of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Centers*, offer essential information on where a transgender person can go to find community,

information, and support. There are more websites peddling products, surgery, and testimonials of the one “true” trans way. The Internet offers a singular and unified pedagogy of transgender identity: be who you are, but you need to spend money to align your body with who you really are; your natural state *is* one that is unnatural and needs remediation.

As transgender people race down the road of body aesthetics at the peril of their own health, what else are they losing? Certainly, they are losing significant hunks of money. Breast augmentation surgeries, both taking them off and putting them on, range from \$3,000–8,000; bottom surgeries cost \$20,000–30,000, but some are much higher. *The Hudson’s Guide to FTM Surgeries* website states that “phalloplasty procedures also tend to be very expensive (between \$50,000 and \$150,000) and are often not covered by insurance” explaining why fewer FTM transgender people are getting bottom surgery, but most aspire to top surgery (“Hudson’s,” 2004). In addition to loss of money, transqueers of the 21st century are being denied queer representations and ways of being that defy the gender/sex/sexuality binaries.

The digital world has opened up communities for transgender people where none have existed before. There is less isolation and perhaps less struggle because of the resources, social networks, and virtual communities provided on the Internet. However, these virtual communities and forums also serve to create a codified version of limited ways of being transgender. A transgender norm becomes established so that even transgender people are no longer queering gender in the way that Dr. Frank-n-Furter did in the 1970s. The Transgender Warrior that Leslie Feinberg describes is being co-opted by the capitalist culture so that a buck—and a Buck Angel—can be made. This commodification of queerness is not exclusive to transgender people, but this group seems the most vulnerable because the “products” they are persuaded to purchase are not new wardrobes or cars. Instead, the capitalist culture has successfully convinced transgender people that they must purchase surgeries and hormones, body parts or the removal of them, to embody their “true” identity. In a culture where consumption is a way of life, a way to validate

one's existence, a way to display one's status and worth, queerness has been co-opted. The Digital Age has obliterated the transqueers who embrace the borderlands of gender fluidity and replaced it with "gender as consumption."

NOTE

1. A note on pronouns: when the person I am referring to has designated a specific pronoun for himself or herself, I use that pronoun. If the person I am referring to has not designated a pronoun, or if I am generally speaking about trans people, I will use the gender-neutral pronouns of "hir" and "zhe." These terms are embraced by many activists in the trans community as a way of shaping language to reflect their reality. Standard Written English does not allow for a gender-neutral third person singular or gender-neutral pronoun referring to a person.

REFERENCES

Access Extended: Candis Cayne Talks Chastity (Chaz) Bono's Transgender Transformation. (2010). *Access Hollywood*. Retrieved from www.accesshollywood.com

Anderson, J. (Writer/Director). (2003). *Normal [Television movie]*. United States: Avenue Picture Productions.

Angel, B. (2010, February 23). Buck Angel's public cervix announcement. *You Tube*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuNFmZhvO0&feature=related>

Applegate, K., Chermol, C., Medina, B., Miskowiec, B., Moriarity, J., & Redmann, R. (Executive Producers). (2010, January 27). *The Tyra Banks Show* [Television broadcast]. New York, NY: Warner Brothers Broadcasting Company.

Babenco, H. (Director). (1985). *Kiss of the Spider Woman* [Motion picture]. United States: HB Films.

Baber, R. (2008, April 25). TV has never seen more transgender characters. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2534139520080425>

Bastian, R., Cooper, L., Dungan, S., Macy, W., & Moran, L. (Producers), & Tucker, D. (Writer/Director). (2005). *Transamerica* [Motion picture]. United States: Belladonna Productions.

Becker, A. E. (1995). *Body, self, and society: The view from Fiji*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Berlanti, G. (Producer). (2007, October 31). *Dirty sexy money* [Television broadcast]. Los Angeles, CA: ABC.

Berry, G. (1998). Black family life on television and the socialization of the African American child: Images of marginality. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 29(2), 233–242.

Bryson, M., MacIntosh, L., Jordan, S., & Lin, H.-L. (2006). Virtually queer? Homing devices, mobility and un/belongings. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 31, 791–814.

Buck Angel Entertainment. (2010). Available from <http://buckangelentertainment.com/>

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble* (First ed.). London, England: Routledge.

Carroll, L., & Gilroy, P. J. (2002). Transgender issues in counselor preparation. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 41, 233–242.

Carstarphen, M., & Zavoina, S. (Eds.). (1999). *Sexual rhetoric: Media perspectives on sexuality, gender, and identity*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Clark, C. (1969, Spring). Television and social controls: Some observations on the portrayals of ethnic minorities. *Television Quarterly*, 18–22.

Collins, D., Eric, R., Metzler, D., Panzanaro, J., & Williams, M. (Producers). (2006, August 1). *Queer eye for the straight guy* [Television broadcast]. New York, NY: Bravo.

Coogan, K. (2006). Fleshy specificity: (Re)considering transsexual subjects in lesbian communities. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 10(1/2), 17–41.

De Lauretis, T. (1989). *Technologies of gender: Essays on*

theory, film, and fiction. Basingstoke and London, England: Macmillan.

Edwards, M. (2010). Transconversations: New media and community. In C. Pullen & M. Cooper (Eds.), *LGBT identity and online new media* (pp. 159–172). London, England: Routledge Press.

Eonline. *ETonline*. (2007, September 26). Retrieved from <http://www.etonline.com/news/2007/09/54395/>

Farr, D. (2010). A very personal world: Advertisement and the identity of trans- persons on craigslist. In C. Pullen & M. Cooper (Eds.), *LGBT identity and online new media* (pp. 87–99). London, England: Routledge Press.

Feder, S., & Hollar, J. (2006). *Boy I am* [Film].

Feinberg, L. (1993). *Stone butch blues*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.

Feinberg, L. (2004, January 12). Reading my author afterward. *WBAI.org*. Retrieved from http://wbai.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=741&Itemid=127

Gallus, M. (Director). (2007). *Girl inside* [Motion picture]. United States: Women Make Movies.

Gauthier, D. K., & Chaudoir, N. K. (2004). Tranny boyz: Cyber community supports in negotiating sex and gender mobility among female to male transsexuals. *Deviant Behavior*, 25, 375–398.

Gill, R. (2007). *Gender and the media*. Cambridge, England: Polity.

Gray, M. L. (2010). From websites to Wal-Mart: Youth, identity work, and the queering of boundary publics in small town USA. In C. Pullen & M. Cooper (Eds.), *LGBT identity and online new media* (pp. 288–298). London, England: Routledge Press.

Hansbury, G. (2005). The middle men: An introduction to the transmasculine identities. *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 6, 241–264.

Harrison, D. (2010). No body there: Notes on the queer migration to cyberspace. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 43(2), 286–310.

Hartley, J. (1999). *Uses of television*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hichon, J., & Reaves, S. (1999). Media mirage: The thin ideal as digital manipulation. In M. Carsarphen & S. Zavoina (Eds.), *Sexual rhetoric* (pp. 65–

76). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Hill, R. J. (2004, Summer). Activism as practice. *New Direction for Adult and Continuing Education*, 102, 85–96.

Hudson's FTM Resource Guide. (2004). Retrieved from <http://www.ftmguide.org/> Jordan, N. (Writer/Director). (1992). *The Crying Game* [Motion picture]. United States: Miramax Films.

Kimball, M. M. (1986). Television and sex-role attitudes. In T. M. Williams (Ed.), *The impact of television: A natural experiment in three communities* (pp. 265–301). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Lebow, Alisa. (Writer/Director). (1994). *Outlaw* [Documentary]. United States: Women Make Movies.

Leifer, A. D., Gordon, N. J., & Graves, S. B. (1974). Children's television: More than mere entertainment. *Harvard Educational Review*, 44(2), 213–245.

Lombardi, M., Wilchins, R., Priesing, D., & Malouf, D. (2001). Gender violence: Transgender experiences with violence and discrimination. *Journal of Homo- sexuality*, 42(1), 89–101.

McCarthy, M. (1992). The thin ideal, depression and eating disorders in women. *Behavioral Research Therapy*, 28, 205–215.

MacDonald, K. (Writer/Director) (2006). *Black and white* [Documentary]. United Kingdom: Women Make Movies.

McGee, M. (2005). *Self-help Inc.: Makeover culture in American life*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Nevins, S. (Executive Producer), & Davis, K. (Director). (2001). *Southern Comfort* [Motion picture]. United States: Home Box Office (HBO).

Nigel, is that your daughter/son? (2010). *Facebook*. Retrieved November 17, 2010, from www.facebook.com

Padva, G. (2007). Media and popular culture representations of LGBT bullying. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 19(3–4), 105–118.

Roberts, G. (2007, September 25). Transsexual actress joins mainstream American drama. *Pink News*. Retrieved from

<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/news/articles/2005-5553.html/>

Roen, K. (2002). Either/or and both/neither: Discursive tensions in transgender politics. *Signs*, 27, 501–522.

Ross, K. (2010). *Gendered media: Women, men and identity politics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Roskam, J. (Writer/Director). (2005). *Transparent*. [Documentary]. San Francisco, CA: Frameline.

Saltzburg, N. (2010). Developing a model of transmasculine identity. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL.

Sawyer, T. (2003). Hail the Prada-worshipping queer. *Alternet*. Retrieved from www.alternet.org

Shernoff, M. (2000). Cyber counseling for queer clients and clinicians. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 11(4), 105–113.

Stasi, L. (2003, August 26). Flame out! Linda isn't happy with how gay TV turned out. *New York Post*. Retrieved August 13, 2010, from nypost.com

Stice, E. M., & Shaw, H. E. (1994). Adverse effects of the media portrayed thin-ideal on women and linkages to bulimic symptomatology. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 13(3), 288–308.

Tan, A. S. (1977). TV beauty ads and role expectations of adolescent female viewers. *Journalism Quarterly*, 56, 283–288.

TransBucket. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.transbucket.com>

Transgendered People on Television. (2008, September 11). *VH1*. Retrieved from <http://www.vh1.com/video/misc/275123/transgendered-people-on-tv.jhtml>

Veneruso, T. (2001). Interview with Max from Southern Comfort. *New Wave Films*. Retrieved from <http://www.nextwavefilms.com/ulbp/max.html>

Ward, L. M. & Harrison, K. (2005). The impact of media use on girls' beliefs about gender roles, their bodies, and sexual relationships: A research synthesis. In E. Cole & J. Henderson Daniel (Eds.), *Featuring females: Feminist analysis of media* (pp. 3–23). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Zizek, S. (1989). *The sublime object of ideology*. London, England:

Verso. Žižek, S. (1997). *The plague of fantasies*. London, England: Verso Press.