RE-PRODUCING MASCULINITIES ON YOUTUBE: A CYBERETHNOGRAPHY OF THE MIGHTMENFTM CHANNEL

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ABSTRACT

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In this study, I examine the performances of masculinities on a YouTube transgendered collaborative channel. By investigating how female to male transgendered users produce themselves in a visual online environment, I explore the gaps created between the body, the interface, and being embodied in an online space. These gaps present critical spaces for communication scholars to investigate what effect the communicative properties of Internet technologies have on gender, and more specifically on masculinity. Now, with the affordability and accessibility of hardware, software, and other media production and dissemination tools, the nature of cyberspace has changed. Users are now becoming content producers through self and other re-presentation and re-production and are visually present and digitally embodied. I ask: How do such content producers become digitally embodied? Can digital embodiment contain properties that are transferable to offline lives? Does YouTube, a cyberspace very much rooted in visual representation offer a space and a means of experience for a group of people who’s bodies and performances of gender are constantly in flux. Or, do the visual aspects of YouTube merely reinforce hegemonic notions of gender—specifically masculinity? The major objective of my work is to explore digital environments, such as YouTube, as one of the technologically constituted layers of contemporary life in order to interpret the meaning making practices and to identify the political implications of living online. I am specifically interested in the role the body plays at the intersection of the interface and an online community. In order to analyze critically YouTube, and the role that the body plays, I look at YouTube videos produced by a transgendered community. Here I focus on the production and performances of masculinity.
For my family and friends, who have always encouraged me to achieve my dreams.
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In 2006, I quite accidentally stumbled onto YouTube.com. At the time, I was a user\(^1\) on the social networking site MySpace. Social networking sites share a few key characteristics: profiles, friends, and comments (boyd, 2007). These sites function as “a social utility that connects you with the people around you,” as “a place for friends,” or as “the best way to stay in touch with your friends, and such sites are the fastest way to discover the people and things that matter to you most.”\(^2\) Social networking site users create a representation of themselves through a profile, which often include pictures and information about the user (eg: contact information, education, jobs, hobbies, favorite TV shows, and favorite movies, etc.). The information included in the profile helps users find and get to know one another as they share similar interests, tastes, locations, etc.

I became a MySpace user in order to connect with current friends, catch up and reconnect with old friends, and maybe even make some new friends. One day in April, I noticed that some of the users on my friends list\(^3\) had embedded videos in their profiles. When I clicked on one of the embedded videos, a Dolly Parton music video began to play right on the user’s profile page. In the bottom, right corner of the video was the logo YouTube. Not knowing what YouTube was I googled it and found YouTube.com. I spent hours typing in random keywords that might produce videos that interested me and might represent me as well as my interests in some way. What I found, and then embedded on my MySpace page, was a music video of Rufus

\(^1\) User-One who employs the service provided by the system.

\(^2\) These phrases come from the homepages of Facebook (http://facebook.com), MySpace (http://myspace.com), and Friendster (http://www.friendster.com) social networks.

\(^3\) Friending is a social networking practice enabled by a “friend button” that allows users to mark other users as “friends.” By friending a user that user is added to a list that contains the names and links to all friends that a particular user knows, thus creating a network. A friend on a social networking site may denote an actual friend, an acquaintance, or just a random user who wants to be part of a specific network.
Wainwright performing *Hallelujah* at a live concert, a *Saturday Night Live* (from here on SNL) clip of “The Ambiguously Gay Duo,” and a clip of the then President George W. Bush saying something that I thought was ridiculous. I used these three YouTube clips to represent my taste in music, provide a glimpse into my sexuality and gender performance, and give insight into my political outlook. YouTube provided a virtual warehouse of media texts for me to use, and because users controlled the content, the variety of texts was far more diverse than what the mainstream media conglomerates offered. I was actually able to find and view media content that represented me.

During those first days in 2006, I was a simple YouTube user. As such, I employed YouTube as an informal archive for television texts. Initially, I would simply search for clips that I heard people at school talking about, such as William Hung’s horrific singing on *American Idol* or SNL’s “Dick In a Box” clip. I was also able to share those videos via sites such as MySpace, Facebook, Digg, orkut, Mixx, hi5, Bebo, and Live Spaces with a simple click of a button. I could post a video to a site that is not listed by copying and pasting the URL or HTML code to a blog, homepage, or in an email. The multiple sharing methods provided by YouTube make it quick and easy for users to recirculate video content.

YouTube and social networking sites belong to a wave of technology called Web 2.0—web space based on social software where users generate content rather than simply consume it. Web 2.0 technologies have transformed the Internet into what Jenkins (2006) has termed “participatory culture.” Jenkins defines participatory culture as “culture in which fans and other

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4 URL, Uniform Resource Locator-The address system used on the World Wide Web and other Internet locations. The URL indicates the method of access, the server to be accessed, and the path of any file to be accessed.

5 HTML, Hypertext Mark Language- Formatting commands that convert files, documents, pictures, and so on into webpages. YouTube offers an embedded code that formats the video player and the video to show up on a webpage.
consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of content” (p. 257). The power of participation is in the ability for everyday users to amend, expand, and recirculate content, thus leveling the field between media conglomerates and the everyday user.

My experiences on YouTube have led me to the conclusion that YouTube offers users more than just the ability to view and share video clips. By signing up and creating a free YouTube account, I was able to move from a passive viewer to an active participant on YouTube. As a participant on YouTube, I not only viewed and recirculated videos, but I also participated by interacting with other participants through the tools (such as leaving text comments) offered on the site. To access the tools and become a participant, a user creates a YouTube account by creating a user name and password. Once an account is established, the user is able to build a channel that functions as a homepage and allows the user to display personal information as well as video viewing habits and opinions. For example, by clicking the “favorite” button, located under each YouTube video, will add the video to a list of favorites on a user’s channel. Adding a video to the favorite section on a YouTube channel makes it easier to watch the video again because the user no longer has to search for the original clip. Additionally, a count of how many users have “favorited” the video is located on the main YouTube page where the video plays. This count illustrates the popularity of a particular video. A recent 2010 redesign of the YouTube website includes the addition of the “I like this” and the “I dislike this” buttons. By clicking either button, a tally of the number of users who clicked the button is displayed under the video. Additionally, once a user clicks the “I like this” button, the video is then added to the user’s account settings page. The fact that a favorited video is added to a user’s channel and a video that is liked is added to the user’s account settings page indicates that a favorite rating is more important than simply “liking” because the video marked “favorite” is
available for all users to see on the user’s channel. Participants can also click the “playlists” button, which adds the video to another list on the participant’s channel. Finally, a flag button can be used if a user/participant believes the video is in violation of YouTube rules. This might include indecent content or possibly copyrighted material. Subscribing to a channel is similar to friending; it links one participant to another and allows them to view the “favorite” videos, playlists, and subscription lists of that participant. Subscribers will also receive email updates when a channel they subscribe to has new video content added to it.

My personal YouTube channel is represented below in Figure 1. The user’s personal channel offers a variety of tools to display information, connect with other users, and create social networks. The top of the left-hand column displays the channel name and personal information such as user name, age, location, and a channel/profile description. Below this information is a “Connect with…” box that displays the different ways to connect with a user. These methods include sending a message, adding a comment, and sharing the channel.

Underneath the “Connect with…” box is the “Recent Activity” box that displays the most recent channels a user has subscribed to, videos a user has favorited, and users that have been friended. The last three boxes on the left side are “Subscriptions,” “Subscribers,” and “Channel Comments.” The “Subscriptions” box lists all of the channels that a user has subscribed to. Subscribing to a channel indicates that a user is interested in the content produced and recirculated by the channel’s producer. By being a subscriber the user is notified when new content is added to that channel. The “Subscribers” box lists all the users who have subscribed to the channel and are thus interested in when new content is added. Finally, the “Channel Comments” box is a tool for users who view a particular channel to leave text comments as well.
as links to webpage’s and videos for the producer of the channel. The “Channel Comments” box functions much like a personal message board.

Figure 1. My YouTube Channel (March 26, 2009).

The right-hand column contains the most recent video uploaded (which can be played right on the channel). The next box is the “Videos” box, which contains all the videos a user has uploaded. Under the “Videos” box is the “Favorites” box, which displays all the videos that a
user has favorited. Finally, there is the “Friends” box, which displays all the friends that a user has added. The tools offered on users’ personal channels give users the ability to interact with other users, which creates users who also participate in what they consume.

In 2006, the editors of *Time* designated “you” as Person of the Year to pay tribute to the millions of everyday users who dedicated their creative energy to the booming user-generated content (UGC) platforms, such as YouTube, of Internet culture. UGC marks the departure from a strictly passive audience to one that co-creates media culture. Since the 1980s, the term “prosumer” has been used to denote how users’ agency hovers between the bipolar categories of producer and consumer, or how the consumers participate in what they consume (Toffler, 1980). As a UGC, YouTube offers users the ability to become YouTube content producers who can create video content and upload it to share with others while adding content to the YouTube site. Though I acknowledge that “prosumer” is an important term in regards to UGC platforms, throughout this dissertation I will continue to mark a difference between individuals who upload videos as producers and individuals who comment on videos as users in order to differentiate between different kinds of practices and labor.

YouTube content producers (from here on referred to as producers) typically create two types of video content. First, a producer can take a piece of previously recorded content such as a television show and reedit it in some way, such as adding text and/or audio commentary, or cutting and rearranging the original. Second, a producer can create a video blog or vlog. Traditionally, blogs or weblogs “are frequently updated webpages with a series of archived posts, typically in reverse-chronological order” (Nardi, Schiano, & Gumbrecht, 2004). Blogs are primarily textual, but they can include multimedia components such as photographs, video clips, and hyperlinks, which may allow for audience comments. Vlogs are a form of a blog for which
the primary medium is video. Like traditional blogs, vlogs are often portrayed as online diaries or personal journals (Nardi et. al., 2004). With a YouTube channel, an Internet connection, and a web camera, producers can record vlogs right on the interface. The producer can then record a video and easily upload it to YouTube. Producers can create videos that are more advanced and incorporate digital editing techniques, music, and other video clips by utilizing software provided by other companies. For example, my MacBook Pro came with iMovie software, which possesses the capabilities to record and import digital videos. iMovie also allows me to perform different editing tasks such as adding text, sound effects, transition effects, etc., all of which produce a better quality and more professional video. Producers do not need to have highly stylized and edited videos in order to be viewed often. Some of the most viewed videos are of a person talking to a camera. YouTube’s user-friendly and intuitive design invites simple users to become producers by giving them the ability to interact with other users by editing and creating their own media content. YouTube producers create content, and through content creation, producers invite participation, dialogue, and recirculation.

YouTube’s success can, in large part, be attributed to its user-friendly interface⁶ (from here on interface). Users do not need to sign into an account to view clips, and there is no need to worry about software compatibility or downloading files. Once the webpage loads, the video automatically begins to play.

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⁶ User interface is the means by which people interact with a machine, device, computer program, or other complex tool. The user interface provides a means of input or allows the user to manipulate the system.
The user interface on YouTube, represented in Figure 2, contains a scrollable sidebar of hyperlinked videos, which are search related. These videos might include videos posted by the same user, keyword related videos, and YouTube promoted videos. This mode of hyperlinking effectively replicates channel surfing. Through this interface, users can click from one clip to another without conducting multiple searches. Frequently, searches for an iconic or controversial

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7 A hyperlink is a reference point to a whole document or a specific element in a document that the reader can automatically access by clicking the link.
moment of television will yield multiple clips of the same content, with minor variations in
image quality, clip length, titling, keywords, or spellings. Deciding which clip among the batch
to view may depend upon clues such as the thumbnail image, clip length, or peer-review
popularity.

Almost three years have passed since I first stumbled across YouTube. In the time that
has gone by, I have deleted my MySpace account, but I have continued using YouTube.
YouTube has also changed since I first visited the site in 2006. At that time, YouTube was
nothing more than a video-sharing site that allowed users to archive and recirculate media
content, which was primarily duplicated from television. Now, YouTube is still a video-sharing
site, and users still archive and recirculate media content, but users can also annotate,
appropriate, and create content. In less than three years, YouTube has blurred the lines between
simple audiences and media producers. My experiences on YouTube reflect these changes.
CHAPTER I.

SITUATING AND CONTEXTUALIZING

Introduction: YouTube.com

In previous decades, cybertculture studies focused on typed text and how that text created identities that were often contradictory to a user’s offline life (Dibbell, 1993; Kendall, 1998, 2002; Nakamura, 2002; Turkle, 1997). These contradictory experiences were rooted in Gibson’s (1984) imaginings of how computers and modems could directly link to users’ brains, so they could participate in “consensual hallucination.” Then, over a decade later, Stone (1991) described how, “The body in question sits at a computer terminal somewhere, but the locus of sociality that would in an older dispensation be associated with this body goes on in a space which is quite irrelevant to it” (p. 43). These bodiless interactions give users the freedom to be able to choose and construct their virtual form(s) and identity(ies). On one occasion, a user might choose to be a tall, beautiful, Indian woman; on another s/he might wish to be a short, plain, Irish male. The ability to create and edit bodily forms in an online environment suggests a temporary escape from the physicality of the body. However, I argue that a more productive perspective would see the unraveling of gender and identity promoted by Haraway (1991) who placed it at the center of her cyberfeminist manifesto for cyborgs. Haraway’s evocation of the cyborg conjures images of a human/machine hybrid. Haraway constructs the cyborg as female or without gender, but never male. This post-gender vision discourages a utopian view where neither men nor women exist; rather it attempts to expose systems of power such as patriarchy (Gane & Haraway, 2006). The cyborg is positioned to identify political possibilities in developing consciousness, understanding oppression, and imagining futures. This construction

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8 I use “s/he” to illustrate that you can never truly know someone’s sex in an online textual environment.
promotes a materialization of complex social-technical relations where every thing and every body are involved in systems of communication and control. The constructedness of identity, gender, and even sex become apparent when talking about how they are unraveled in an online environment. The materialization of complex social-relations contrasts sharply with a perspective that envisions escaping the body.

A central tenet of Internet research has been about the convergence of online and offline identity and sociability in virtual spaces, such as multi-user dungeons (MUDs, adventure games), newsgroups, chat rooms, and blogs. The ways in which users have utilized these spaces to create identities and socialize with others have been one of the central themes about Internet usage (Gajjala, 2004; Gane & Haraway, 2006; Haraway, 1991; Kendall, 2002, 2007, 2008; Lange, 2007, 2008; Nakamura, 2002; Rheingold, 1993; Stone, 1991; Turkle, 1995). At the risk of oversimplification, this work suggests that within such spaces where occupants are anonymous and bodies and identities can be edited, the expectations and norms of behavior within everyday life become fluid and less restrictive. According to Turkle (1995),

Virtuality need not be a prison. It can be the raft, the ladder, the transitional space, the moratorium that is discarded after reaching greater freedom. We don’t have to reject life on the screen, but we don’t have to treat it as an alternative life either. We can use it as a space of growth. Having literally written out online personae into existence, we are in a position to be more aware of what we project into everyday life. (p. 212)

According to Turkle, virtuality or cyberspace gives users choices, and through these choices, the ability to know themselves in ways that were not previously thought possible in offline spaces. For instance, Gordon, a high school junior who did not “fit in” experimented with different personas on MUDs. He created different personas that had qualities he was trying to enhance in
offline life. One of his personas is described as being like him but, “. . . more effusive, more apt to be flowery and romantic. . . . A second character . . . is more self-confident and self-contained than the real life Gordon” (Turkle, 1995, p. 190). Gordon uses the personas on the MUDs to help heighten his sense of self as a work in progress. Turkle reports that Gordon feels that his online personas are helping him to enhance his offline self by giving him opportunities to play with and develop certain characteristics that he feels are lacking.

Recent studies of the Internet and cyberspace illustrate that users still try on new identities through the creation of personas that differ from their offline lives. Nakamura (n.d.) investigates the trend of identity tourism in cyberspace that enables users to try on different identities, such as men masquerading as women or an Anglo-Saxon playing an East Indian. The trying on and playing with these other exotic identities further promotes marginalization because the user simply discards these identities once they are finished role-playing. While trying to construct linkages between real and virtual identities, a tension exists between the conceptualization of an empty, free-for-all virtual social space and an approach that pays attention to the way embodied communication anchors and shapes interactions within the virtual landscape. Rather than visions of another “life-world” (Benedikt, 1991) occupied by users with multiple identities (Haraway, 1991), the Internet, for many, is a space to interrogate the creation of meaning and a site to articulate criticism aimed at breaking down hegemonic structures. For example, Nakamura (2002) explores how the “Internet propagates, disseminates, and commodifies images of race and racism” through “cybertyping” (p. 3). Nakamura explains that cybertyping is how the interactive process between the user and the interface brings the “cultural layer” of race to online environments, such as when options are given to identify race, gender, and sexuality in drop-down menus that are constructed through offline ideological constructs.
Kendall (2007) writes about animutation videos that serve as a critique to traditional constructions of hegemonic masculinity. She also explores how the posters of animutation videos create interpersonal relationships with others who share a desire to promote alternative views of masculinity that support not only femininity but also feminine versions of masculinity.

Now, with the affordability and accessibility of hardware, software, and other media production and dissemination tools, the nature of cyberspace has changed. Users are now becoming content producers through self and other re-presentation and re-production, which has led to being visually present and digitally embodied (Jenkins, 2006; Kendall, 2007, 2008; Lange, 2007, 2008).

The research questions that I am going to engage in this project are as follows:

1. How do such content producers become digitally embodied?
2. Can digital embodiment contain properties that are transferable to offline lives?
3. Does YouTube, a cyberspace rooted in visual representation, offer a space and a means of experience for people whose bodies and performances of gender are constantly influx?
4. Or, do the visual aspects of YouTube merely reinforce hegemonic notions of gender—specifically masculinity?

The major objective of my work is to explore digital environments, such as YouTube, as one of the technologically constituted layers of contemporary life in order to interpret the meaning-making practices and to identify the political implications of living online. I am specifically interested in the role the body plays at the intersection of the interface and an online community. In order to analyze critically YouTube and the role that the body plays in the re-presentation and re-production of gender, I focus on the production and performances of masculinity in YouTube videos produced by a transgendered community. Because these users
talk about their bodies being in a state of flux, I find this community to be an excellent source for
critical analysis.

YouTube.com, a video-sharing website, was launched in December 2005. As the
webpage itself explains, “YouTube allows people to easily upload and share video clips on
www.YouTube.com and across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email”
representative of the company’s philosophy, “Everyone can watch videos on YouTube. People
can see first-hand accounts of current events, find videos about their hobbies and interests, and
discover the quirky and unusual. As more people capture special moments on video, YouTube is
empowering them to become the broadcasters of tomorrow” (www.YouTube.com, 2008,
Company History). Now, four years its launch, YouTube has become an integral part of
American culture not only through an enormous web following, which is enhanced by
YouTube’s capability to embed and link its content to other websites, but also by videos “going
viral” and being referred to on/by television shows, radio shows, and news agencies. The
YouTube Fact Sheet includes the following as some of the site’s features:

- **Video embedding**: Users can insert a YouTube video into Facebook and MySpace
  accounts, blogs, or other Web sites where anyone can watch them.

- **Public or private videos**: Users can elect to broadcast their videos publicly or share
  them privately with friends and family upon upload.

- **Subscriptions**: Users are able to keep track of their favorite users’ new videos.

- **Quick Capture**: Users with a webcam and Flash software are able to instantly record
  video responses or normal videos onto the site rather than having to prerecord and
  then upload the video.
• TestTube: This is an area where YouTube engineers and developers conduct alpha
testing for new features in development. Users are encouraged to participate in the
development process and are welcome to evaluate the features. (www.YouTube.com,
2008, YouTube Fact Sheet)

With the explosion of affordable recording devices and editing software, more people are
transitioning from passive viewers of YouTube videos to active producers of content. YouTube
has become a place for people to communicate in new ways through video and has “…grown
into the world’s leading video community on the Internet” (www.YouTube.com, 2008, YouTube
Fact Sheet). In February 2008 (Sarno), the Los Angeles Times reported that 10 hours of new
video were uploaded every minute to YouTube.

YouTube has many different types of videos available. Some of the most common are
reposting clips of favorite movies, television shows, sporting events, etc.; quirky and often
comedic remixes of mainstream media; attempts at celebrity by creating outrageous videos akin
to spectacle in the hopes of going viral; and video blogs that are represented as online diaries
which often ask for audience comments. Most scholarly research on YouTube has focused on the
celebrity aspects. Lange (2007) has researched celebrity vloggers whose videos and online
personas have achieved a certain amount of fame. However, in this study, I focus on vlogging,
and the ways in which everyday producers are utilizing this method of communication. Vlogging
has a temporal nature to it. For the producer, it is a day-by-day interaction; however, because
vlogs are usually presented in reverse chronological order with the newest entries first and the
oldest last, users view the producers’ interactions as snippets of activity, which are temporally
located in the time that the user accesses the video, rather than at the time the video was created.
The time gap between when the producer uploaded the video and the time the viewer viewed the
video can distort the context of the video, and in the end, the producers’ intended meaning can be lost.

Users visit YouTube for a variety of reasons. Some users only watch videos; other users like to upload videos. Whatever their reasons, people that navigate to YouTube.com become members of the YouTube community, no matter if they are active or passive users. The videos that receive the most attention often cross the threshold leading from the Internet to mainstream culture. The popular and often publicized videos enter the mainstream media and/or become water-cooler fodder due to their bizarre, hilarious, or sensational content. Chris Crocker’s *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* vlog went viral overnight due to the spectacularly bizarre nature of his performance in which he lambasted the mainstream media as well as bloggers and vloggers for constantly attacking Britney Spears (Burgess & Green, 2009). The Hillary Clinton/1984 parody was the first controversial attack ad of the 2008 U.S. presidential election. In this ad, the creator reworked Apple’s famous Ridley Scott directed 1984 advertisement announcing the Macintosh with video clips of Hillary Rodham Clinton as Big Brother (Hilderbrand, 2007). The Hillary Clinton/1984 parody became an instant culture jamming⁹ classic and an unauthorized video plugging Barack Obama. One of the most popular and arguably the first YouTube star was Bree, better known as “lonelygirl15.” Her emotional post on July 4, 2006, where she discussed how troubles with her parents were getting in the way of a budding relationship drew half a million views in forty-eight hours (Burgess & Green, 2009). It was later learned that lonelygirl15 was a fictional character created by three aspiring screenwriters and an actor. The creators of lonelygirl15 sought to create a fictional soap opera. The initial success of lonelygirl15 and the

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⁹ Culture Jamming- “A term popularized by Mark Dery to refer to the efforts of grassroots organizations to insert ‘noise’ into the communication process by challenging or disrupting the corporate flow of media” (Jenkins, 2006).
later revelation that she was a fictitious character called into question the authenticity of video blogs in general (Hilderbrand, 2007). Not all YouTube users who upload videos are looking to become celebrities; in fact, due to the sheer number of videos uploaded daily, most YouTube videos will garner little attention and a relatively low number of views. Furthermore, the Internet, and YouTube in particular, is a search-oriented medium. Thus, it is becoming exceedingly rare for users to stumble across information they are not looking for or that is not already popular or featured somewhere else. When users do stumble across content they did not expect to find, it is usually the same content everyone else stumbles onto (Sarno, 2008).

Communication scholars (Burgess & Green, 2009; Hilderbrand, 2007; Lange, 2007, 2008) have begun to investigate YouTube as a site rich with communicative actions that may lend insight into the growing trends of vlogging and self-authorship. Although YouTube is most notably known as a video-sharing website, it is far more than a place where users can go if they missed the latest presidential candidate’s political advertisement or the site where you can find a video of Saddam Hussein’s execution. YouTube is a space where individual users and groups can create profiles, social networks, mash-up videos, and video blogs. YouTube is a space where users can interact, learn, and affect information and culture. Through video creation, video dissemination, and social networking, YouTube has become a prime site for investigating communicative action and the fluidity between authors and audiences.

Researchers such as Lange (2007, 2008) and Burgess and Green (2009) have been researching YouTube in an attempt to make sense of the site, which is fraught with discomfort by both corporate interests and community participants due to the uncertainty associated with the meaning and uses of YouTube. This uncertainty emerges from YouTube’s “multiple roles as a high-volume website, a broadcast platform, a media archive, and a social network” (Burgess &
Green, 2009). Lange (2007, 2008) studies how users utilized the various functions that YouTube offers, such as studying the text comments left by viewers (Lange, 2007). Lange (2008) also investigates how YouTube users create and manage social networks. She found that users are able to grant or restrict access to different parts of their profiles and to individual videos that they have posted. In both instances, Lange’s research focused on how users utilize the different functions on YouTube.

Burgess and Green’s (2009) book, *YouTube: Digital Media and Society* is a thorough investigation of YouTube. Burgess and Green (2009) set out to make sense of YouTube as an object of research. Their project is encapsulated by the fact that YouTube is an unstable object that is constantly in flux due to the changes in videos and organization, diversity of content, and the ways in which content is created and distributed or redistributed. For example, YouTube can be used to “make the products of commercial media widely popular” (Burgess and Green, 2008, p. 6). However, due to YouTube’s user-created content platform, challenges to commercial popular culture can emerge through, “user-created news services, or generic forms such as vlogging—which in turn might be appropriated and exploited by the traditional media industry” (Burgess and Green, 2009, p. 6). Unlike Lange’s work (2007, 2008), Burgess and Green (2009) are interested in the structure of YouTube and how it evolves as a media system.

The multi-functional interface provided on YouTube.com moves the site from a simple video-sharing site to communities built around “a feeling or sense of collectivity” (Jerkowski, 2002). YouTube users and producers create community(s) through what Fernback (2007) explains as processes of social solidarity, of production and consumption, and of collective experience and cultural meaning. YouTube users control and distribute content by watching, voting, commenting, networking, subscribing, and reposting videos. In this sense, users and
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producers form communities around videos through the processes of creating, (re)circulating, and commenting.

The Body in Cyberspace

Many studies of cyberculture include discussions of embodiment (Corey, 2007; Gunkel, 1998). These discussions present embodiment as the physical body that is a container, which then contains a spirit, principle, abstraction, or incarnation of something. This vague definition indicates a mind/body dualism rooted in Cartesian philosophies (Gunkel, 1998). This Cartesian split between the mind and the body indicates a possibility of disembodiment when living in cyberspace. For example, a white man could masquerade as an Asian female and possibly pass with this new identity. This instance of successfully passing as someone other than one’s self could then lead the white male to the conclusion that he knows what it means to be an Asian female. This passing or identity tourism (Nakamura, n. d., 2002) can lead to the proliferation of old stereotypes and the silencing of the nuanced experiences of individuals. The silencing of other voices has been the project of patriarchal strategies and privileged Western users for too long as a means of colonization. For this reason, I find it dangerous to believe that people can escape into a space where markers of identity, such as race and gender, do not exist. I argue that the lack of articulation, in regards to embodiment as a mind/body split, is a strategic move that recenters hegemonic structures, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.

The relationship between the body and cyberspace has been a heated debate for over a decade now. Whether these discussions were rooted in high philosophy or popular culture, cyberspace has been described as a space unrestrained by the corporeal, or in Gibson’s (1984) vernacular “meatspace” or the space where the meat of the body exists, the physical world. By
creating the cyberspace/meatspace binary, and through the use of technology, the mind can be freed from the meat of the body.

Haraway (1991) dispels the mind/body myth by providing a sampling of binaries that construct the social hierarchies of Western tradition: “self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, totality/partiality” (p. 177). These dualities are never situations of peaceful coexistence; rather, they constitute violent hierarchies. The mind/body split situates the mind to rule over the body. Gunkel (1998) explains that the mind is signified as a person’s essence and is a source of true identity. He further elaborates that the body in relationship to the mind is simply construed as a mere happenstance of biology and is “inessential to what the individual actually is” (Gunkel, 1998, p. 114). If this were true, then race, gender, age, able-bodiedness, etc. would merely be externalities that do not affect or belong to a person’s being. Such discourses concerning cyberculture that reproduce the mind/body binary operate within the same social and political hierarchies that exist in meatspace. Once again, individuals associated with the body, such as women, people of color, otherly-abled, etc., are restricted from participating and/or censured in the incorporeal realm of cyberspace through their invisibility (Gunkel, 1998).

Haraway (1991), Stone (1991), and Sunden (2001, 2003) take the feminist perspective of embodiment, which does not reinforce the Cartesian split through the destruction of the body. Rather, these scholars view the melding of the body and technology through the lens of the cyborg. The cyborg represents the joining of the biological and technological. Sunden (2001) proposes a “she-cyborg,” which claims that online worlds are not dislocated utopias where everything is possible. Instead, the she-cyborg becomes representative of a perspective that
“problematizes any simple real/virtual distinction, but does so in a sense that does not erase the meanings and matter of ‘sex.’ But neither the body, nor its sex, should in any sense be understood as something ‘natural’” (Sunden, 2001). Along with the cyborg and the birth of the she-cyborg, the erasure of the body is no longer attainable because the body can never truly disappear. For instance, a male user who inscribes masculinity through typing cannot be the same as a female user who inscribes masculinity because the kind of body inscribed upon makes a difference to the emerging meaning and functioning of gender. This difference is rooted within not only how another user reads the inscribed body, but also how the user who is producing the inscription understands what it means to be masculine and feminine.

The body is a construct that emerges out of discourses (Butler, 1990a, 1993; Foucault, 1975/1995; Haraway, 1991). However, bodily practices have a physical reality that can never be fully assimilated into mere discourse. Embodiment is a result of cultural practices that take into account variations of class, gender, race, and able-bodiedness (among others), which allow certain discourses to spread through society. The body serves as a feedback mechanism between discourse, ideas, concepts, ideologies, and materiality (Nayar, 2004). In conjunction with the body, Nayar (2004) explains the body as “the specific experience in a locality, time and culture. It has its abnormalities, variations and particularities, which are seen as abnormal, varied and particular because of the ‘presence’ of the ‘normative body’” (p. 221). Embodiment is also, therefore, performative and subject to individual improvisations.

Hayles (1993) offers a more articulate version of body and embodiment. She writes that the relationship between the body and information technologies points to the emergence of a new postmodern subjectivity that is “constituted by the crossing of the materiality of informatics with the immateriality of information” (Hayles, 1993, p. 149). The body for Hayles is then always
normative and relative to a set of criteria that is naturalized within a culture. Embodiment is then contextual and embedded within the specifics of place, time, physiology, and culture that together comprise enactment. Embodiment never exactly coincides with the body and is always to some extent improvisational. Whereas the body is an idealized form in a shared reality, embodiment is the excesses and the deficiencies that follow when there is an idealized form. It is through this articulation of the tensions between the body and embodiment that it becomes possible to combat hegemonic cultural constructs. Hayles (2006) clarifies these possibilities by explaining that what we make and what (we think) we are co-evolve together. This formulation reincorporates cultural beliefs and practices as a part of the co-evolutionary dynamic between technologies and humans. This co-evolutionary dynamic leads to the understanding that technology is rooted in the same cultural signifiers that are present in meatspace, rather than as some utopian view that is void of markers of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.

Since this study focuses on the communication practices located at the intersections of online and offline environments, I rely on what is referred to as ethnography of cyberspace or cyberethnography (Gajjala, 2002, 2004, 2009; Gajjala & Altman, 2006). Methodologically speaking, a cyberethnographic approach is built on the performative nature of identity using technology in technologically mediated environments. Cyberethnography emphasizes that a researcher becomes involved in learning by doing in the technologically mediated environment he or she wishes to study. This methodology directs the researcher to engage in practices of everyday life at the computer interface and participate in as many aspects of the cybercultural phenomenon as possible. Cyberethnography as a methodology allows me to live on YouTube by engaging in the same everyday performative practices that other YouTube users do, such as creating and posting videos for other users to watch and comment on. By focusing specifically
on performances of counter-hegemonic masculinities, I will demonstrate how masculinity is produced and embodied in a digitally mediated context. I will also argue that digitally mediated embodiment produces agency by more clearly articulating the process that leads to embodiment and exposing the power structures that maintain hegemonic practices.

The sheer volumes of videos that are uploaded every day make YouTube and imposing site for research. For this reason, I conducted a specific search for videos that had been tagged with the term “masculinity.” To tag content is a practice employed by the author of the content in an attempt to create, manage, and categorize content. Tagging creates a folksonomy that group’s related content or content a creator wishes to be grouped with his/her content. A YouTube search for the keyword “masculinity” yielded a result of 1,170 videos. I further narrowed this search down by searching for “masculinity vlogs,” which yielded eight results. One result of my search led me to Jace’s channel. As a YouTube producer, Jace is transgendered and transitioning from female to male. Jace uses the vlogs on his channel to document his transition, and each vlog entry dealt specifically with masculinity, embodiment, and cyberculture. In the fall of 2008, Jace had over 20 vlogs uploaded for public viewing. Through the tag cloud on Jace’s channel, I found MighTMenFTM, a transgendered collaboration channel.

The MighTMenFTM channel is an “all transguy colab[oration] channel representing four countries and guys in all stages of transition” (www.youtube.com/user/MighTMenFTM, 2008). Each week there is a topic of discussion that relates to being transgender and/or transitioning. Weekly discussion topics such as “What makes a man a man?” are chosen from emails sent to the channel by viewers. During that week, each day two vloggers produce and upload videos responding to the discussion topic. On average, the channel has seven vloggers. Each vlogger is

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10 Tag Cloud--All of the tags used by a creator.
assigned a day of the week (Monday-Friday), and then they produce and upload their video responses on those days. In May 2009, the MighTMenFTM channel had 31 weeks worth of videos. In this dissertation, I analyze the videos and the comments from the MighTMenFTM channel. I also include discussion from some of the other female to male transgender vloggers that I found while locating the MighTMenFTM channel. All of these YouTube producers produce content that directly or indirectly embody counter-hegemonic masculinity. The textual and visual aspects of these vlogs and the interaction that they incur provide rich data to analyze masculinities and embodiment in cyberculture.

In 1993, Rheingold wrote, “because we cannot see one another in cyberspace, gender, age, national origin, and physical appearance are not apparent unless a person wants to make such characteristics public” (p. 26). That myth for the most part has been discarded. After all, critical cyberculture studies approach cultural difference not as an afterthought or footnote for future study, but rather as a topic at the forefront, informing research questions, methods, and findings.

Through this dissertation, I wish to enter conversations about how the body and the computer’s interface affect communication. By investigating how female-to-male transgendered users produce themselves in a visual online environment, I explore the gaps created between the body, the interface, and embodiment in an online space. It is these gaps that present critical spaces for communication scholars to investigate what effect communicative properties of Internet technologies have on gender, and more specifically on masculinity.

Theoretical Overview

Queer theory is based around the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who a person is. In other words, it is meaningless to talk in general about _gay men_ or any other
group because identities consist of so many elements that assuming people can be seen collectively based on one shared characteristic is illogical. Broadly speaking, queer theory contests categorizations of gender and sexuality by exploring the social, cultural, and political agendas enforced through the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire. More to the point, queer theory exposes the constructedness of heterosexuality, which was once normalized through its categorization as the normative sexuality while all other sexualities were categorized as deviant. While queer theorists are often interested in same-sex dynamics, other common queer topics include cross-dressing, intersexuality, gender ambiguity, and the performance of gender. As a critical project, queer theory locates and exploits the incoherencies in those terms that stabilize heterosexuality, such as sex, gender, and sexuality. Queer theory demonstrates the impossibility of any “natural” sexuality by calling into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as “man” and “woman” (Jagose, 1996).

Queer theory’s debunking of stable sexes, genders, and sexualities develops out of a specifically lesbian and gay reworking of identity in the presence of multiple and unstable positions. Teresa de Lauretis (1991), the theorist often credited with launching the term “queer theory,” abandoned it almost three years later on the grounds that it had become politically innocuous because it was co-opted by the very mainstream forces and institutions that it was designed to resist. One possible instance of this co-option is whether or not a generic masculinity may be reinstalled at the foundation of the gender-neutral queer.

Though de Lauretis has been disillusioned by the term “queer,” it retains a conceptually unique potential as a necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation. Butler (1993) argues that what makes queer so useful is the ways in which it understands that the effects of its interventions are not singular and therefore cannot be anticipated in advance. Butler understands
that the conservative effects of identity classifications lie in their abilities to naturalize themselves as self-evident descriptive categories. The term “queer” must be conceived as a category in constant formation (Halperin, 1995).

Deployment of the term “queer” indicates a resistance to political interventions of naming and categorization through the promotion of a non-identity. Researchers using queer theory do not argue for liberal pluralism as much as the negotiation of the very concept of identity (Warner, 2002). Queer becomes a response to the perceived limitations of the identity-conscious gay and lesbian movements. Notions of identity are predominantly structured around self-recognition, community, and shared identity. The mobilization of the term “queer” was enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are arbitrary, contingent, and ideologically motivated.

Unlike those identity categories labeled “lesbian” or “gay,” the category of queer developed from the theorizing of often-unexamined constraints in traditional identity politics (Jagose, 1996). Queer, as an identity category, has no interest in consolidating or even stabilizing itself. Rather queer maintains its critique of identity-focused movements by illustrating that even the formation of its own coalitional and negotiated groups may well result in exclusionary and reifying effects in excess of those intended.

As a critique of identity, queer cannot be imagined outside the realm of problems energized by identity politics. Instead, queer must remain fluid and unfixed in order to be an effective analytical tool. The deployment and critique of queer foregrounds the conditions of political representations. Perhaps it would be more beneficial not to look at queer as in opposition to identity politics but rather to represent it as continuously interrogating both the preconditions of identity and its effects. In other words, it turns identity inside out and reveals its supports.
Taking the queer subject online creates an interesting amalgam because cyber(space) and queer are reputed to have a lack of specificity. The cyberqueer (Morton, 1995; Wakeford, 1997) points to the relationship between sexuality and space, where space is taken to be the arena accessible by computer-mediated interactions. Cyberqueer spaces are framed as new places within which lesbian, gay, transgender, or queer experiences can take place with a particular focus on the advantages compared to real physically located space. Mainstream cyberspace has often been promoted as creating virtual communities and cyberqueer spaces may compensate for the social or geographical isolation of sexual minorities by operating as a medium through which contacts can be more easily facilitated. The existence of the cyberqueer reconstitutes space through points of resistance against the dominant assumption of the normality of heterosexuality.

The cyberqueer is representative of a subject position that is fluid, or subjectless. Stone (2001) writes that in cyberspace “the transgendered body is the natural body. The nets are spaces of transformation, identity factories in which bodies are meaning making machines, and transgender—identity as performance, as play, as wrench in the smooth gears of the social apparatus of vision—is the ground state” (p. 180). Entering cyberspace blurs the boundaries between the body and gender due to the plethora of possibilities available to the user through the joining of the real and the imagined. The new space of cyberspace has become important as a contextual feature for the creation of new versions of the self. Cyberspace affords the cyberqueer choices, which are not available in everyday meatspace. The cyberqueer has the ability to bypass otherwise heterosexual spaces if they choose. Likewise, the cyberqueer also has the ability to remain virtually anonymous or virtually public if they choose. In the case of YouTube, producers and users alike are able to control which information other users may access. The producers on MighTMenFTM have made a choice to have their videos made available to the public. The
ability for the cyberqueer to make a choice and demonstrate control indicates that coming-out online has transformed the notion of what it means to be queer.

Through a discussion of Butler (1990a, 1993, 2004) and Foucault (1972/1971, 1988, 1990/1976, 1995/1975), I will argue that the ideology of a socially constructed self limits individual agency by recentering hegemonic practices through a lack of articulation and freedom. These limitations of social construction direct individuals to use pre-existing materials and/or hegemonic structures to construct identity. My intention is to propose a discourse based on the production of self, which allows for a different and more useful articulation of agency. The discursive properties of production promote a state of invention that influences creativity and counter-hegemonic practices.

In this dissertation, I investigate YouTube as a site that not only gives voice to individuals but also as a site where users create and perform identities. The analysis that follows will illustrate that producers and users go through an authenticating process that leads to embodiment. The authenticating process reveals that the produced self materializes through editing, adapting, and perfecting identity performances. These produced performances reveal that cyberspace is not the dialectic of real life; rather cyberspace is a condition of real life.

Finally, it is my intention to dissect the dichotomous relationship between cyberspace and real life by showing their interconnectivity. Haraway (1991) takes as her focus the binaries of human and animal, organism and machine, and the physical and nonphysical. Her aim is to invoke the imagery of the cyborg, a creature that is a melding of dualisms. By creating the cyborg, Haraway offers new ways of thinking about the relationships between humans and technology. The cyborg provokes an image that melds the biological and the technological. In
the same regard, YouTube creates a space that combines the technological, the textual, the body, and the embodied.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 begins with complementary literature regarding cyberspace and technology, which situates the foundation of this dissertation squarely within the communicative study of cyberculture. Then, the incorporation of masculinity in cyberspace is introduced through the discussion of literature surrounding gender performance, hegemonic masculinity, and masculinity in cyberspace.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology I used for studying users and producers on YouTube. The main methodological structure that I used was that of cyberethnography, which is not only concerned with where the study takes place but how it is conducted as well. When studying an online environment it becomes important to not only record and comment on what has been witnessed, but to also explain what it is like to be living in that online environment. To more clearly understand and to add a critical lens to my study of YouTube and the transgendered community that I studied, I employed an epistemology of doing introduced by Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman (2007). Through cyberethnography and an epistemology of doing, I was able to explain what I was doing, how I was doing it, and why it was important to do.

Chapter 4 begins my analysis of the MighTMenFTM channel through an analysis of videos and the textual comments that followed those videos. In this chapter, I probe questions surrounding the production of masculinity in cyberspace when the body, or at least part of the body, is visible. The questions surrounding the visible body then lead to the interrogation of hegemonic structures of masculinity and sexuality.
Chapters 5 builds off the analysis of traditional productions of masculinity presented in Chapter 4 and incorporate discussions of how the MighTMenFTM producers challenge hegemonic constructions of masculinity. The purpose of this chapter is to make visible and critique the tensions that exist between the reproductions of hegemonic masculinity and the vloggers attempts to subvert those same power structures.

In Chapter 6, I summarize the findings of this study in relation to the research questions I posed earlier in this chapter. I summarize and reflect on the theoretical and methodological implications of studying masculinities on YouTube through a transgendered collaborative channel. Here I also expand on possible future research regarding online environments and the study of masculinities. Finally, I reiterate why it is important for communication scholars to study online environments and be productively engaged in discussions of what these new environments mean for our field.
CHAPTER II.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cyberculture

In this chapter, I join the conversations of scholars from the third generation of cyber studies, such as Silver’s (2000; Silver & Massanari, 2006) and Bell’s (2001) chronology, and review theories of technology and culture (Nayar, 2004; Slack & Wise, 2005). These scholars situate my theoretical framework squarely within the realm of performing in everyday life. I review scholarship (Dibbell, 1993; Kendall, 1998, 2002, 2007, 2008) that highlights researchers who have lived in cyberspace(s) and have been a part of cyberculture(s). Finally, I review Connell’s (1982, 1983, 1987, 2005) conceptions of hegemonic masculinity and then locate studies (Kendall, 2002, 2007, 2008; Nayar, 2004; Nixon, 1992) of masculinities within the context of cyberspace.

When talking about cyberculture, it is necessary to begin with at least one story of origin. Cyberculture’s origin begins in cyberspace. Science fiction writer William Gibson first coined the term “cyberspace” in his 1984 novel Neuromancer. In Neuromancer, cyberspace is defined or described as:

A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts…A graphic representation of data abstracted from every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding… (p. 69; all ellipses in original)

Gibson’s description of cyberspace points to locations between urban space and data space. This description of cyberspace, which emerged from popular culture, has shaped the way that the
world has approached the topic for decades. Other early descriptions of cyberspace, such as that offered by Benedikt (1991), emphasized its technological characteristics and define it as “a globally networked computer-sustained, computer-accessed, and computer generated, multidimensional, artificial or ‘virtual reality’” (p. 122). Lipert (1996) called it “an abstraction of the computer” (p. x). Barnes (1996) described it as “the territory of digital information” and a “hyperdimensional realm that we enter through technology” (p. 194). As considerations of the medium came more into focus, emphasis shifted to descriptions of sensory worlds and experiential environments (Steur, 1995) as well as attention to aesthetic and compositional characteristics (Barbatsis, 1999; Rheingold, 1993; Zachman, 1992).

David Silver (2000) has provided an overview of the field that he identifies as “cyberculture studies.” He argues that cyberculture studies have moved through three generations. The first generation he describes as popular cyberculture, consisting of descriptive journalism often found in newspapers and magazines using the Internet as a frontier metaphor. The second generation known as cyberculture studies, was more academic in nature and focused mainly on virtual communities and online identities. The third generation that Silver writes about is critical cybercultural studies, characterized by the study of and intersection of online interactions, digital discourses, Internet access, and interface design. Later, in an edited volume, Silver and Massanari (2006) explain critical cyberculture studies are not limited to the study of the Internet but “…a critical approach to new media and the contexts that shape and inform them” (p. 6). They further elaborate that critical cyberculture, like cultural studies, “strives to locate its object of study within various overlapping contexts, including capitalism, consumerism and commodification, cultural difference, and the militarization of everyday life” (p. 6). Silver’s (2000) overview of the three generations of cyberculture studies, as well as his definition of
critical cyberculture studies, situates YouTube as a rich site for academic study. YouTube users create and maintain online identities and virtual communities through textual and audio/visual discourses, as well as by utilizing the networking and search functions. YouTube users live at the intersection of technology, culture, and everyday life, all of which are rooted in capitalism, consumerism and commodification, cultural difference, and militarization.

In their primer, *Culture and Technology*, Slack and Wise (2005) make a distinction between technology and culture, and technological culture. These distinctions are important to the understanding of what cyberculture is and how it fits into broader cultural views. They estimate the most common meaning of technology in popular culture conceives technologies as “constructed and useful thing[s]” (Slack & Wise, 2005, p. 97). For example, computers, cell phones, televisions, and iPods are physical objects with practical applications. These things are part of everyday life and exist in culture as machines, artifacts, and instruments. The tendency to consider technology in terms of “thingness” accumulates a series of stories or theories, including those of progress, convenience, and determinism (Slack & Wise, 2005). The stories of progress and convenience suggest that each technology takes life forward and makes it easier, while the stories of determinism discuss how people create tools and artifacts that inspire users by technical properties. In the technological variant of determinism, technology guides, shapes, and influences culture. Users become dependent on these machines and tools, which lead to technologies becoming self-sustaining and functioning continuously throughout the day. This dependence appears to make life more convenient and progressive. Machines have essential inherent capacities that result from linear development, application of scientific method, and modifications in previous generations of machines (Grint & Woolgar, 1995). With this view on machines, determinists assume that new technologies develop autonomously and independently.
without reference to culture and become a primary cause or key factor of transformations in
culture and human behaviors. Such changes happen because “each new technology creates a new
potential for human thought, expression, or activity” (Murphy & Potts, 2003, p. 13). As a result,
enthusiasts celebrate the latest generation of technologies praising instant connectivity and global
access. On the other side, pessimists express fear for the loss of traditions and increased risks for
individual citizens.

Slack and Wise (2005) state that they base their conceptions of technological culture
around Raymond Williams’ (1989) notions that “culture is a whole way of life” and “culture is
ordinary.” First, culture, as a whole way of life, is tradition. Culture is the ideas, meanings,
values, and artifacts handed down from generation to generation, and passed on through families
and other social institutions. Culture is also the work of selection, whereby tradition is
reconfigured in the historical conditions of everyday life and everyday change. If culture is a
whole way of life, then it illustrates the process of meaning making at a particular point in time.
To claim, “culture is ordinary” is to acknowledge that cultural processes occur within the variety
of practices that constitute everyday life (Williams, 1989). These practices include the whole
range of activities within which people make meanings in their lives, from everyday expressions
and practices such as conversations over dinner or checking email, to institutional structures and
activities such as the structures of education and the practice of designing a technology for public
consumption. Building off Williams’ (1989) conception of culture as “a whole way of life” and
“ordinary,” Slack and Wise (2005) infer that culture is a process that includes artifacts such as
technologies.

From the perspective of Slack and Wise (2005), technologies are integral to culture, not
separate from it, and thus it makes more sense to talk about technological culture rather than
technology and culture. Technological culture invites users and critics to take a cultural studies approach to the investigation of technology and culture. Technological culture also provides a framework that integrates technology into the concept of culture rather than separating them from one another.

What then of cyberculture? Setting up a distinction between cyberspace and cyberculture is a false dichotomy. Bell (2001) writes, “Cyberspace is always cyberculture, in that we cannot separate cyberspace from its cultural contexts” (p. 6). Nayar (2004) explains that cyberculture is often used to refer to Information Technology (IT), Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and specifically the use of Internet technologies. Nayar then expands the definition of cyberculture to include living in an “information society” where information is central to production, consumption, politics, and everyday life. Cyberculture, then, is about everyday life in an information society that relies on information and information technologies (Nayar, 2004). YouTube is an example of information technology, and the emphasis on everyday life in an information society is the focus of this study. The purpose of YouTube is to allow users to produce, consume, and disseminate information. Users accomplish this by incorporating cyberculture into their daily lives.

Building upon (Bell, 2001; Nayar, 2004; Slack & Wise, 2005) conceptions of cyberculture and cyberspace, it becomes necessary to explain them in relation to meatspace. Everyday life operates within specific spaces. Foucault (1986) describes external space as “The space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us, is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space” (Foucault, 1986, p. 23). These spaces do not exist in a void; rather, they exist in historically, temporally, and relationally situated contexts. Space is often described in
relation to a physical place and how one physical place is situated relationally to another place. For example, passing through different spaces situates how I get from school to my house. In this case, I move from inside to outside, in a car, and through neighborhoods until I arrive at school. School and my house represent the physical places, while inside, outside, in a car, and through neighborhoods represent the spaces that I go through in order to arrive at the place. Cluster relations also describe space, thus allowing space to be described via its relation to other spaces. An example of cluster relations would be sites (places) of punishment—prisons, the principle’s office, and the corner (for a child who has been placed in a timeout), et cetera. However, there are other kinds of spaces: “[Spaces] that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect. These spaces as it were, which are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites, are of two main types” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). The first space that Foucault describes as having curious properties are utopias. Utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces that do not exist in any real space because they present society itself in a perfected form. The second type of space that Foucault (1986) writes about is heterotopias. Heterotopias are real spaces that may enact a kind of utopia by being simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Heterotopias are unlike ordinary cultural spaces, but they are connected to those ordinary cultural spaces. In the simplest forms, heterotopias are counter-sites that reflect reality through the convergence of all other real spaces present in a society. Foucault (1986) classifies heterotopias into two main categories “crisis heterotopias” (p. 24) and “heterotopias of deviation” (p. 25).

Crisis heterotopias are privileged, sacred, or forbidden places that are reserved for individuals who are in a state of crisis in relation to society and the human environment in which
they live. States of crisis might include: “adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc.” (Foucault, 1986, p. 24). Examples of heterotopias of crisis then would be, “boarding school,” or “military service for young men” where sexual virility begins to manifest (p. 24). In the nineteenth-century, for adolescents’ sexual virility was expected to take occur in places other than the family home. Foucault describes that for women, until the middle of the twentieth century, there was a tradition called the “honeymoon trip.” Since a young woman could lose her virginity “nowhere” the moment of its occurrence in the honeymoon hotel was indeed the place of nowhere (p. 25).

Foucault (1986) posits that heterotopias of crisis are being replaced with heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of deviation are spaces such as “rest homes and psychiatric hospitals, and of course prisons” (p. 25). These represent spaces where individuals are placed when their behaviors deviate from the required norms of a society. Foucault further explains that retirement homes could be considered on the borderline between heterotopias of crisis and the heterotopia of deviation, since old age is a crisis, but idleness in society is a deviation.

Cyberspace constitutes a heterotopia in that it exists within the realm of the everyday, where everyday practices are enacted in spaces that reflect their everydayness in ways that challenge normative assumptions about society and culture. Thinking of cyberspace as a heterotopia will help to link cyberspace to meatspace. It will also be useful in linking happenings in cyberspace to actions and consequences in meatspace. Because YouTube is based on recording and redistributing videos, oftentimes of users’ everyday lives, YouTube can be thought of as a museum, which is “capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites which are incompatible” (Foucault, 1986, p. 25). A museum is a single structure that houses many objects and scenes from the past. A single museum can contain scenes of dinosaurs,
gladiators, and automobiles. While each scene is from a different time, they are reflected through their convergence in the present structure of a museum.

For the viewers of videos, YouTube operates in the same way that the museum does. The videos are uploaded, archived, and available for viewing at any time from one centrally located space. For example, I can sit in a coffee shop and watch a video of Chase, a young trans man, confessing that he only performs his male identity from the safety of his home. Chase has created a type of heterotopia by (re)presenting himself on YouTube and by confessing that he is only “Chase” on YouTube. Conversely, YouTube for Chase sits on the border of a heterotopia of crisis and deviation. Being transgendered in this society is often thought of and presented as a psychological or medical crisis. However, YouTube could also be considered a heterotopia of deviation for Chase because he can (re)present himself as male in an environment that is both safe for him and safe for society. YouTube’s lack of physicality allows Chase to perform as if he were “nowhere.” YouTube also imprisons Chase by placing him “nowhere” which keeps him from performing in a deviant manner in meatspace.

Living in Cyberculture(s)

In the late 19th century, “Citizens in western cultures conceived of communities in a recurrent sense; place based social interaction, collective value systems, and shared symbol systems create a normative structure typified by organic traditions, collective rituals, fellowship and consensus building” (Fernback, 2007, p. 50). Cohen (1985), Etzioni (1995), and Fernbeck (2007) hold a view of community that is less place-based and more process oriented. For these scholars, community includes “. . . processes of social solidarity, material processes of production and consumption, law making and symbolic processes of collective experience, and cultural meaning” (Fernback, 2007, p. 50). These diverse perspectives on communal existence
portray a construction of community that has evolved given the proliferation of online communication technologies. Jerkowski (2002) investigates the relationship between community and new media, stating, “It is safe to say that the concept of community is as central to present-day studies of the Internet as it was during the earlier years of sociology. The main difference seems to be redirection of emphasis from geographic place to a feeling or sense of collectivity” (p. 37). The shift from a located space “to a feeling or sense of collectivity” (Jerkowski, 2007) is important in discussions of cybertecture because to be part of a culture is to be a part of others.

One of the earliest renderings of cybertecture is the MUD or Multi-User Dungeon (Kendall, 2002). MUDs, first created in the 1970s, are online text-based adventure games similar to a Dungeons & Dragons-type game. Typical MUDs are text-driven, where players read descriptions of rooms, objects, events, other characters, and computer-controlled creatures. Players then interact with each other and the virtual world by typing commands (Kendall, 2002).

Later incarnations of MUDs are MOOs, or MUD Object Oriented. A MOO is an online text-based environment to which multiple users are connected at the same time. The term MOO refers either to those programs descended from the original MOO server or to any MUD that uses object-oriented techniques to organize its database of objects. In other words, a MOO is a MUD; the most distinguishing feature of a MOO is that its users can program or create interactive objects within the server, ultimately expanding and changing how the server behaves. Examples of such programming changes include creating new rooms and objects, creating new generic objects for others to use, and changing the way the MOO interface operates (Kendall, 2002; Turkle, 1995).

Dibbell (1993) has written about being a participant on LambdaMOO, one of the oldest and most popular MOOs. LambdaMOO takes place in and around a mansion. For example, when
users log onto LambdaMOO, they enter through the coat closet, then navigate through the mansion either through inside rooms such as the living room or outside locations such as the beach or the hot tub (http://lambdamoo.info/#maps). Dibbell (1993) recounted a story about sexual violence committed by another LambdaMOO user called “Mr. Bungle.” The crime takes place in the LambdaMOO mansion living room, on a Monday night, in March, at about 10 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. The living room represents a communal space among the LambdaMOO residents and is described by Kendall (2002) as more of a town square. The public nature of this space explains how sexual violence in the form of rape occurred in a world constructed completely of words and having no actual physicality. On LambdaMOO, there are no physical bodies; there is only text to be read.

The cyber-rape performed by Mr. Bungle occurred when he ran a “voodoo doll” subprogram, which allowed him to have control over the actions of other LambdaMOO characters. He made “legba eat his/her own pubic hair,” and he “caused Starsinger to violate herself with a piece of kitchen cutlery” (Dibbell, 1993, ¶ 7). These attacks continued for several hours until someone summoned Zippy, a LambdaMOO veteran with special programming skills. Zippy fired his gun, “a gun that didn’t kill but enveloped its targets in a cage impermeable even to a voodoo doll’s powers,” effectively ending the attacks and reign of terror (Dibbell, 1993, ¶ 7).

The textual rape committed by Mr. Bungle may have only occurred on a screen through words, but his victims were deeply affected. Even those who were charged with the task of deciding what to do with Mr. Bungle were affected. In the end, the users of LambdaMOO asked that the master programmers erase Mr. Bungle from the MOO. In essence, Mr. Bungle was executed. Because of the Bungle affair, the LambdaMOO creator changed the structure of the community from a tribal system, where only master programmers could make decisions, to a
democratic society where users could affect change through voting. A system of petitions and ballots was created so anyone could ask for a popular vote that would require a master programmer for its implementation. Through this new system, programmers were required to comply with the majority result of any item brought to a popular vote (Dibbell, 1993). This democratic schema is operating on LambdaMOO today.

The above description of LambdaMOO serves as an orientation to cyberculture and the precarious positionality of the body sitting at the computer interface and the embodied user that exists in cyberspace. A woman in Seattle whose MOO character “exu” fell victim to Mr. Bungle explains that after the attack she posted a message to MOO’s public mailing list calling for Mr. Bungle to be punished. The woman in Seattle confides months later that as she wrote the words to that public post “posttraumatic tears were streaming down her face” (Dibbell, 1993, ¶ 14). Though the facts of the Bungle case exist in the environment of a MUD, and the lines of the virtual and the real world are neatly separate, the experience and meanings behind lines of text exist in the gap, as exu’s tears demonstrate, between the real world and cyberspace. The story of Mr. Bungle’s crimes and how they affected individual users and the LambdaMOO community as a whole point to the fact that the interactions and experiences had in cyberspace are inseparable from meatspace.

Nakamura (n.d.) echoes Dibbell’s (1993) findings in her essay “Race In/For Cyberspace: Identity Tourism and Racial Passing on the Internet.” Nakamura is interested in how race is written in cyberspace, specifically focusing on LambdaMOO. Nakamura states, “The technology of the Internet offers its participants unprecedented possibilities for communicating with each other in real time, and for controlling the conditions of their own self-representations in ways impossible in face to face interaction” (Nakamura, n.d., ¶ 1). In other words, the textual nature of
cyberspace offers the ability to defer distinctions and imbalances of power by performing their bodies as text. These textual performances make it possible to “computer crossdress” (Stone, 1995) and represent oneself as a different gender, race, age, class, sexual orientation, etc. On LambdaMOO, there are four gender options for each player to choose from, but the player must choose their gender from one of the predetermined categories in order to participate. Race, on the other hand, does not need to be articulated in order to participate. Users can write their own racial description if they choose. Nakamura (n. d.) investigates how users author and react to descriptions of race on LambdaMOO. Nakamura notes that, “While everyone is ’passing,’ some forms of racial passing are condoned and practiced since they do not threaten the integrity of the national sense of self which is defined as white” (¶ 3). The power dynamics that reside in social categories such as race continue in cyberspaces such as LambdaMoo. Unarticulated racial identities are assumed to be white partly because of the demographic of Internet users; “most are white, male, highly educated, and middle class” (¶ 6). Additionally, the utopian view of the Internet would claim that the MOO should regulate racial discourse in the interest of social harmony. Racial role-playing is permitted when it fits within familiar discourses of racial stereotyping.

While text-based programs such as LambdaMOO have dominated much of the scholarly research surrounding the Internet, people increasingly express themselves online through various non-textual media. Online multimedia communication occurs through personal webpages (Killoran, 2003; Papacharissi, 2002), webcams (Jimroglou, 1999), and video blogs (Young, 2007). Kendall (2007, 2008) takes up the challenge to study amateur video creation as interpersonal conversation. Kendall focuses her research on animutationportal.com. Animutation is a video genre that mostly takes the form of music videos; music is often selected from
children’s television shows in languages other than English. The lyrics of these songs are textually mistranslated into English sound-alike’s, resulting in silly lyrics. Animutations always include images from popular culture. These images are then animated in a deliberately crude style, similar to the television show *South Park*, and are then often altered to enhance the humor of the video. Finally, animutations always reference other animutations, using an extensive common palate of repeated images. It is the repetition of form and content that Kendall argues makes this genre of videos function as a form of persistent conversation. For those outside of the animutation subculture, the videos seem to be purely entertaining, but for those within the subculture, each video represents part of an ongoing conversation.

The literature reviewed to this point explains the communicative complexity, inseparability, and sociability of cyberculture and meatspace. To understand how human/machine interactions continue to permeate contemporary culture a brief review of what it means to social network is needed.

**Social Network Sites**

Social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, MySpace, Cyworld, and YouTube have attracted millions of users, many of who have integrated these sites into their daily practices. SNSs utilize a variety of technologies and software to support their users’ interests and practices. While most sites support the maintenance of preexisting social networks, others help strangers connect based on common interests, location, or activities. Some sites cater to diverse audiences, while others attract people based on commonalities, such as shared racial, sexual, and national identities. Sites also vary in the extent to which they incorporate new information and communication tools, such as mobile connectivity, blogging, and photo/video sharing.
Social network sites have become hotbeds for academic research, and boyd and Ellison have become leading scholars in this area of study, laying the foundations for continued work in this area. boyd and Ellison (2008)

…define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. (p. 211)

boyd and Ellison are careful to clarify that “social networking sites,” often the preferred vernacular, are quite different from their social network sites:

While we use the term “social network site” to describe this phenomenon, the term “social networking site” also appears in public discourse, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. We chose not to employ the term “networking” for two reasons: emphasis and scope. “Networking,” emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. While networking is possible on these sites, it is not the primary practice on many of them, nor is it what differentiates them from other forms of computer-mediated communication, and while networking is possible on these sites it is not the primary use. What makes SNSs unique is that they enable users to articulate and publish their social networks. (2008, p. 511)

Not all cyberspace researchers agree with boyd and Ellison’s idea that a definitive distinction between “social network sites” and “social networking sites” is useful.
Beer (2008) critiques boyd and Ellison’s urge to create a broad term, such as “social network sites,” that pushes researchers away from a more differentiated classification of new online cultures:

Social networking sites, in the narrower sense, can then be differentiated from other related but different web applications like YouTube, where, picking up on boyd and Ellison’s own argument, making and accumulating friendship connections is not the sole focus of activity. YouTube could be categorized as a folksonomy for instance. (p. 519)

Beer’s articulation of what he interprets as a problem in studying SNSs stems from concerns that social network sites as they are defined is a mutation of Web 2.0. Beer argues that it would be easier to use social networking sites as a subcategory of Web 2.0, rather than creating new terms to replace already existing ones.

Beer (2008) points out that according to boyd and Ellison’s (2008) definition of SNS’s, YouTube would not be included because the primary purpose or use of YouTube is video sharing. However, YouTube users are given the opportunity to create and/or publish networks of friends. I do not believe that YouTube users only publish preexisting social networks to the extent that users of sites like MySpace and Facebook do, but I do think that there are some preexisting social networks present. Due to the primary purpose of video sharing, most users engage in some type of social networking. More clearly stated, users probably network together with other users, who in most cases they do not know.

The research that I have conducted on YouTube indicates that YouTube can be considered a social networking site or a social network site. The distinctions that boyd and Ellison (2008) outline are not simply relegated to the intended use of the site, but rather how users utilize the tools that the site offers them. In many cases, YouTube users connect with and
friend other users who they previously knew. This would fall under boyd and Ellison’s definition of a social network site. On the other hand, many users friend and subscribe to other user’s channels based on their liking of the videos that they post. In this instance, YouTube would fall under a social networking site. In the case of the transgendered channel that I am researching, the users sought each other out to make connections and form relationships based on the common experience of being transgendered. Once these initial relationships were established and they created their collaborative channel, users from preexisting friends’ lists began to merge making YouTube both a social networking site and a social network site.

The users of MighTMenFTM forged strong bonds and friendships through common experiences with gender and difference. The videos that I analyze focus on what it means to be, live, and perform the masculine. The following section details the literature that I used to analyze the users’ gender performances.

Wo/Men and Cyborgs

In this section, I outline Butler’s (1990a; 1993) critique of gender and her notion of performativity. Coupling Butler’s performativity of gender with Haraway’s (1991) cyborg illustrates how categories of sex and gender are negotiated in very similar ways whether they are in online environments or offline environments. Through the melding of technology and flesh, the cyborg represents the conscious extensions of performativity that create subjectivities.

Butler (1990a, 1993) conceives of gender performativity as the process by which subjects are compelled by a diffuse power structure to reiterate idealized norms in order to become more intelligible. For Butler, there is no prediscursive subject, only subjects whose gender identities are performative and socially constructed in and through the repetition of already given signs and norms. Gender performativity is a “compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for the
reason of fully determining” because within the reference of the norm exists the possibility for slippage, for variation from the norm, that might enable a subversion of identity (Butler, 1993, p. 231). As Butler (1990a) posits, this signification takes place through the compulsion to repeat “agency,” which leads to the possibility of variations of that repetition. Butler’s (1990a, 1993) deployment of gender performance and performativity directs attention to the constructed and arbitrary roles of wo/men.

In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler clarifies her definition of performativity, so it is not misunderstood to be a daily choice. She reemphasizes the importance of repetition and goes on to say that performativity is the repetition and reiteration of a norm or set of norms. This more specific definition leads to a regulatory definition of performativity. She articulates that the body should be thought of as matter, thus conjuring images of solidness and preciseness. It is through this matter that the body materializes and comes into being. She goes on to say that the accumulation of culture is at once the matter that makes up bodies, and it is also what makes those bodies matter. Butler offers a view that shows how gendered beings are socially constructed. Butler’s description of social construction provides the subject with a limited amount of agency by deploying terms such as “materiality” and “performativity.” The problem that arises from the use of these terms is that they are contained within the normative culture, hence, rewarding the status quo while punishing the *other*.

Studying identity has become an extremely messy endeavor because of the tenuous and dichotomous relationship between the individual and society. To embody an identity suggests the accumulation of culture. This dictates that embodiment is at most a rearticulation of hegemony and, at least, a component of it. Because of the relationships between bodies and society, the
critical gaze that has been directed to the performance of every day lives should include cyberspace and the performances that happen as part of the same critical inquiry.

The physical body is discursively marked by the social constructions of gender, ethnicity, size, etc. In addition to these constructions, the body is constantly haunted by specters of tradition, historicity, and naturalness. The matter of bodies is at once physical and metaphysical, much as Butler (1993) writes

The body posited as prior to the sign, is always posited or signified as prior. The signification produces as an effect of its own procedure the very body that it nevertheless and simultaneously claims to discover as that which precedes its own action. If the body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification, then the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue performative, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. (p. 30)

By destabilizing the materiality of the body, Butler has pushed us to think about the constructedness of the sexed and gendered body and what that means. Through this destabilization, Butler creates a possible space in which bodies, and more specifically the materiality of bodies, no longer dictate the course of existence. In this sense, the relationship between nature and culture has been reversed. The body is no longer a site that creates culture but rather the site on which culture is applied and gender is one way that society applies culture to the body.

Gender is constructed through interactions. It does not exist alone because there must be something to measure itself against and react to. This interaction between the flesh of being and
other beings brings us to a crossroads; gender is always recognized through its relation to other bodies. In these terms, gender is a social construct, and as a social construct, relations of power exist. Patriarchal power forms the basis on which gender power resides. Patriarchy is “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general” (Lerner, 1986, p. 239). Trujillo (1991) comments, “Traditionally, such patriarchal representations include males as ‘breadwinners,’ ‘family protectors,’ and ‘strong father figures’ whereas females are ‘houseswives,’ ‘sexual objects,’ and ‘nurturing mothers’” (p. 291). However, patriarchy is not simply a system of men’s power over women but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and differentiated through multiple masculinities (Kaufman, 1994). Hierarchies of patriarchal power within masculinities include categories such as: gay masculinities, black masculinities, blue-collar masculinities, etc. Patriarchal power does not simply lie in the biological formation of maleness, but rather in the social construction of masculinity that is based on categories such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, and able bodiedness. The system of patriarchy continually constructs us no matter what gendered subjective positions we hold.

In Gender Trouble, Butler asks, “What kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilizes the naturalized categories of identity and desire?” (1990a, p. 130). In that work, and later in Bodies That Matter (1993), she suggests that drag, as a form of gender parody, does not necessarily call normative, naturalized gender into question, but rather that the disruptive possibility of such actions “depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered” (Butler, 1990a, p. 139). Viewing masculinity through a performative lens allows the critical scholar to see what Halberstam (1998) theorizes as “‘kinging,’ or performing nonperformativity” (p. 259). Halberstam (1998)
goes on to say, “To ‘king’ a role can involve a number of different modes, including understatement, hyperbole, and layering” (p. 259).

Understatement as a mode describes a performer’s attempt to minimize performativity. Halberstam uses the example of when a drag king demonstrates his reluctance to perform. The appearance of shyness and the non-theatrical are in effect a performance of masculinity and a strategy to naturalize it. Hyperbole is finding the exact form of masculinity that is already exaggerated and duplicating it. Halberstam (1998) uses Drag King Murray Hill’s performance of the older, fatter Elvis Presley to describe hyperbole; in essence, Murray is performing, “Elvis playing Elvis” (p. 259). The naturalized performance of masculinity lends itself nicely to the masculine hyperbole because it imitates itself and its naturalness making the constructedness and artificiality visible through its own design. Layering is the final mode that Halberstam offers us. Layering is when a drag king performs a recognizable persona, like Elvis, but the drag king’s femaleness is also apparent. This layering of the theatrical and the real reveals both the performer’s queerness and again the constructedness of conventional gender roles (Halberstam, 1998).

Butler (1990a, 1993) theorizes that gender is a set of learned behaviors that has been passed down through culture. She also theorizes that culture, through norms, regulates our performances of gender. She states that Foucault (1990/1976) is ambiguous about the precise character of regulatory practices that produce the category of sex, and Wittig (1981) attributes the category of sex to reproduction and compulsory heterosexuality. Compulsory heterosexuality marks sex as a binary that results in the consolidation of the terms of sex, gender, and desire in an attempt to restrict the production of identities along the axis of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1990a; Wittig, 1981).
Through her deployment of the term “performativity,” Butler has been able to theorize new ways of thinking about gender and sex. In fact, sex and gender have been denaturalized and are now recognized as being discursively created. Haraway’s (1991) cyborg functions as a willing and conscious extension of the performative. Joining the performative with the figuration of the cyborg illustrates the cyborg’s ability to negotiate with its immediate environment and shape it through the material practices it engages.

“A Cyborg Manifesto,” Haraway’s (1991) foundational essay, builds an ironic political myth about “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction,” a creature “simultaneously animal and machine” (p. 149). The cyborg makes possible three crucial boundary breakdowns characteristic of modern episteme: between human and animal, between animal-human (organism) and machine, and between physical and non-physical. Haraway’s manifesto blurs the lines between reality and fiction, or in the case of this study, cyberspace and meatspace.

The cyborg myth grows from socialist feminism, left movements, biology, literature, and philosophy as well as militarism, patriarchal capitalism, state socialism, high technology, scientific cultures, colonialism, and wars (Gane & Haraway, 2006; Haraway, 1991, 1992). These locations position the cyborg to identify political possibilities in developing consciousness, understanding oppression, and imagining futures. Haraway strategically conceives of the cyborg as female or without gender but never male. The cyborg makes visible that which is invisible. Haraway’s cyborg evokes the female experience, yet with a disclaimer that nothing binds women naturally. The cyborg represents the complex relationships between the social and the technological where every thing and every body are involved in the systems of communication and control. Using colorful metaphors and referring to multiple meanings, Haraway relies on the
trophe of women to point to the immaterial and material consequences of power, civilization, and mobility that force women (and cyborgs as well) to struggle for survival. To fantasize about post-gender means to long for the world that “has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity” (Haraway, 1991, p. 150). In this way, Haraway breaks the opposition between nature and culture. Haraway’s (1991) manifest suggests that the assumptions about a variety of social categories – gender, race, class – reconstruct nature in such a way that they support the dominant hierarchies based on social differences.

Haraway (1991) critically investigates the worldliness of technoscience and explores accountability, responsibility, pleasure, work, and play involved and emerging in cyberculture. Her use of the cyborg enables a critical reading of the mundane everydayness of cyberculture and technology. The image of the cyborg lessens the gap between nature and culture, and in so doing, also exposes how cyberculture is created through discourses of difference rooted in the natural/cultural dichotomy or in Haraway’s terms “organism/machine.” Cyberculture is then rooted in the same hegemonic structures that are experienced away from the interface. However, at the interface, users are able to make visible those structures that are typically invisible. By typing or creating the self at the interface, users are able to create selves that challenge cultural hierarchies, and in so doing, they can take that knowledge and apply it to the realm of meatspace.

Computer Cross-Dressing and Transgendering

Online performances of gender, whether construed as a masquerade or a serious and realistic performance, may or may not be parody. In either case, they are probably less likely than offline parodies to “drastically call into question the gender system of dominant culture as a fixed binary” (Poster, 1995, p. 31). The electronic medium that makes gender masquerade
possible and conceivable for a wider range of people also enables both the masqueraders and their audiences to interpret these performances in ways that distance themselves from a critique of gender. A significant limitation of the medium directs online participants to interpret online gender performances, whether masquerade or not as only performance, not as an actual possible way of being.

Within cyberculture studies, the notion of cross-dressing has been used largely as a metaphor for thinking through multiple forms of identity performance. The term “computer cross-dressing” was coined by Stone (1991) to describe the notorious case of Julie. In 1982, a New York psychiatrist named Sanford Lewin opened a CompuServe account. In many online contexts, it is appropriate to choose a name different from one’s real name, often referred to as a “handle” or “screen name.” For his handle, Lewin chose Doctor in reference to his profession. Not long after Lewin opened his account, he was involved in a conversation in a public chat room with a woman. Both Lewin and the woman decided to take their chat to a private mode where participants can only receive the chat typed from invited individuals. After a few minutes of conversation in private mode, Lewin realized that the conversation was much different than any he had ever had because of its depth and openness. Lewin soon realized that the woman thought that he was a female psychiatrist, and he attributed the nature of this conversation to his perceived identity. Lewin claimed that if women were able to let down their defenses and hear what they needed to hear from another woman, then this could be an opportunity for a psychiatrist to do a lot of good (Stone, 1991, 2001).

After this surprising conversation, Lewin began to create an online persona named Julie. He needed a persona that others would want to talk to, but he also needed the persona to only be available online in order to keep her true identity secret. He created Julie; a neuropsychologist,
who had been involved in a drunk driving accident that had killed her boyfriend, paralyzed her, rendered her mute, disfigured her face, and had in general embittered her. Julie flourished on CompuServe, and she gained many friends. In the end, it was not the inconsistencies that outted Julie as an imposter, but rather how real she seemed to the other participants. In the end, it was the other disabled women on CompuServe that pegged Julie as a fraud. They knew the real difficulties, both personal and interpersonal, of being disabled. The way Julie referred to herself as “differently-abled” and described how she was reentering her life was a signal to the disabled women on CompuServe that Julie was not who she said she was (Stone, 1991, 2001).

Elsewhere, computer cross-dressing has been mobilized as a means of thinking through precisely the ways in which cyberspace might be experienced as threatening. Perhaps the most well known example of this is provided by Nakamura’s (n. d.) influential essay, “Race In/For Cyberspace.” For Nakamura, “computer cross-dressing” is a form of “identity tourism,” which exemplifies the way in which online gaming provides “scenarios for the fantasies of privileged individuals.” “It is commonly known,” she says, “that the relative dearth of women in cyberspace results in a great deal of ‘computer cross-dressing,’ or ‘men masquerading as women’” (Nakamura, n. d.). The problem with computer cross-dressing as identity tourism is that users who take on the persona of an otherwise marginalized person can shed that persona at any time. In effect, these identity tourists can actually be said to be furthering the marginalization of others because they are using them as play, never challenging hegemonic practices, and simply deleting characters when they are done with them.

As illustrated by Stone (1991, 2001) and Nakamura (n. d.), cross-dressing has been used with theories of virtual subjectivity. Cross-dressing refers to any gendered practice that might be considered deceptive. Privileged groups such as white men frequently use cross-dressing as a
form of identity play in which their goal is to pass as other. This type of identity play does not disrupt or trouble privilege; rather it propagates misogynistic, heterosexist, and racist notions of identity. The desire to pass “involves the construction of gendered and racialized identities that, while they may fail, are intended to convince” (Ferreday & Lock, 2007, p. 156). Passing assumes an onlooker whose gaze is able to verify or deny the performance. Though I agree that passing is an important skill for those who are marginalized to possess for their survival, I also acknowledge that passing is another way to colonize those who are marginalized and to convince to conform to societal rules and hierarchies of power and privilege.

Both Stone (1991, 2001) and Nakamura’s (n. d.) accounts of computer cross-dressing signify cyberspace as a privileged space where computer cross-dressing and identity play only take place online. A more useful way to think about cyberspace and computer cross-dressing is to acknowledge that individuals do partake in identity play in the offline world, and the offline identity play is often either a result of online computer cross-dressing or a precursor to computer cross-dressing (Nakamura, n. d.; Stone, 1991, 2001).

To think about computer cross-dressing as identity play that is both online and offline life creates a gap in which otherwise marginalized people can resist that marginalization. For example, the transmen on YouTube engage in identity play by performing their transgendered subjectivities for the viewers of their videos. These performances on YouTube not only challenge the male/female gender dichotomy, but also open up a space for transmen to talk about being transgendered.

The term “transgender” is an umbrella term that encompasses manifestations for people who feel unlike their biological sex. A transgender individual may have characteristics that are normally associated with a particular gender, but identify elsewhere on the gender continuum, or
exist outside of it as other. To be transgender refers to an individual whose identity does not conform unambiguously to the conventional notions of male or female roles, but combines and moves between them. Transgender can also mean people who were assigned a sex, usually at birth based on their genitals, but who feel that this is a false or incomplete description of their selves. Finally, transgender can be a non-identification with, or non-presentation of, the sex (and assumed gender) one was assigned at birth.

Boswell (1997) explains, “Transgender has to do with reinventing and realizing oneself more fully outside of the current systems of gender” (p. 54). Ekins and King (1999) use “transgendering to refer BOTH to the idea of moving across (transferring) from one pre-existing gender category to the other (either temporarily or permanently), AND to the idea of transcending or living ‘beyond gender’ altogether” (p. 581-582). The conceptualization of transgendering includes male femaling and femaling male, as well as those who transgender themselves and those who transgender others. For Ekins and King (1999), transgendering is a conscious performance of gender that does not adhere to categories of sex, gender, and desire; instead, it attempts to break-free of these regulatory categories.

In recent years, literature concerning transgender subjects focuses on stories, which are in Stone’s (1991) words “disruptive to the accepted discourses of gender” (295). Bornstein’s (1994) Gender Outlaw challenges commonsense assumptions about what it means to be a man or a woman by advocating for “gender fluidity,” which is “the ability to freely and knowingly become one or many of a limitless number of genders for any length of time, at any rate of change. Gender fluidity recognizes no borders or rules of gender” (p. 52). In similar ways, Feinberg’s (1996) Transgender Warriors mixes personal experiences with current gender theories and transgender politics.
With the introduction of gender performances, there must also be an introduction to the relations of power that construct the foundation of society. The following section outlines a brief description of Foucault’s work that is centered on the construction of subjectivity and how human beings are made to be subjects (1972/1971, 1990/1976, 1995/1975).

Social Production

In the “Afterword” of Dreyfus and Rainbow’s (1983) *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Foucault wrote that his goal for the last twenty years has not been to analyze the phenomena of power or its foundations; “My objective, instead, has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects” (p. 208). Much of Foucault’s (1972/1971, 1990/1976, 1995/1975) work centers on subjectivity and how discourses create and maintain that subjectivity. Foucault (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1983) talks about three modes of objectification that transform human beings into subjects. These modes are dispersed throughout his body of work (1972/1971, 1990/1976, 1995/1975).

The first mode is represented by “scientific classification” (1972/1971), whereby the subject is subjugated through the objective thinking of sciences. Through scientific classification, the sex binary is born. Classifying the body into two distinct sexes regulates not only what bodily configurations are acceptable but also the variances in how those bodies are used. “Dividing practices” (1995/1975), the second mode of objectification, happens when the subject is divided within one’s self or divided from others, usually through the practices of medicalization, stigmatization, and normalization. Building upon scientific classifications, dividing practices represents the modes of control that are enacted, all of which are built around criminalizing anything that is different or nonnormative. The third mode that Foucault writes about is that of subjectification (1990/1976). Foucault’s subjectification is concerned with how
the human being turns him or herself into a subject. Foucault chose to investigate subjectification through the lens of sexuality; “how men have learned to recognize themselves as subjects of ‘sexuality’” (Dreyfus & Rainbow, 1983). Subjectification is central to individual actors understanding how the previous two typifications construct a subject’s reality. Through Foucault’s notion of subjectivity, individual actors now govern themselves in accordance to a social matrix that moves power from the hands of the sovereign to a disciplinary-based system. It is this third mode, subjectification that significantly impacts the research in this dissertation and the study of cyberculture.

Foucault’s conceptual analysis of a major shift in Western cultural practices, from sovereign power to disciplinary power, in Discipline and Punish (1995/1975), demonstrates his method for understanding. He charts the transition from a top-down form of social control in the form of physical coercion that is dispersed through the sovereign to a more diffuse and insidious form of social surveillance and process of normalization. Foucault’s analysis of Bentham’s seventeenth century architectural plans for an all-seeing or “panoptic” prison encapsulates Foucault’s notions of social surveillance and the process of normalization. Foucault describes the panopticon as a nineteenth century prison system in which prison cells are arranged around a central watchtower. From this watchtower, the supervisor is able to view the inmates, yet the inmates are never certain when they are being watched. Due this uncertainty, the inmates police their own behaviors. In other words, the panopticon refers to a form of power that works through the observation and surveillance of the many by the few, and where the few (those in power) are often not visible. According to Foucault, this modern form of power is quite different from the classic form of power in the spectacle. In the spectacle of public punishments, for example, the many observe the few, and this observation is meant to control the masses. The panopticon has
become the metaphor for the processes whereby disciplinary technologies, together with the emergence of a normative social science police both the mind and the body of the modern individual. The theoretical foundation that the panopticon builds is of control that delivers power through subjectification of the prisoner. The watchtower supervisor is the external authority figure, and the presence or even the possible presence controls the prisoners’ behaviors. Cyberspace operates in many of the same ways as the panopticon. However, a discussion of a modern panopticon will need to take place because in many instances human beings not only expect to be under surveillance but demand it.

Inspired by Mathiesen’s (1997) critique of Foucault (1995/1975), Bauman (1988), Fiske (1993), and Levin (1997) argue that in opposition to Foucault’s panoptic arrangement of prisoners encircling the central guard tower, media technologies are more aptly defined by a “synoptic” relationship where the many now watch the few (Elmer, 2003). For example, Fiske (1993) points to the football as a “reverse panopticon,” wherein the power to individuate, segment, and control gives way to fan power, knowledge, and pleasure. However, as a specific critique of the Foucaultian panopticon, the synoptic argument assumes that the panopticism derives from the corporeal surveillance, in other words that one literally watches the many. For Foucault, the disciplinary power of the panoptic prison does not reside in the watcher or the central prison guard; it stems from the architectural arrangement that suggests panoptic surveillance to the prisoners (Elmer, 2003). As a media critique, the synoptic model is seemingly biased towards spectatorship. A far more productive envisioning would be how panopticism and synopticism work in concert with one another.

I argue that YouTube operates both under panoptic and synoptic views. YouTube, as a system, operates through panopticism. The most telling way that this occurs is when the system
flags videos for potentially violating copyright laws. Through complex algorithms and employees acting as gatekeepers, YouTube functions as a single system that controls the actions of many. On the other hand, the synopticon becomes visible through watching, subscribing, reposting, and commenting on videos. Producers are rewarded through fame and acknowledgement when their videos garner a high number of views. The popularity of a single video equates to that producer having more power to affect information and knowledge than a producer whose video was only seen by a few. Additionally, a popular producer’s comments on other videos are more coveted than those of an unknown producer. This represents a reciprocal relationship between the one and the many. The many have the power to elevate or deem inconsequential any single producer, thus invoking a system of control similar to that of public executions. YouTube producers watch others’ videos to see what the masses like and then replicate the methods of production. In a culture based on spectacle, the most popular videos are often the bizarre and quirky such as Chris Crocker’s *LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!* or the lonelygirl15 hoax.

A central premise to Foucault’s (1995/1975) work on the panopticon revolves around how to exert control over the masses with a limited amount of resources. This control is exerted through hegemonic ideological formations. To the casual observer, hegemony appears as a rigid system guarded by thick walls entrenched in tradition and stability. Hegemonic formations endure the test of time by expanding, appropriating, and incorporating not only those who are subservient to its laws, but also those, which are subversive. By accommodating and incorporating that which would be seen as subversive, hegemony maintains its powerful hold. Hegemonic masculinity is a key ideological formation, and in the following section, I outline that formation.
Hegemonic Masculinity

Men’s Studies was created to provide a way for men to interrogate patriarchy through establishing men’s subjective experiences, thereby displacing the supposed objectives that have universalized, and empowered men (Brod, 1994). By interrogating and sharing the nuances of men’s experiences, we have begun to destabilize what has been presented as universal objective knowledge. However, by uncovering men’s subjectivity and placing it at the loci of inquiry, it appears that hegemonic masculinity is attempting to maintain itself, and through this maintenance, negative attitudes towards effeminate men, gay men, and women are once again growing.

Studies of masculinity as well as feminist scholarship coalesce around the need to mark masculinity and men as gendered subjects. In particular, scholars challenge the invisibility of dominant masculinities, since all forms of masculinity do not garner similar privilege. The term “hegemonic masculinity” has come to capture the socially constructed, institutionalized yet shifting form of masculine identity that systematically dominates femininities and alternative masculinities (Connell, 1983, 1983, 1987, 1995, 2005). As Connell (1990) defined it, hegemonic masculinity is “the culturally idealized form of masculine character” (p. 83) which emphasizes “the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness” as well as “the subordination of women” and “the marginalization of gay men” (p. 94). Connell argued that such an idealized form of masculinity becomes hegemonic when it is widely accepted in a culture and when that acceptance reinforces the dominant gender ideology of the culture.

According to Connell (1987), the task of “being a man” involves taking on and negotiating “hegemonic masculinity.” Men’s identity strategies are constituted through their complicit or resistant stance to prescribed dominant masculine styles. Connell’s (1987) analysis
of this process of identification is an anti-essentialist one. He argues that masculine characters
are not given. Rather, a range of possible styles and personae emerge from the gender regimes
found in different cultures and historical periods. Among the possible ways to be masculine,
some are more valued than others, and it is with these that men must engage.

depiction of the wars of positions and maneuver characteristics of social formations. Hegemonic
ideologies preserve, legitimate, and naturalize the interests of the powerful, marginalizing and
subordinating the claims of other groups. Hegemony is not automatic, but it involves contest and
constant struggle. Connell (2005) indicates that hegemonic masculinity defines itself in
opposition to other “subordinated masculinities” and in contradistinction from some model
(whether real or imaginary) of femininity. Through the definition of opposition, hegemonic
masculinity encompasses that which might reveal cracks in the integrity of the structure. This has
been and still is the reason for the subordination of women, gay men, and femininity.

Connell (2005) argues that hegemonic masculinity as a unit of analysis provides a
number of advantages for the critical scholar. First, the study of hegemonic masculinity points to
the constructedness of masculinity, which makes patriarchal dominance visible through the
processes of constructing masculinity. Second, the study of hegemonic masculinity is interested
in the deep analysis of the problematics of masculine gender power. Finally, hegemonic
masculinity notes the relevance of relations between men, as well as relations between men and
women. Brod (1994) warns against the urge to create separate gender spheres because the
analysis of masculinities should include both women and men in relation to other men. Brod
goes on to say that the cure is not in abandoning the concepts of gender but in taking a relational
approach to the topic of gender.
Hegemonic masculinity is not without its critics. Some find Connell’s account of the processes involved in the social and psychological reproduction of hegemonic masculinity to be sketchy. Martin (1998) and Edley (1999) criticize Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity by saying that it fails to specify what conformity to hegemonic masculinity actually looks like. Holter (1997, 2003) contends that hegemonic masculinity reifies the masculine by constructing masculine power from the direct experience of women. Wetherell and Edley (1999) state that hegemonic masculinity should understand the hegemonic norms as defining a subject position in discourse that is taken up strategically by men in certain circumstances. Finally, Demetriou (2001) contends that because hegemonic masculinity appropriates whatever appears to be useful from other masculinities, it should be considered within the historical context in which it occurs.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) counter by saying that ambiguity in the gender process is important to recognizing mechanisms of hegemony. Further, they argue that hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a description of real men. Hegemonic masculinity is not a personality type or an actual male character. Rather, hegemonic masculinity should be thought of as an ideal or set of prescriptive social norms, symbolically represented.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) believe the term “hegemonic masculinity” has endured the test of twenty years pretty well. However, they do believe that over the past twenty years, one specific idea needs to be rejected. In Gender and Power, Connell (1987) attempted to locate all patterns of masculinity in a single pattern of power and global dominance of men over women. Connell now believes that this approach needs to be abandoned because it treats hegemonic masculinity as a fixed character type and that is not what was originally intended.

A few other reformulations that Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) believe are necessary include a more holistic understanding of gender hierarchies. To do this, they believe that there is
a need to recognize the agency of subordinated groups as much as the power of the dominant groups. Second, they call for the need of a geography of masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt posit that the local might represent face-to-face interactions, such as those at work and family. Regional could then be thought of as the cultural level or the nation state, and global could be represented as the transnational areas such as world politics, international business, and the export/import of media.

A third area of expansion, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest, is that of social embodiment. They call for more studies of the body, which consider bodies to be both objects and agents of social practices. Messner’s (1992) study in which he described the bodies of athletes as weapons and Trujillo’s (1991) examination of Nolan Ryan’s embodiment of hegemonic masculinity serve as foundational examples of what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) are calling for. Another theorist interested in social embodiment is Judith Halberstam (1998), who examines other ways to use bodies as well as ways to create the self in productive and meaningful ways. Halberstam examines embodiment and masculinity through the description of drag king performances. Halberstam explains how a female’s body can enact masculinity, which pushes the boundaries of how to think about masculinity in terms of what it is and how it operates.

Within the field of communication, scholars have become increasingly interested in examining examples of mediated hegemonic masculinity (e.g., Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Atkinson & Calafell, 2009; King, 2009; Lindgren & Lelieve, 2009; Trujillo, 1991). Trujillo (1991) describes hegemonic masculinity as a cultural or idealized masculinity that filters itself into the common sense of a society. Through the media representations of major league pitcher Nolan Ryan, Trujillo further names five features of hegemonic masculinity: “(1) physical force
and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality” (p. 291).

Trujillo (1991) explains how mediated representations of Ryan contained the five features of hegemonic masculinity as he chronicles the force with which Ryan was able to throw a baseball, and later in his career, how he was able to gain control over that force, thus fulfilling the first feature of hegemonic masculinity. Ryan succeeded in occupational achievement through athletic dominance, which for a pitcher equates to no-hitters and strikeouts. Third, the media reaffirmed hegemonic representations of Ryan through his relationship with his wife, Ruth Ryan. “Predictably, the media chose to present Nolan as the breadwinner” and emphasized his relationship with his sons (p. 298). Due to Ryan’s upbringing in rural Texas, he was often referred to as a baseball cowboy. Trujillo recounts the story of when Ryan was matched up against fastball pitcher Roger Clemens of the Boston Red Sox. A CNN sportscaster described the match-up as “The Shootout at the O.K. Corral in the lone star state” (p. 299). This description of Ryan firmly situates him within the American myth of the frontiersman. Finally, through the representations of husband and father, Ryan’s heterosexuality was confirmed. Ryan’s representation “as a wholesome, monogamous, heterosexual, white man,” thus making him a “safe sex symbol” is much safer for male sportswriters to comment on than “white playboys, black beasts, gay blades, and other alternative images” (p. 302). Through his critique of Ryan, Trujillo was able to demonstrate the ways in which Ryan embodied each of the five features of hegemonic masculinity.

Other communication scholars have followed in Trujillo’s steps. Atkinson and Calafell (2009) explain how in George Lucas’s Star Wars films Anakin Skywalker, who becomes Darth Vader, exhibits each of the five characteristics of hegemonic masculinity that Trujillo (1991)
outlined. However, Atkinson and Calafell (2009) incorporate a sixth characteristic of hegemonic masculinity as the “avoidance of responsibility through gray areas” (p. 2). Atkinson and Calafell explain the gray area as “the nebulous and confusing space where responsibility for inappropriate actions becomes tangled and lost,” and it is within that nexus that “oppressive practices such as exploitation and sexual harassment are most dangerous and visible” (pp. 3-4).

Ashcraft and Flores (2000) focus on the film *Fight Club*, which criticizes how “the corporate world and all its trappings—bureaucratic sedation, materialism, isolation, deception, and the crushing presence of things feminine—as a force that kills men” (p. 10). The only way that the men in the film can regain their masculinity and escape being “slave with white collars” is to fight to regain control. The critical impetus for Ashcraft and Flores (2000) is that professional masculinity (white-collar men) is in a state of crisis. They further posit that the discourse surrounding the crisis of masculinity for white-collar men closely resembles other historical discourses of threatened masculinity. They argue that the ongoing patterns of conflict surrounding white-collar men point to potential vulnerabilities in patriarchal capitalism. However, the fact that masculinity, specifically white-collar masculinity, is continually in crisis implies that hegemonic masculinity is in a constant state of flux. I would argue that this state of flux is because hegemonic masculinity does not articulate a single monolithic ideal but a complex matrix from which multiple masculinities can emerge—often from the same body (Ashcraft & Flores, 2000; Brod, 1994; Connell, 2005; King, 2009).

Communication research interested in mediated examples of hegemonic masculinity is also present in cyberculture studies. The performance of gender and masculinity is just as relevant in cyberspace as it is in meatspace. However, due to its infinite boundaries, cyberspace
does present some obstacles and possibilities when it comes to both performing and reading gender, particularly that of hegemonic masculinity.

Masculinity and Cyberspace

In a cyberfeminist critique of Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), Nixon (1992) points out the nefarious gendering of the Internet that takes place through the labels of “hackers” and “console cowboys.” The label “console cowboy” represents a gendering of new technologies, which denotes that men explore and conquer through doing or possibly penetrating. The matrix (the Internet), on the other hand, is always configured as feminine space as “the word ‘matrix’ originates in the Latin ‘mater’ meaning mother, womb, or something within which something else originates, or develops” (Nayar, 2004, p. 288). Through a critical reading of *Neuromancer*, Nixon demonstrates the sexism of images such as the cowboy “penetrating” the matrix or “jacking in.” Gibson describes the matrix as having a life of its own; however, this life is born from the women who configured the matrix with the desire for unification. The introduction of this desire is treated as viral software that is transformed into the feminine *Other*. This narrative, stemming from the cyberpunk genre, supports the premise that cyberspace is gendered and representative of the procreative heterosexual mythos; men jack in while women give birth.

The work on gender and cyberculture has been prolific. In particular, a considerable body of research focuses on the norms of gender behavior and their application to online interactions, especially on MOOs/MUDs. Researchers suggest that gender switching can lead to greater understanding of gender as constructed and of the self as mutable (Bruckman, 1994; Turkle, 2005). Other reports are more critical and view power inequality based on gender. Kendall (1998), Paasonen (2002), O’Brien (1999), and other scholars argue that online identities continue to carry rigidly delineated expectations of offline reality. They suggest that the act of switching
genders online seems to cross gender boundaries, yet it does not blur those boundaries; instead, it strengthens them. Gender identity enacted online relies on a greater degree of stereotypical and essentialized notions of identity than in more fluid offline interactions.

Kendall (2002) lived on and investigated a MUD known as BlueSky. To interpret BlueSky’s social environment, Kendall uses the metaphor of a pub (or bar). Kendall states that while not everyone may be familiar with an online chat space, everyone is familiar with the neighborhood bar or pub, whether they have been to one personally or through representations of them on television. The pub metaphor also conveys the social relationships that are negotiated on BlueSky, as well as a space where participants “enact and negotiate masculine identities within a particular class and race context” (Kendall, 2002, p. 4).

This negotiation along with the performance of specific masculinities occurs through interactions with others. As Messerschmidt (1993) points out, “Masculinity is never static or a finished product. Rather, men construct masculinities in specific social situations” (p. 31). Segal (1990) defines masculinity: “As it is represented in our culture, ‘masculinity’ is a quality of being which is always incomplete, and which is equally based on a social as a psychic reality. It exists in the various forms of power men ideally possess: The power to assert control over women, over other men, over their own bodies, over machines and technology” (p. 123). Kendall (2002) hypothesizes that the power over technology, on BlueSky for example, represents the most salient instances of masculine power. Kendall observes that many of the conversations on BlueSky revolve around the use of the computer. Users discuss new software, planned purchases, and technical advice, all of which reinforce a group identity centered on computer technology. BlueSky participants enact a form of masculinity congruent with computer culture, itself a largely masculine domain (Turkle, 1984, 1988; Ullman, 1995; Wright, 1996). Wright (1996)
discusses the particular style of masculinity in both engineering and computer culture as “requiring aggressive displays of technical self-confidence and hands-on ability for success, defining professional competence in hegemonically masculine terms and devaluing the gender characteristics of women” (p. 86).

In her research on animutation videos, Kendall (2007, 2008) analyzes the ways in which the videos frequently include themes relating to gender. These themes often include “playful and ironic representations of masculinities, but also more negative depictions of gay male characters” (Kendall, 2008, p. 210). The rare appearance of female characters in the videos reveal the difficulties involved for young men in discussing gender. The two most common types of animutation characters are the effeminate or feminized male as well as the childish characters or those characters from children’s media; all of which “represent identities that must be rejected in order to conform to hegemonic masculinity” (Kendall, 2008, p. 210). Kendall argues that animated videos provide new tools for young men to explore and express ideas about masculinity and identity. Juxtaposing existing images, text, and sound in ironic and ambiguous ways can allow the animutators to celebrate and denigrate hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities without committing to either stance. Though animutation videos often include images relating to masculinities, conversations about gender and identity rarely occur in text-based forums. Kendall attributes this rare occurrence to the bluntness and awkwardness that accompanies text-based assertions about identity. Also, the archival nature of text-based communication can discourage participants if they feel it will reflect poorly on them. Kendall does acknowledge that even though users may not discuss gender and identity in explicit terms on a text-based forum, they do perform masculine based identities through their text-based conversation, which are often fraught with sexual metaphors and blatant sexist language.
Kibby and Costello’s (1999) research on CU-SeeMe, an online video-conferencing site, found that men created a masculine subjectivity and male sexual identity. For these men, the normative aspects of masculinity were being performed. For the most part, this display of masculinity involves performing themselves as heterosexuals, in that they enact sexual differences along normative gender lines. Men performing on CU-SeeMe were often performing “an active sexual role, positioning their female partner’s body to be the primary focus of the erotic display. Lone males are usually content to watch these performances and to direct them via chat” (p. 359).

The tension around the display of the naked male body arises from the revelation of the greatest male secret, the penis. At the center of the cultural concept of masculinity is the penis “its length, shape, appearance, and performance are held to be critical indicators of essential aspects of masculinity” (Kibby & Costello, 1999, p. 361). Keeping the penis hidden from view maintains the mythology of masculine strength and power, while exposing it as “small, flaccid, and vulnerable” exposes the myth (Kibby & Costello, 1999, p. 361). For this reason, men’s most common mode of display is an anonymous chest shot, at least until they have an erection. Kibby and Costello explain that men are reluctant and often refuse to undress (completely) and perform in publicly accessible rooms on the site.

Early conceptions of gender revolved around the reification of male-female biological dichotomies (Stoller, 1968; Tiger & Fox, 1971). This evolved into the concept that men and women have different ways of communicating (Tannen, 1990). According to this view, men have an internalized linguistic style that is more competitive and result oriented, while women’s styles are more relational and rapport oriented. However, a number of scholars (Ashcroft & Mumby, 2004; Connell, 2005; McNay, 1992) have rejected the essentialist conception of gender
difference, and instead they examine gender and identity as derived from Butler’s (1990a) conceptualization of gender as a series of performances. In this context, gender performances include dress, gesture, movement, interaction, posture, and other activities (Butler, 1990b). By viewing gender not as a stable priori quality but as a complexity that exists only as it is produced, one can represent the varied ways in which gender is practiced and revealed.

While gender performance was originally confined to feminist literature, researchers (Brickell, 2005; Garlick, 2003; Kibby & Costello, 1999; Peterson, 2003) are now beginning to examine various constructed and performed masculinities. Critiques of masculinity through the examination of men’s lives and experiences as gendered, socially, and historically variable have begun to expose the communicative constructedness of men’s daily lives. Studies of the discursive activities of masculinity suggest that “men are not permanently committed to a particular pattern of masculinity” (Connell, 2005, p. xviii), but they actually formulate particular discursive choices from a cultural inventory of masculine behavior. This research into masculinity has extended the study of masculinities in online spaces (Kendall, 2000, 2002; Kibby & Costello, 1999; Koch, Mueller, Kruse, & Zumbach, 2005).
CHAPTER III.
A METHODOLOGY FOR STUDYING YOUTUBE.COM

In 1998, I purchased my first computer because I was going to college and thought that having a home computer would make my life easier. However, I also had an ulterior motive. Being a young, gay, white, male living in a small Midwestern town can feel isolating, and I wanted to get online so I could meet other gay men. I found a chat room that I liked, and I still chat there ten years later.

When I first started going to the chat room, I tried to represent myself as authentically as possible because I wanted my chat partners to know me. I was hoping that the Internet would provide a space where I could meet other people. Producing myself on the Internet was much different then than it is now. During those first few years that I had a home computer, it was nearly impossible for everyday users to have a picture of themselves online. Web cams were just starting to come out, but their quality was low and there were many software compatibility problems, while scanners were large and very expensive. During that time, I relied solely on typing to provide basic textual descriptions of myself as a means to create an image of who I was.

Now, ten years later, when I log onto that same chat room the thing I notice first is that in many of the bio lines it says “no pic[ture], no chat,” meaning if I do not have a photograph of myself to share then that person will not talk to me. In addition, during conversation, it is common for chatters to ask for multiple pictures to make sure that you are who and/or what you say you are. The more time I spend online, the more I notice that the Internet is not about being someone else, or even an idealized version of one’s self, it is about being able to successfully authenticate one’s self in relation to the community/audience one wishes to engage.
In the above situation, authentication relies on the abilities of the chatters to successfully utilize and interpret symbols within specific contexts. In the gay chat room that I have visited for years, I know that at least half of the chatters are there for the sole purpose of finding someone online to meet offline for a sexual encounter. I know that when a chatter sends me a private message with the word “Looking?” it means he wants to know if I am looking for sex. If he sends a private message saying “stats?” he wants to know statistics such as my age, height, weight, hair color, and eye color. From these basic descriptions, a conversation will ensue with the basic purpose of determining if the chatters are each other’s type. They will ask for pictures to verify the previous descriptions. The more pictures a chatter provides, the more verification possible. This authentication process is not about catching someone who is representing him/herself untruthfully. It is about the chatters coming to a common understanding of who each other is both physically and psychologically; they are essentially verifying one another’s identity.

My research investigates YouTube and how the convergence of texts, still images, and moving images affects our everyday communicative practices. Because YouTube is a specific cyberculture, I have chosen to conduct a cyberethnography. A cyberethnography represents a commitment to an interpretive understanding of people’s experiences of the Internet and of the texts they create online and offline. Cyberethnography then explores the complicated relationship between online and offline discourses by acknowledging that the study of everyday life is essential to the study of the Internet (Gajjala, 2004; Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007). By participating and producing videos, which are then uploaded to YouTube, I am learning through doing what other users do. With a web cam, video editing software, and the interface, I interact and produce my cyber self in the same ways as others. The knowledge gained through doing will

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11 A user enters into a space specifically designed to allow synchronous textual communication. Chatters cannot alter the virtual environment; they can only publish texts.
aid in my attempt to critically analyze users and their videos. By conducting this cyberethnography, I intend to be able to better understand this form of communication and what kind of impact it has on our everyday communicative practices.

The methodological challenges and questions that arise when researchers attempt to do research in and on cyberspace provide scholars with different ways of thinking through what cybertulture means. How researchers think about cyberspace shapes how they research it, and how researchers research cyberspace shapes how they think about it.

**Cyberethnography**

Ethnographic methods occupy a central position in studying cybertulture, Internet, and computer mediated communication (Bell, 2001). Hine (2000) looks at cyberspace as a culture and as a cultural artifact. As a product of culture, people with contextually situated goals and priorities produce the Internet, including YouTube.com. This technology is not only shaped by how it is made but also by the ways it is marketed, taught, and used. As a cultural artifact, culturally produced meanings constructed by authors, users, and critics of the website could have formed a much different YouTube.com than exists today. In addition, thinking about the Internet as a culture emphasizes that it is a lived experience made from people, machines, and stories in everyday life. The technological nature of contemporary culture plays into the general research agenda of ethnography to search for culture. Star (1999) considers an ethnography highly beneficial, even “tempting” (p. 383), for studying online interactions because this method is strengthened by listening to silenced voices, balancing diverse meanings, and connecting speech and actions. By exoticizing the technological innovation of YouTube, the scholarly gaze is redirected onto something that is simultaneously mundane and spectacular, thus revealing the resistance and challenges to the obvious characteristics of culturally and socially constituted
technologies. Cyberethnography is used to articulate the importance of context in self-reflexive ethnographies because the cultural dynamics of the Internet cannot be overstated. Cyberethnography emphasizes living online and immersing oneself in the cyberculture, which produces links between the ethnographer and the subject(s) being studied. These links enable the ethnographer to understand how the spatio-temporal praxis of being in such environments might shape his/her subjectivity. By living online and inhabiting a digital space, the researcher learns how to produce and negotiate subjectivities by building, interacting, and collaborating within them. Cyberethnography is not only concerned with hypertext, multimedia, and the production of self, but also with the practices of everyday life in both online and offline contexts. Online interaction blurs the boundaries between “online and offline, virtual and real, private and public, object and subject, local and global, place and space” (Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007, p. 211). Through this blurring, “online interaction produces relational links between contexts, cultures, and individuals that are framed by hegemonic ideologies” (Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007, p. 211).

When conducting ethnographic research, the researcher must focus on a culture to study and then find a way to enter that culture. This point of entry can be referred to as the field. The field represents the place that contains a specific culture. Traditional ethnographies have physical and temporal boundaries that help the researcher to focus the scope of the research. For researchers interested in studying cyberculture, defining the boundaries of the field is tricky. Cyberspace, as described previously, does not have physical boundaries such as a village, town hall, or classroom. Cyberculture scholars, such as Kendall (2002), construct textual boundaries by describing the textual environments they inhabit. For example, Kendall (2002) describes her
time on BlueSky as a crowded bar where people roam around from table to table talking to one another.

While information sharing can (and does) occur in any format, MUDs, like chat rooms, seem geared towards a social purpose more than YouTube does at first glance. Kendall (2002) pointed out this tendency towards social usage and the feeling of shared space in *Hanging Out in the Virtual Pub*:

Synchronous forums—those that allow for near-instantaneous response (including the various chat programs and MUDs but not including e-mail list and newsgroups)—can provide a particularly vivid sense of “place” and of gathering together with other people. Rather than merely viewing a space through the electronic window of television, many people feel that when they connect to an online forum, they in some sense enter a social, if not physical space. (p. 6)

Kendall is saying that the idea of a description of a space as well as the understanding that multiple people were sharing a particular location at the same time generated a greater sense of camaraderie between participants than could be achieved through asynchronous methods. The argument is that synchronous communication replicates the feeling of being physically co-present with others that one feels in a bar, a restaurant, or some other geographic location that is shared as a meeting space.

Despite the fact that there are multiple examples of studying the Internet in an ethnographic mode (e.g., Gajjala, 2004; Hakken, 1999; Hine, 2000; Markham, 1998; Miller & Slater, 2000; Turkle, 2005), each study requires unique and specific decisions about viewing boundaries and connections between cyber and other spaces, constructing identify and embodiment, understanding the sense of place, and defining social relations. Some of the issues
that I have to consider in this project about YouTube include: What constitutes the field or the location of the research? Where does the field start and stop, in other words, is it the entire YouTube site, or a particular channel? Finally, what kind of work do I need to do in order to make sense of what is happening.

Within the scope of this research project, technology encompasses material, physical and immaterial objects, and digital systems. In this situation, I have to decide where the ethnography of digitally mediated communication is located. If one does research about and in cyberspace, s/he may not need to go far because the field opens up in one’s house or office (Hine, 2000; Markham, 1998). In some cases though, researchers have to temporarily relocate, like Miller and Slater (2000), to conduct the ethnography of online Trinidadian identity. Kuntsman (2004) argues that often cybculture research evokes the notions of travel, distance, and discovery by separating the research site and exoticizing cyberspace or its dwellers. In conventional anthropology, fieldwork sites based on cultural, social, and spatial distance gauge ethnographic authenticity and then measure the craft of practitioners in rendering the distant familiar (Amit, 2000). Similarly, in ethnography of online spaces and practices, the research can be done from a distance and thus construct knowledge that emphasizes difference. Such notions have been rigorously criticized for their colonial and imperialistic implications. These notions have been reconsidered to emphasize the communicative and performative praxis of ethnography (Conquergood, 1991). Therefore, an ethnographic location is less concerned about the physical dimension of the site but more with the practices, actions, affects, representations, and discourses comprising the field.

Cyberethnography is constructed through continuous engagement with technology and its users. Consequently, cyberethnography becomes a radically dispersed practice of study that is
not locked into one physical space. Green (1999) studies virtual reality and identifies dispersion as geographical, technical, social, and conceptual. Geographically, Green has to travel to several locations; in my project, I do not travel per se, but rather I log on to YouTube from different locations. Sometimes, I log on from inside my apartment, from my office, and from coffee shops; I have even logged on while at a public library in another state. I collect observations, write narratives, and interact on YouTube while in these different locations. Though traveling to YouTube is only an Internet connection away, the way that I experience the interface can be controlled by my physical location. While watching or producing videos in a public space such as a coffee shop or library, I have to plug in my earbuds, so I can hear audio. In addition, while in public places, I am very conscious of the videos I watch. YouTube does not allow pornographic material to be uploaded but some of the content could be considered offensive or inappropriate if someone glimpsed my screen. I did produce one video while at a coffee shop. I used the integrated camera in my laptop to record myself as I was listening to music via my earbuds¹² and typing a blog entry. Because I was in a public space, I could not add the oral narrative to the vlog. It could have been potentially disruptive to the other patrons of the coffee shop and would have been awkward for me to be sitting there appearing to talk to my computer. Once the recording was completed, I uploaded the video to YouTube. Through tools offered on the YouTube interface, I included annotations that described what I was doing, what I was thinking, and what was going on around me. This dispersion in a technical sense designates a variety of artifacts and techniques defined as the object of investigation. For the current project, technical dispersion implies a wide range of elements that comprise YouTube, such as videos, recording devices, editing tools, commenting, and recirculation tools. The numerous relations that are

¹² Ear buds are small speakers placed inside the ear so that only the listener can hear what is being played back.
formed, forged, maintained, and dissolved on YouTube provide for social dispersion. Conceptually, the accounts and stories of experience on YouTube can be analyzed and described in more than one way. For Green (1999), “This object-virtual reality-was a number of dispersed human and nonhuman systems, with multiple aspects and attributes” (p. 412). For me, YouTube is as dispersed as virtual reality; the archival nature of YouTube collects individuals through multiple forms and locations into one picture. Since the field is dispersed, I join the researchers who argue that the boundaries of the field are not exactly physical (Gajjala, 2002; Green, 1999; Kuntsman, 2004). The boundaries define and are defined by the conscious efforts of the researcher to pay attention, to record, to analyze, to critique, and to inhabit the explored communication process.

Epistemologies of Doing

In order to study the Internet and cyberculture with a critical lens, researchers must draw on particular kinds of ethnographic encounters that take place while living both online and offline in relation to digital technologies that allow for the production of the digital or the cyborg self. Producing the cyber self functions an “experience of doing, or the practices of being simultaneously online and offline, here and there in her everyday negotiations of society and culture, is integral to the study of these environments” (Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007, pp. 201-210). To explore the production of digital selves as practices of everyday life then means that technology is always an articulated moment of interconnections manifested in relation to the Internet. These technological interconnections then intersect the digitally mediated selves as practices of everyday life at various points. Understanding these intersections a methodological examination of the production of the digital self must then incorporate “epistemologies of doing” (Gajjala & Altman, 2006). Gajjala, Rybass, and Altman (2007) explain that,
“Epistemologies of doing” as a methodology is situated in a pedagogy that attempts to produce an understanding of these intersections through an exploration of process through doing and being self-reflexive while doing. The methodology would require the subject/object to produce selves—through typing, writing, image manipulation, digital video, and digital audio and so on—and also to continually interact and “live” at these interfaces. Thus, if the research is about the digital environment of Facebook.com, the researcher would also go through the process of entering and living in that environment, trying as far as possible to engage everyday practices that are permitted at this interface. (p. 210)

Thus, at the online/offline intersection, I produce myself through acts of knowledge, memory, and everyday habit reaching for conversations and sites that recognize my presence. Physicality of the body is expressed through everyday material practices, even when those practices involve online production of self. The practice of engaging such a technological environment produces the subject/agent. Meaning, therefore, is made through doing—doing in this case is typing, recording, responding, and editing one’s self into existence and constructing a virtual archive.

Interacting and Intersecting: Producing Digital Selves

Producing a digital self is not as simple as just writing oneself into existence. A producer must be aware of how meaning is communicated in any particular cyberspace. Through an epistemology of doing users learn how meaning is communicated (Gajjala & Altman, 2006; Gajjala, Rybass, & Altman, 2007). For example, on Facebook and MySpace it is important to build profiles that represent a digital persona based on predetermined possibilities by filling out categorized boxes such as: name, sex, birthday, siblings, relationship status, hometown, political views, religious affiliation, work and education information, likes and interests (such as books
and television shows), etc. Also through joining groups, adding pictures, publicizing “friends”
lists, and playing popular games (such as “Farmville”) and taking quizzes (such as “Name that
80’s Sitcom) users are able to further express their personas. Through partaking in these common
and often times popular activities users are able to produce personas that are easily understood
by others because they are doing the same things.

Producing a digital self on YouTube is different than it is on Facebook and MySpace. On
YouTube, users produce videos that must be interpreted by others. The reason that this is
different from the previously mentioned websites is because there is less structure when creating
videos and more emphasis is put on individual creativity. Compared to Facebook and MySpace
YouTube has relatively fewer boxes to fill in. A YouTube user can include their name, age,
gender, country, school, and short description if they choose. A user’s YouTube channel is
predicated on videos they like and other channels they subscribe to. There is a far greater risk for
a YouTube producer’s video to be misinterpreted due to the lack of a generalized structure.

Video creation and video editing has become extremely easy in the last few years. A
number of computers now come automatically equipped with built in web cameras and software
so that all you have to do is turn the equipment on, and you can be a video producer. The
affordability and portability of this equipment are just a couple of the reasons for the success of
YouTube.

Through the many tools offered via the YouTube interface, users do more than just
upload videos. YouTube users participate and interact in many of the same ways as social
network users. For one, the technology is compatible, meaning that you can post YouTube
videos on both Facebook and MySpace. Second, on YouTube, users have the ability to create
profiles, add friends, and participate in groups. Third, YouTube users can create and maintain
social networks by adding friends, viewing recent activities, writing and reading comments, etc. Unlike other social networking sites, YouTube users employ videos to communicate back and forth more than they utilize standard text or still images. YouTube has become the next wave in the performance of online identity. Because of the ease with which you can put moving images of yourself online, it has become less likely for Internet users to pretend to be something they are not. This then opens the Internet up for new explorations that critical cyberethnography is especially suited to conduct.

I signed up and became a YouTube user April 5, 2006. When I signed up, I was automatically given a channel. For almost two years, I did not use my channel page or any of the tools that came with it because I was not interested in anyone knowing I was on YouTube. Before starting this research project, I was a simple user of YouTube and a lurker. I simply searched for videos, watched them, read the comments that followed the videos, and occasionally shared them on other sites, such as Facebook and MySpace. I did not want anyone to know that I was spending that much time on YouTube when I should have been reading or writing for one of my graduate seminars. I did not want my undergrads to know that I was on YouTube when I was supposed to be preparing the next day’s lecture or grading papers. I definitely did not want anyone to see me or something I created on YouTube. At the time, producing and posting on YouTube seemed worse than the blind review process in academia. I feared the possible belligerent comments that could follow my posting based on a viewer’s dislike of what I had to say and/or my novice production skills. Even though blind reviewers for academic journals are often belligerent in their comments about content and style (production skills), perhaps it’s the assumption that the reviewer is somehow qualified to be belligerent that makes it less scary. I was afraid that there were no safeguards to keep would-be video snatchers from ripping my
video, re-editing it, and then reposting it—all of which I thought would be a reflection of me. Furthermore, this possibility seemed more like a kidnapping or case of identity theft. All of the above scared me and kept me from participating and producing on YouTube for two years. At its most basic form, these were fears were rooted in losing control of my own work and my cyber self.

For three years now, I have been a YouTube user, and I have been actively keeping research notes since January 2008. I have created my personal channel, which includes a background picture I took from a Chicago hotel room at night. My channel, which has been viewed 543 times, has five subscribers and three friends. I have subscribed to 26 different users’ channels so that I receive notification when they upload new videos. I have also added 12 videos to my “favorite” list. Both the subscriptions and the favorite list are visible on my channel, and other users who view my channel can connect to my subscriptions and my favorites. I have uploaded five videos. The first video titled *First Video Blog Attempt* is a short 1 minute and 16 second introductory video that has been viewed 86 times. The second video titled *Why Do You YouTube?* is a 9 minute and 25 second mash-up video that has been viewed 130 times and has received one comment. The third video titled *Starbucks Pop-Up Video* is 5 minutes and 15 seconds and has been viewed 14 times. The fourth video titled *New Glasses* is 40 seconds long and has been viewed 30 times. The fifth and final video titled *Tell3.org* is 1 minute and 53 seconds long and has been viewed 27 times. I have also added the *Tell3.org* video as a video comment to another user’s video.

The introductory video indicates that I am a graduate student researching YouTube. I realized while making the video that it is difficult and awkward to talk to a camera. I learned that I had to visualize myself talking to a group of strangers. In most of my videos, I start by saying,
“Hello YouTube.” This greeting is my attempt to connect with those who end up viewing the video.

The mash-up video titled *Why Do You YouTube?* is comprised of portions of different users’ videos, some of celebrity users, some random users, as well as a clip of a TV show and a movie. The connective tissue between each of the clips is the typed text that I inserted between the beginning and end of each video clip. Examples of the text are: “Why do you YouTube? To entertain yourself…” “To show You…” “To tell You…” “To promote You…” “To teach You…” “it’s about me not You…” “It’s about me and You…” “What are you watching? Why are you watching?” “Who is watching You? Why do you YouTube? What does YouTube mean for Us?” I hoped that the mash-up video would garner some attention with other users, and though the video has been viewed 130 times, it has only received one comment.

The last three videos that I created, *Starbuck Pop-Up, New Glasses*, and *Tell3.org* were attempts to be more personable and to let viewers get to know me a little more. In essence, I was trying to present a more personal cyber self because I found through surfing YouTube that vlogs with a lot of views and comments were either very personal or just bizarre videos that people thought were so stupid they were funny. Being crazy and divulging a lot of really personal content is not comfortable to me, so I tried to split the difference by offering more information about me than I normally would, yet compared to most YouTube videos, my videos are quite tame.

Even though many other users have not viewed my YouTube channel and uploaded videos, they have been viewed. Other users have found me on the site, thus indicating that I am able to enter into the community. Creating these different kinds of videos and waiting for users
to view and comment on them has been valuable in learning what it means to enter an ethnographic site in cyberspace.

When I first started keeping field notes in January 2008, I used a notebook to record my initial observations and reactions to videos. My field notes also included a list of the search words I used as well as some of the different tags that users used to network videos. Once I started producing my own videos, I noted the processes that I conducted to record, edit, and upload the videos. I also noted that once I had videos uploaded logging on to YouTube was a much different experience than before I became a producer. Now, when I log on, I immediately check to see if anyone new has viewed my videos, has friended me, subscribed to me, rated a video, or left a comment.

This traditional form of taking field notes worked fine, but I found it a little distracting to be watching videos on the computer and then turn away to write my comments. Since then, I have set up a wiki that can be edited and a blog, which was useful because it fostered a creative way to write. Finally, I am currently using Google docs because I can access it anywhere that I have an Internet connection. I have since copied and pasted all of my other electronic forms of field notes into Google docs, while also retaining my initial notebook filled with my early field notes. Splitting the computer screen between the videos that I watch and my field notes has proven to be the easiest and most efficient way to document my experience on YouTube.

In addition to keeping field notes, I have also kept a separate virtual archive of all the videos that I have chosen to analyze. Even if the videos are removed from YouTube, I have a copy of them. While analyzing the videos, I watched them via the YouTube interface because that is the form and space that the producers intended for viewing. The virtual archive is purely
to maintain the integrity of the research by having an unaltered and persistent record of the videos.

To create my virtual archive I had to determine how to save the videos to my computer. To do this, I conducted a Google search for "ripping YouTube videos." Ripping is a process of copying audio or video content to a hard disk. During my initial search, I encountered and downloaded iSquint and SWF & FLV player, both of which were needed to complete the ripping process. Unfortunately, I cannot always get it to work because it is hard to find the exact code on the YouTube page that I need to download. I conducted another search and came across Keepvid.com, a site where you put in the url of the video and then it downloads it for you. Once the video is downloaded, the user renames the file with an .flv file extension. Finally, the user drags the renamed file into the iSquint tool, which then allows the video to be played on a QuickTime video player. Although ripping YouTube videos raises some ethical concerns regarding a producer’s loss of control of their work, I am utilizing a tactic that many other users employ. Additionally, I am ripping videos to maintain a personal research archive that I will not share, and I will not alter the videos. This approach is similar to the way that researchers who conduct interviews handle confidential interview transcripts and notes. My hard drive functions in the same way as a locked file cabinet.

In November 2008, eleven months after I started visiting YouTube daily and keeping research notes, I performed a keyword search for “masculinity” and “masculinities.” Once the search results were displayed, I narrowed the results by searching for “masculinity vlogs.” I further narrowed this search by discarding television programs and commercial movies. I also discarded highly edited videos, which includes videos that showed editing that indicated certain content was cut and/or if the videos’ timelines seemed out of placed or rearranged. These
criteria also covered the discarding of mash-up videos. As I watched the remaining videos, I came across some transitioning transgendered users who were keeping vlogs about their daily lives and their experience of transitioning from one gender to another. These vlogs included posts that introduced the user, presented their bodies’ pre and post hormone replacement therapies, as well as pre and postoperative surgery. There were also posts about getting new state identification cards that reflected their new gender, and there were posts about how to live in the new gender.

I want to be clear that this research is about everyday users, and transgendered individuals are everyday users. This research is not about being transgendered; it is about the communication process and embodiment in cyberspace. Because cyberspace and performing in cyberculture(s) exist within everyday lived experiences, the videos that I have chosen to analyze should not be thought of as exotic nor should those in the videos be considered other. I chose these videos because these producers engage notions of embodiment, gender, and specifically masculinity, and communication processes through reflexive critical lenses. These users represent the everyday user. They are not YouTube celebrities, and their videos have not gone viral. The videos are vlogs with a minimum amount of editing.

The videos I have chosen to include have been posted to MighTMenFTM, “an all-transguy colab[oration] channel representing four countries and guys in all stages of transition” (www.youtube.com/user/MighTMenFTM, 2008). The first week of video posts consisted of each of the transmen introducing themselves. Introductions included first names, where they were from, what stage of transitioning they were at, and why they wanted to be part of the MighTMenFTM channel. After the introductory videos, each week consists of a topic of discussion relating to being transgendered and/or transitioning. Weekly topics are chosen from
questions emailed from viewers. Each day two users produce and upload videos related to the week’s topic. As of May 2009, the MightTMenFTM channel had 31 weeks worth of video discussions. After having watched all the videos, I found three separate weeks in particular directly and indirectly communicated the vloggers’ thoughts on what it means to be a man and/or masculine. I draw intensely from; week five, which included “Masculinity and Femininity” as the topic of discussion; week fifteen, which discussed “Manhood” as the topic; and week twenty-one, which focused on “Man or Mouse” as the topic of discussion. Because these three weeks represent the core of this research, I have included descriptions and the textual comments that followed in Appendix A. However, I also incorporate examples and discussions from other weeks, as well as from other female-to-male YouTube vloggers. I identified these other vloggers through the same criteria that I used to find the MightTMenFTM channel.

Human Subjects Review Boards (HSRB) were created to provide guidelines for ethical research and to safeguard the treatment of research subjects. For Internet researchers, online environments pose unique questions and challenges. These questions and challenges revolve around questions of privacy and whether or not to gain informed consent. Early in my research, it was determined that I did not need to gain HSRB approval because the vlogs that I have chosen exist within the public domain. Anyone with a computer and Internet connection may access them, and to view them does not require any form of membership or registration. Also, it is either explicitly stated in the vlog or on the user’s channel that they are intentionally making these vlogs public to document their daily lives as transgendered and transitioning individuals. These statements imply that I am not infringing upon the user’s integrity or their rights to self-determination. For example, Adrian has the following channel description:
Hi, my name is Adrian and I am a young trans man just wanting to document my transition on youtube. I have been inspired by the many other transmen I have seen on youtube and I think it’s a great way to keep track of the beautiful journey that lies ahead of me. I am excited that my body is now taking its proper form and is beginning the process to match my brain.

I have chosen to change the names of the users under investigation even though the videos are in the public domain and the users explicitly state their desires for their videos to be publicly viewed. I made this choice in order to give the users some semblance of privacy and to ensure that the research contained within these pages is situated in a discrete context. By discrete, I mean that it is not my intention to speak for these individuals or to impose my interpretations of their videos onto them. Rather, it is my wish that this research functions as a starting point for discussions revolving around the multiple possibilities that online environments provide for embodiment and the performance of masculinities for users.

The decision to provide a level of confidentiality to my research subjects was confirmed in June 2009. During the first week of June, I returned to the MighTMenFTM channel to see if I needed to add any updates to my research. After clicking on the MighTMenFTM link, I was directed to a page that contained an “account has been deleted” message. After some searching, I found two YouTube videos stating that the MightMenFTM channel had been “hacked” and deleted by an unauthorized user in a malicious act. Further investigation also indicated that the transmen users were establishing another channel, but shortly after it was launched, they were once again hacked and the channel was deleted. These malicious acts of deleting accounts reminded me that even though the transmen wanted their videos to be available to the public and
even though they were participating in an online environment, they were still susceptible to being harassed and victimized by other users.

A great deal of time, energy, and labor was lost due to this malicious attack. More than 350 videos were lost, and along with those videos, constructive and productive conversations about gender, sexuality, and society were also lost. Because the MighTMenFTM channel link is virtually dead, I have chosen to continue to refer to the name of the channel as the transmen created it. MighTMenFTM is not a pseudonym; rather it is the original title of the channel. One of the benefits of my research might be to serve as a reminder that MighTMenFTM did exist, with the backup hardcopy data to prove it.
CHAPTER IV.

REPRODUCING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY ON YOUTUBE

The analysis that follows is based on a cyberethnographic investigation into transmen’s engagement with online video sharing on YouTube. In order for me to get to know the vloggers, I watched their intro videos as well as the rest of the videos uploaded under the playlist section, which is where the weekly vlogs are located. There were 31 weeks of video uploaded. As stated earlier, I utilize videos from the MighTMenFTM channel as well as other YouTube female-to-male transgender vloggers. In Appendix A, I have included video descriptions and the textual comment logs that follow them for three separate weeks. I have included these three weeks as exemplars of what I observed on YouTube and because they form the core of my analysis. Even though this channel and all of the videos exist in a public space, I have altered all user names to protect the privacy of the users as well as their rights to self-determination. In order to preserve the YouTube culture, I did not edit the textual comments. I left misspellings and sentence structures as they originally appeared because these characteristics depict particular cultural trends.

Reproducing Hegemonic Masculinity

The term “hegemonic masculinity” is used to explain how the social, cultural, and political expression of maleness legitimates and reproduces social relationships that generate dominance in a particular culture at a particular time. The strength of hegemonic masculinity as a theoretical tool lies in its ability to describe the layers of multiple masculinities at the structural level and the intricacies of their relations to one another, and to recognize the fluidity of gender identities and power (Hearn, 2007). The concept of hegemonic masculinity and its position to femininities and other masculinities has been useful in outlining the various nuances of power set
within a hierarchical framework. Due to the fluxuating nature of gender for the transmen, hegemonic masculinity will provide a useful structure in analyzing their communicative behaviors.

In this chapter, I explore how a group of YouTube producers and users reproduce their performances and embodiment of masculinity. To reproduce hegemonic masculinity means to replicate traditionally accepted forms of masculinity that maintain dominance over others through a system of power that lends legitimacy to patriarchy. The legitimization of patriarchy through the proliferation of hegemonic masculinity always refers to the rejection of the feminine, which homogenizes or essentializes conceptions of masculinity that include only men. However, the project of critique of hegemonic masculinity is to make its constructs visible in order to understand gendered power differences and the contradictory experiences in relation to masculinity. To further this project, I analyze the videos of female-to-male transgendered YouTube producers.

In much of the literature reviewed (Dibbell, 1993; Kendall, 2002, 2007, 2008; Lange, 2007, 2008; Nakamura, 2002; Nayar, 2004), the personas that online participants create are referred to as identities. These identities are created by generalized categories such as women/men, black/white, Asian/European, gay/straight, etc. Identity categories have an essentializing function that simply names an individual’s place in culture. I now turn to the notion of subjectivity. To use the term “subjectivity” in place of “identity” opens up the fissures within categories of identity. To talk about subjectivities means to take into account the power structures that exist in a particular culture. Although cyberspace is celebrated as a space that breaks down cultural power hierarchies, cyberspace is not a vacuum. In cyberspace, users are still influenced by the existing power structures, such as the male/female dichotomy that exist in
meatspace. It is important to note that the transmen’s performances of masculinity, and even their performances of transgender, are influenced by their subject positions in meatspace.

YouTube interface and tools help users create subjectivities. However, these subjectivities are also shaped in the broader context of discourse where the body that is producing the subjectivities resides. When I am watching a video or leaving a comment on YouTube, I am also in my apartment, office, or a coffee shop. It is the sedimentation of acts both online and offline that creates the discourse within which we produce our subjectivities. In other words, meaning is made at the intersection of online and offline space; thus, the notion of two distinctively separate worlds must be set aside to consider the actual specific context of the meaning-making process. For example, in Jace’s video *MTM5: Masc. and Fem.*, he talks about not drawing attention to himself when he is around straight people. However, the very purpose of this collaborative channel and the videos posted on it, including Jace’s, is to draw attention to the transgenderedness of the producers. According to Jace and many of the other video producers, they would never do this in meatspace, and in actuality, they do the opposite by trying to pass as male.

The MighTMenFTM channel collaborators use YouTube to enter into the public sphere and not only start a dialogue about what it is like to live as transgendered individuals, but to also put a queer body on display. The purpose of this research is to investigate how YouTube might allow users and producers to transgress power relationships rooted in gender and sexuality, and how YouTube might be reinforcing those same power relationships as well. I argue that at times the producers and users reproduce hegemonic forms of masculinity such as rejecting the feminine and explaining how to reproduce culturally accepted performances of masculinity through controlling the image of the body, clothing, and types of talk.
Everyday Life in the Network

YouTube and MighTMenFTM are integrated into daily life. The community that forms on MighTMenFTM is the result of everyday interactions occurring in a virtual environment. The commitment and care put into the MighTMenFTM channel is represented through the production, uploading, and commenting on videos. The time and labor put into the channel by both the producers and the users marks the MighTMenFTM channel as a part of their everyday lives. Being part of this digital environment has united the users and producers together in a way similar to their life experiences. Users such as HHH, N0, CSI, and XX make several comments a week on the posted videos and on other user’s comments as well. The repetitive presence of users helps to build and maintain community while fostering a dialogue based in collaboration. Additionally, the YouTube producers on MighTMenFTM do not stop after posting a video each week. They respond to comments following their videos left by users. Producers also comment on other producers’ vlogs as well. The interactions between producers and users are just one way that MighTMenFTM succeeds in creating and sustaining community discussions.

The importance of highlighting the MighTMenFTM channel as a community resides in the producers’ and users’ inability to have these discussions in a public space offline. Icarus, a frequent participant on MighTMenFTM leaves a comment:

I admire you for being able to talk about this stuff on YouTube! I was able to get through transitioning but I’ve never had the courage to put my thoughts out there like you’re doing. (MTM21: FEARS..ectt)

Rants posts,

I think YouTube is great with the amount of trans people that blog because, you know, there is always someone who either blogs, comments, or reads who has been going
through the same shit and most importantly is still around. They even give someone like me whose dating a transguy something. (*M2M15: Maturity + Internal Struggles*)

Both of these comments indicate that YouTube and MighTMenFTM are important parts of their daily lives because they relate to the producers and the users because of their shared experiences. The comments left by Icarus and Rant indicate that YouTube is a space that facilitates conversations and representation in ways that are missing in their offline lives. The everydayness of MighTMenFTM marks a boundary that many of the users and producers have not been able to pass through in their offline daily lives. For this reason, this networked community represents a space that, to a degree, transgresses normative power structures. YouTube provides a space for the users and producers to embody a gender that does not necessarily correspond with their biological sex traits and gives them the opportunity to have experiences not rooted in physical signifiers.

The transmen on YouTube do not have the luxury of navigating the world without worry. In responding to advice about how to be read as more masculine, Jacob (*MTM5: Masculine and Feminine Behavior*) posts a video about suggestions that he received regarding how to pass more effectively as male. The advice he received centered on wearing baggy shirts, baggy jeans, and getting a buzz cut. The clothing suggestions offered to Jacob were less about style and more about hiding his female body. By wearing bagging shirts and jeans, Jacob’s female body would be concealed sufficiently from those he interacted with so that he would not automatically be read as female. In response to this advice, Jacob comments “It’s pretty crappy that some of us choose to let go part of ourselves in order to make other self expressive aspects more visible, we should just be able to have it all.” Craig a MighTMenFTM alternate vlogger fills in when one of the other vloggers is unable to upload a video. Craig’s (*MTM11: Identities*) video post tackles the
issue of having to present masculinity as singularly as possible. Craig says, “In order to be read as masculine I have to conform to accepted versions of masculinity. The more clear I am in my representation of masculinity the less I am questioned as actually being male.” Craig further elaborates that he goes for a “hipster” look because he is small and thin. He explains the hipster look as a “clean cut hippie.” Craig says that because he is not athletic but able to grow sideburns and a goatee helped him to decide on how to present his masculinity. Both Jacob and Craig’s posts indicate that they strategically choose how they embody masculinity. As Jacob alludes to and Craig states specifically, “As unfair as it is, it is important for FTM’s to align their presentations of masculinity with one particular accepted version rather than multiple versions” (MTM11: Identities).

Similarly, all of Chase’s vlogs talk about his fear of going into the world while trying to pass as male. Chase do not believe that he can pass as a male. Due to this fear, Chase only performs his male gender on YouTube, in the safety of his own home. For transmen, the decision to enter the world in their preferred gender rather than the gender that corresponds to their biological sex can be a life or death decision.

To serve as an example Sloop (2004) recounts the story of Brandon Teena. In 1993, Brandon Teena, born Teena Brandon, a twenty-one year old transmen moved to Falls City, Nebraska. The move was predicated on several brushes with the law as a result of Brandon’s forging checks. The move also allowed Brandon a fresh start with his male identity in a community where he had no history as a female. During Brandon’s time in Falls City, he quickly made friends and began dating. The women whom Brandon dated later referred to him as “the ideal man,” and “the perfect kisser” (Sloop, 2004, p. 51). While in Falls City, Brandon was once again arrested on charges of check fraud. While making a court appearance for the check fraud in
Falls City, Brandon was served with another arrest warrant from Lincoln, Nebraska. The warrant from Lincoln was issued in Brandon’s birth name, and was subsequently jailed as a female. Through Brandon’s arrest, his friends and the community of Falls City became aware of Brandon’s female status.

Sloop (2004) explains that the speculation about Brandon’s true gender took an ugly turn when two of his male friends Tom Nissen and John Lotter forced Brandon to show his genitals in an attempt to uncover his true gender. Discovering that Brandon had a vagina Nissen and Lotter forced Brandon to leave with them where they took him to an isolated part of town and raped Brandon. After the rape, Nissen and Lotter told Brandon that if he told anyone about the rape they would kill him. Brandon did report the crime to the authorities. A week later Nissen and Lotter drove to the farmhouse that Brandon was staying at with friends and fatally shot him and the two other people in the house.

Sloop’s (2004) analysis of the case of Brandon Teena and the media coverage that followed Brandon’s death serve as illustrations of how gender is disciplined. Sloop argues that even though the case of Brandon Teena did provide examples of how to trouble traditional categories of sex/gender, heterosexuality/homosexuality, and masculinity/femininity in the end the dominant discourse surrounding Brandon resituate gender binaries. In fact, the murder of Brandon Teena is a product of a society that is situated on the reiteration of sexual norms to stabilize categories of sex through individuals and institutionalization. Attempts to transgress normative categories of sex are then disciplined, sometimes with death.

I argue that these life or death decisions are not predicated on an everyday life, which as defined by Grossberg (1992) is in the province of the “better off.” Rather, they have a daily life. A daily life is contingent on survival through forced coherence to hegemonic structures that
operate to restrict and even imprison a subject through threats as drastic as death. On the other hand, everyday life is routinized and mundane:

There is a real pleasure and comfort in its mundanity, in the stability of its repetitiveness. Not only its practices but also its investments are routinized. In a sense, one need never worry about living within the maps of everyday life. Instead, one gets to “choose” how one insubstantiates that map, what matters, where one invests. In everyday life, one has the luxury of investing in the mundane and trivial, in the consumption of life itself. To off the simplest example, there is a real security and pleasure in knowing when and where and exactly for what (including brands) one will go shopping next. (p. 149)

According to Grossberg, those who possess economic, political, or social resources are able to generate an everyday life. Those who cannot generate an everyday life, instead, have a daily life. To impart a differentiation between daily life and everyday life means to acknowledge discrepancies in power between individuals based on hegemonic hierarchies, such as gender, sex, sexuality, race, etc. The ability to generate an everyday life signals that an individual operates within hegemonic structures in predefined ways. When the transmen log onto YouTube and navigate their way to the MighTMenFTM channel, they enter a public space in which the context of a trans man collaborative channel allows them to perform their preferred gender in a way that is normalized through common experiences. The MighTMenFTM channel gives the producers and users the ability to create an everyday life on YouTube. On YouTube, these individuals do not have to think about how they present themselves, and they are able to connect with other individuals who have similar life experiences.

As stated by Levina and Kien (in press), “It is no longer fitting to examine the network as an external force, but rather as a somewhat banal aspect of our everyday environment.” Everyday
life is comprised of relationships and interactions with people who may or may not be strangers, and YouTube creates and sustains these everyday relationships. There is some contention about whether or not YouTube falls under boyd and Ellison’s (2008) definition of a social network site. boyd and Ellison (2008) explain that their preferred use of social network site versus social networking site is based on sites such as MySpace and Facebook where the primary purpose is to maintain preexisting relationships. boyd and Ellison contend that networking implies creating new friendships with strangers. If this were the case, then YouTube would be considered a social networking site because YouTube’s primary purpose is video sharing (Beer, 2008). Beer further points out that even though YouTube users are given the opportunity to create and publish networks of friends, he does not believe that they publish preexisting social networks to the extent that Facebook and MySpace do. My experience with the MighTMenFTM channel supports Beer’s claims that users are initiating relationships with people they did not know beforehand; thus, they are networking. However, boyd and Ellison’s (2008) argument about networking versus network focuses on what users do with technology. They focus on whether or not users are networking with new users or if they are maintaining a network with preexisting known users. I find boyd and Ellison’s argument regarding network and networking to be conceptualized as a singular technological entity, whereas the network should be envisioned, “as an already-amorphous condition of life itself” (Levina & Kien, in press). The MighTMenFTM channel supports this claim because users and producers have embraced the reality of being globally networked as part of their everyday experiences. In fact, the network allows many of these users and producers to have an everyday life that is representative of their experiences, which they are not afforded in their offline interactions.
Passing

Passing refers to the successful navigation of mainstream spaces by a marginalized individual. By passing, the marginalized individual is able to escape persecution and enjoy the rewards and privileges of the mainstream group through misleading performances. The goal of passing, though usually a mechanism of survival, is to ascend the hierarchical ladder and gain more power and agency. The MighTMenFTM vloggers discuss successful performances of masculinity as passing as male. For the vloggers, “passing,” means to have their gender performances accepted by an onlooker who then in turn accepts them as male.

The vloggers explain how to pass in very systematic ways. Even though at different times each vlogger states that masculinity should not be equated to having a male body or penis, they consistently talk about feeling betrayed by their body. To pass as a man means to achieve masculinity through control of the body and mastery of male gender norms. To understand how to master gender norms, Jared (MyteeMenz5: HEY BOYHHH...oh wait) posts a video in which he advises to watch other men and see what they do. Jared’s advice centers on reproducing masculinity through reiterating performances of biological men who are accepted as masculine.

Men are under constant surveillance from other men. Other men watch us and rank us, grant our acceptance into the realm of manhood. Manhood is demonstrated for other men’s approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance. During week eight (M2M8: Other Men), in their vlogs, Jace, Barret, Arden, and KrisE all discuss the fear of other men, specifically the fear of biologically born men reading and accepting them as masculine. In Jace’s vlog he states, “When it comes to being read by bio[logical] men I try to act like I’m not trying to be masculine. I just try to act natural, but I am always really worried that one of the guys will call me out on it.” Arden echoes Jace’s sentiments, “When I’m with a group of guys I just try not to draw any
attention to myself.” By creating videos about being read by other men, Jace and Arden direct attention to the importance placed on the approval of other men. Further, their nonperformance of masculinity by not drawing attention to themselves directly correlates with Halberstam’s (1998) description of the nonperformativity of masculinity. The nonperformativity of masculinity is based on the *naturalness* of masculinity where “masculinity ‘just is’” and “femininity reeks of the artificial” (Halberstam, 1998, p. 234). To recognize performances of masculinity especially those based on hegemonic versions such as white masculinity or heterosexual masculinity means to pay attention to how those versions appear to be natural. The transmen are very aware of the nonperformativity of masculinity, that is why Jace tries “to act natural” and Arden tries “not to draw any attention.”

KrisE and Barret also explain that it is important not to draw attention to one self when trying to pass as masculine. However, both KrisE and Barret state that they are often read as gay men by biological males. KrisE attributes this to his being “a little more flamboyant than most guys” and Barret says that he believes that he is read as gay because “he talks about his ‘partner.’” Though many people refer to their husband/wife and boyfriend/girlfriend as “partner,” the distinction is often a cue associated with gender and/or sexual couplings that are not considered normative because the term holds a sense of theatricality. As Halberstam (1998) states, gay masculinities and masculinities of color “have already been rendered visible and theatrical in their various relations to dominant white masculinities” (p. 235). Hegemonic masculinity is not concerned with referring to significant others as partners, rather it is more interested in maintaining the status quo by referring to significant others by the gendered terms of husband/wife or boyfriend/girlfriend. Those gendered terms clearly mark whether or not a man is in a heterosexual or gay relationship.
The two most common responses on how to pass as a man include having short hair and not sitting with crossed legs because men typically have short hair and men take up as much space as possible (and crossed legs suggests an attempt to not take up space). In *MTM5: Masculine & Feminine Behavior and Passing*, Arden explains that when he was younger and people could not immediately read him as male, he used to try to help them by playing off as many senses as he could. Visually, he always had a short haircut and wore boy’s/men’s clothing. He also only had one ear pierced, which he equated with masculinity. Arden describes his physical look as surfer/skater. In terms of audio signals, he would practice lowering his voice. Now, that he is on testosterone, the lower voice comes naturally. For scent, he would wear Old Spice aftershave because he could not afford cologne. Arden explained “Mom would say I smelled like my grandpa.” Arden’s hope was that people he interacted with would notice that he had more male points than female points and that would help them read him as male. He stated that sometimes his efforts were successful, and sometimes they were not. Arden also believes that attitude and behavior are significant factors in passing. He said he has always had male interests such as carpentry and sports. He also said he was more aggressive and vulgar than girls his age. Finally, he recounts the words of his grandfather who told him that when meeting someone you should give them a firm handshake and look them straight in the eyes. This will project confidence. Likewise, if you are looking someone in the eyes and they are looking you in the eyes, they will not be looking elsewhere.

Arden’s description of the ways in which he passed when he was younger mirrors the non-performativity of the drag king (Halberstam, 1998). Arden’s use of his grandfather’s advice about shaking hands and looking someone in the eyes is an example of repetitious acts of masculinity that go unnoticed because of the lack of theatricality.
The subject created at the intersections of the online/offline/interface is different from the producers’ offline lives. I say this because they talk about passing and being called by the name they gave themselves instead of the name that was given to them. They talk about the technologies they use to change their bodies. To talk about passing at once negates that ability. YouTube as a cultural site is just as public as offline life, but on YouTube, these producers disclose more than they would to acquaintances and strangers. For example, Chase only discloses his preferred gender identity on YouTube; he does not go into the world performing a gender that does not correspond with his body. Chase is scared to wear his binder\(^{13}\) outside of the house because he thinks he “look[s] awkward,” and he is “afraid people will say things” and look at him as a woman pretending to be a man (\textit{MTM21: FEARS..ectt}).

\textbf{Casdon:} You don’t suck! Fears are ok, and you will get there in your own time. No worries, I still love ya!

\textbf{Aedn:} I don’t want to minimize your fear, but about wearing the binder out: You will be more aware of it than others. Other people are surprisingly blind to those things. Unless you’re in high school, where people DO say stuff, and I’m sorry. :( 

Chase responds,

I’m in college and thanks, that really helps. . . . I’m just scared because it makes my boobs kind of look uniboo-ish haha.

\textbf{Michael:} Unless you’re wearing a tight shirt, no one is going to notice. People are not thinking about you; they’re all too busy thinking about themselves. (\textit{MTM21: FEARS..ectt})

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\(^{13}\) A strong elastic piece of cloth that pulls the breasts closer to the body in an attempt to conceal them.
Chase’s fear demonstrates Foucault’s (1995/1975) notion of docile bodies. Foucault begins by discussing the soldier’s body and how one recognizes it when they see it. The soldier’s body: has a flat stomach, powerful thighs, long legs, chest pushed forward, and eyes always forward never looking at the ground. The soldiers also march together in unison and are under the commands of a higher status officer. The creation of the soldier’s body is similar to being molded from clay and then put into mass production. The body of the soldier marks the docile body because it demonstrates how one is created and controlled. For Chase, his body does not match up to how he feels inside. Chase’s fear is that his body, no matter what he does, is recognized as a female body while he wants to be recognized as male. He tries to mold his body by having a short haircut as well as wearing jeans and sweatshirts and a binder to compress his chest. In the end, Chase does not believe that others will accept him as male because of his body. The conflict that Chase experiences between his gender performance and the visual representation of his body marks a disobedience rooted in the reproduction of the masculine and the representation of the feminine.

Wakeford (1997) points out that the anonymity, or lack of face-to-face contact, suggests that coming out online may be easier. The visual aspect of YouTube indicates that it might be less about the lack of face-to-face contact and more about the space cyberspace affords its users. I would describe this as a space in which the producers of identity have more tools available to them to create, describe, and maintain identities. In Chase’s case, he is able to discuss his confusion and anxiety about his gender from the safety of his home, the only place where Chase feels free enough to perform masculinity. This specific YouTube community allows Chase to construct and perform his identity in a way that makes visible the bodily identity and fantasies, desires, and narratives through which he is constructed. In other words, through the convergence
of the safety of Chase’s home and the publicness of YouTube, the MighTMenFTM channel allows for a visible, nuanced, performance of all gender identities. As Christina stated above, “I look in the mirror and I don’t see what I want to see.” In his videos, Chase lowers his voice, wears his binder, and performs his masculine gender. I would argue that for Chase producing videos is a way of looking in the mirror and seeing what he wants to see. In this instance, the interface provides a transformational space for individuals to interact; this space is both distant and immediate. The cyberqueer has the ability to choose where s/he goes. S/he does not have to cross, pass through, go over, or go around a heterosexual space to get to a queer space. This is unlike daily life where transmen have to operate within the heterosexual matrix in order to get to where they want or need to go, physically or discursively. The availability of these choices and/or possibilities indicates that cyberspace is not constructed or ordered in the same way as the offline world. However, those who live in cyberspace often try to impose the same power structures as those of meatspace.

YouTube re-presents bodies in a very different way. Bodies on YouTube are diverse in size, shape, color, and sex. These same bodies are individualized, playful, and willful stemming from both desire and pleasure. It is true that the MighTMenFTM collaborators desire to be read as men in the space of YouTube, and the users who comment on their vlogs authenticate them as male through their positive and verified interactions. In the case of the soldier, if a soldier’s body does not measure up, the soldier will be discharged eradicating any difference. On the other hand, if a trans man does not measure up, he is sanctioned in ways that include being redefined and losing control over his identity to physical abuse, which could include death. Hegemonic forces control bodies in order to maintain the status quo. In Chase’s case, he is afraid of looking different than what a male is supposed to look like. These fears are rooted in the possible
inability to perform *correctly* masculinity. Chase’s fears, which are rooted in hegemonic conceptions of masculinity, keep him shut away inside his house.

Bodies are always on display, and they are frequently scrutinized and categorized. The bodies that look and perform in ways that support mainstream society’s vision are rewarded, while those bodies that do not are sanctioned. A person never knows when s/he is being watched and scrutinized, but an individual is aware of the possibility. The possibility of surveillance serves as a control mechanism that forces the masses to want to conform (Foucault, 1995/1975).

**Sweet:** trans or not…I think all men (and women) look @ each other and compare themselves…as much as we hate to admit it.

I bet other men look @ you and compare themselves too =)

*(MTM21: Comparisons and Expectations)*

Sweet’s comment acknowledges that bodies are always under surveillance and due to that surveillance, individuals try to control their bodies in ways that conform and measure up to hegemonic expectations. The monitoring of bodies and the performances of those bodies serve two purposes. First, individuals compare bodies to gauge how well they fit into what is normative. Second, the fear of not passing the normative standard compels individuals to change their bodies and their performances. Johnson’s comments confirm the importance that is placed on conforming.

**Johnson:** Troy: If you ever get to where you have no fears about performing as a man, you will have done better than most all cis\(^{14}\) gendered males. In your studies of the criminal justice system, you will almost certainly study the use of the polygraph. A principal factor in performing a successful polygraph of males is triggering sex

\(^{14}\) Cisgender- This term is used to denote someone who is comfortable in the gender they were assigned at birth. Cisgender is as a contrast to transgender on the gender spectrum.
insecurities. A retired polygraph examiner I know told me that in 30 years, he never had a male “subject” that he couldn’t break in 15 minutes. Also, one of (cont)

Johnson: (continued) reasons POWs from the Viet Nam War still exhibit so many mental problems is that their insecurities were exploited extensively by their captors. Many have never been able to rebuild themselves mentally. The insecurities they had were all there before they were captured, but were not strong. (MTM21: Fears Around Achieving as a Man)

To metaphorically link, Johnson’s example of the polygraph test and the POW’s in Vietnam illustrates that the fear of not measuring up to be a real man is a fear that all men have. Furthermore, men are always battling to defend their gender, sex, and sexuality. Observation and interrogation instills the fear that one’s masculinity will be proven false, thus resulting in a loss of power. Those that strip you of that power, whether they are Vietnamese captors or society, then have control over you.

Even though the vloggers say that they have learned that gender is fluid and that there is not much difference between femininity and masculinity at times, each of them recenters hegemonic masculinity in multiple ways. Jace, Arden, Barret, Chales, Eric, Spenser, KrisE and Liam constantly reproduce middle class, white male, masculinities through discussions of their values. Take for instance Liam (M2M15: Being a man and not a boy), he does not think of physical standards or a list of traits when it comes to being a man. He states that if he had to choose something that would make someone a man, it would be “responsibility.” He clarified by saying a man should take responsibility for his own actions and should do what has to be done, even if it is inconvenient. Liam’s statement alludes to the fact that women are not expected to take responsibility especially when it is inconvenient. Here once again, women are defined as weaker
than men and needing men to take care of them due to their lack of responsibility. During the same week, Barret described that when he told his mom that he wanted to be male he had to remain calm. He describes this moment of coming out to his mom as a defining moment in growing up and becoming a man because he was calm and understanding versus going “going ballistic and being immature.” His statements not only point to what it means to be a man, but also what it means to be a woman as well. His statements indicate that being a man is better than being a woman. Liam and Barret’s statements about being a man means taking responsibility, doing what needs to be done even if it is inconvenient, and being calm and understanding suggest that women are dependent on others, free of responsibility, and emotionally erratic.

As illustrated in the previous paragraph, one of the main purposes of the MighTMenFTM channel is to provide information to other transgendered individuals on how to pass as male. In transmitting this information, many of the vloggers reconstitute and perpetuate notions of hegemonic masculinity. One way in which they do this is by defining masculinity in terms of not being feminine. By reinforcing traditional sex and gender binaries, the transmen are contributing to the proliferation of hegemonic masculinities, which at its core oppresses women and feminine traits. In this instance, YouTube becomes another mechanism of oppression that reconstitutes traditional notions of gender.

The discussions on MighTMenFTM demonstrate that gender for everyone, transgendered and non-transgendered, is a performance with an end goal of passing. The Panopticon was never physically built; however, this does not make it any less real. The Panopticon is a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form. In terms of cyberculture, the Panopticon operates in much the same way as Foucault described when he argued that the technology of the prison made the prisoners aware that it was possible they were under surveillance at any given time.
without their knowledge; hence, the prisoners recognized a need to police themselves. Cyberculture and YouTube operate in much the same way. However, the bodies of the disciplinarians have completely disappeared into the technology, thus hiding the limitations of corporeality. Surveillance techniques and practices have now universalized the body and the way it is worked on through the invisible nature of technology. The producers and the users on MighTMenFTM can never escape the gender binary. In fact, passing reinforces the gender binary by accepting and operating within the boundaries of the masculine and the feminine. However, through authenticating transgender on YouTube, the transmen are creating a space in which to transgress the masculine and feminine boundaries.

A cursory look at these videos and discussions points to the fact that the producers and users do not intend to challenge the existence of the gender binary but rather reinforce it by conforming to traditional gender standards. However, the existence of a transgendered collaborative channel is in itself transgressive. The producers’ ability to publicly explain in their own words how they traverse the gender authentication protocols is transgressive in that it exposes the social constructedness and performative characteristics of gender. Now, with the performative characteristics of gender made visible, the arbitrary boundaries that contain gender within a matrix of power can be crossed.

These authenticated performances of gender function as embodied experiences. The users, and especially the producers, on MighTMenFTM engage in an epistemology of doing just as I am. They learned what it was like to experience life as a transgendered person in a reality not governed by biology but rather through performance. This new knowledge created through experience then transcends the confines of YouTube and has become part of their everyday lives.
CHAPTER V.
RE-PRODUCING MASCULINITIES THROUGH TRANSGENDER EMBODIMENT
ON YOUTUBE

I start to type YouTube’s web address, as I have done many times before. In fact, once I type “y, o” my browser automatically finishes the address for me. I find myself on YouTube’s homepage. There is no need to sign in because long ago I checked the box to allow the site to remember me. I immediately look to the right of the web page and check my “Inbox” to see if I have any personal messages, friend requests, comments, or video responses. I glance at the thumbnails of new videos uploaded by the channels that I subscribe to. I also look to see which videos are increasing in popularity. I click my user name, and I am taken directly to my channel. Immediately, I scroll down the page until my “Subscriptions” box is visible; I click “see all.” I am taken to my subscription page. I look at thumbnail images of my subscriptions in grid format. My subscriptions are arranged in order of when they were subscribed to, with earliest subscriptions first and then more recent subscriptions. Because MighTMenFTM is my most recent subscription, I click “Next” to take me to the next page where the MighTMenFTM thumbnail is listed. By clicking the MighTMenFTM thumbnail, I am transported from my channel to the MighTMenFTM channel. There are signs of activity on the channel; each day one or two new videos are uploaded. There are many channel comments left by visitors. Most of the comments are simple notes such as, “Great Channel I love watching all your alls Video just amazing …” (Loveable). Other channel comments are about who they think should fill an open vlogger spot on the channel, while others leave possible topics for discussion. As I roam around the page, I feel like I am observing a discreet culture that is at the same time different from my own yet also very much the same. When I watch the videos posted on this channel, I often feel
like a peeping tom looking through someone’s bedroom window, and many times I am because videos are often recorded in bedrooms.

The narrative above explains how I enter the MighTMenFTM channel. It is important to note that I enter the channel as an outsider, which is highlighted by my feeling like a peeping tom peering through windows. Though I am not transgendered, my sexual orientation marks me as marginalized in a heteronormative society. In this sense, I am able to empathize with transmen and recognize the heteronormative power structures based in large part through the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. Additionally, through logging on, searching, friending, favoriting, liking, and commenting, I am able to experience living on YouTube through doing. Through this doing of technology I see how online and offline experiences converge through embodiment at the interface.

Re-producing Masculinities

In the previous chapter, I examined the ways in which YouTube producers reproduced hegemonic masculinity. I concluded that through the reproduction of masculinity the transmen participated in the recirculation of ideas that work against them because of their transgender subject location. In this chapter, I explore how the transmen on YouTube challenge conceptions of hegemonic masculinity. I argue that YouTube creates a space in which the transmen are able to experience masculinities in a way that challenges conceptions of hegemonic masculinity through the embodiment of the trans man at the interface. Previously, I used the term “reproduce” to signify a copy that replicates preexisting images, ideas, and norms. Now, to investigate the ways in which the MighTMenFTM vloggers challenge the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity, I use the term “re-production.” The hyphen between re and production signifies the space between the production of a copy and the production of something new
through the reworking of the copy. To re-produce masculinity means to interrogate critically traditional conceptions of masculinity and then to rework it in a way to open up more possibilities in which to be masculine. Re-producing masculinities creates a critical project through the interrogation of the relationships between masculinities, patriarchy, and heterosexuality.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, these transmen are aware of conceptions of hegemonic masculinity and make conscious choices about how they perform their masculine genders in female bodies. Their YouTube videos constitute a critical dialogue of the overlapping relationships and performances between sex, gender, and sexuality. The exposure of these overlapping relationships enable the transmen to re-produce masculinities in constructive and meaningful ways that can transgress the normative structures of traditional hegemonic masculinity.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which the MighTMenFTM producers integrate flesh and machine in the formation and display of cyborg subjectivities, a hybridized identity represented through the technology of a digital camera. The digital camera medium transforms readings of gendered bodies as sites of knowledge production. I assert that through the use of YouTube the MighTMenFTM producers create cyborg subjects through the integration of the electronic image and the Internet that expose more than just flesh. YouTube reveals cultural tensions surrounding epistemological conceptions of vision, gender, and identity and raises questions for future conversations regarding the role of technology in the representation of gendered subjects.

The videos that the producers create and the textual comments left by users enable an examination of the ways in which they all produce, perform, and edit their gender identities in
their networked, daily lives. As I said before, while watching these transmen’s videos, I feel like a peeping tom peering through bedroom windows. During this time, I can see something very real happening. For example, Chase explains that he only feels comfortable performing his transgendered identity on YouTube. At the same time, I exist outside the safety of his home watching him. Due to this merging of spaces, the YouTube interface serves as an entrance to a heterotopia. According to Foucault’s (1986) fifth principle, heterotopias are not freely accessible, rather they are based on a “system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (p. 26). Entry to a heterotopic site then is either compulsory, like entrance to a prison, or else an individual must endure a rite of passage or purification like that of a religious rite. Anyone can become a producer on YouTube, but first they must go through the ritual of registering an account and setting up a channel. The producer’s uploaded video is then screened (purified) to make sure that they have complied with the ethical standards of the site including decency and not violating copyright laws.

While I watch Chase’s videos, I am aware of all the spaces that are presented. For Chase, YouTube functions as a space of compensation with a role that “is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault, 1986, p. 27). As a space of compensation, Chase finds safety in YouTube because of its meticulous regulations and rules. On YouTube, the lack of physicality creates a boundary that keeps Chase safe, unlike in meatspace where Chase could be in physical danger. Second, YouTube is governed by rules that all producers and users must follow, or they risk being banned from the site. YouTube also offers protocols to its producers so they can censor comments left by users; this, in effect, allows producers such as Chase to govern the interactions of other users.
The ability for producers, such as Chase, to be able to monitor and also delete content left by other users creates a unique subject position. Some users, who in meatspace have every advantage and privilege, can now be deleted and effectively silenced. In contrast, other users who may on a regular basis be silenced in meatspace now have the ability to speak and, to a greater degree, be heard.

YouTube represents a subject that is constituted by fusing together disparate entities: The corporeal and the mechanic. In doing so, YouTube offers a unique presentation of subjectivity, called here cyborg subjectivity. The integration of the concept of subjectivity with the characteristics associated with cyborgs makes for a new definition of what it means to be a subject. Haraway defines a cyborg as a “cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1991, p. 149). In Haraway’s conception, cyborgs are material creatures as well as manifestations of the fantastic, and the cyborg is “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” (1991, p. 151). These qualities are also found within MighTMenFTM channel. Through the integration of the body and technology, the YouTube producers emerge as a hybrid, neither fully human nor fully machine yet constituted, in part, by both. The transmen trespass across traditional visual boundaries of the private home via the public site of YouTube. Through the playful negotiation of a subject/object position, the transmen emerge as a particular type of cyborg subject, one that seems to require and yet simultaneously resist certain traditional readings of fe/male embodiment.

Authenticating Drag

Thus far the term “passing” has been utilized to communicate an attempt to successfully navigate mainstream spaces by marginalized individuals through (re)presenting the self as a
member of the mainstream or a member of a group to which one does not actually belong. In this sense, passing is an enactment based on deception. I find the notion of passing to be singularly unhelpful. Passing as a narrative assumes there is a self that masquerades as another kind of self. However, what happens when a biological female passes sometimes as butch, sometimes as male, and sometimes as gay. In this instance, to pass is to be defined and to become only with the approval and acceptance of interactional partners. The acceptance that follows after successfully passing is then rooted in normative assumptions about gender that do not allow for variation. The question then becomes, how can gender be performed in light of multiple possibilities? I argue that it is necessary to move from a discussion of passing to a discussion of authenticating.

Authenticating is based on the protocols one goes through in order to verify their identity(s). The goal of authenticating is to verify an identity through successful communication. Authenticating is different from passing because authenticating is only concerned with verification regardless of the consequences. Authenticating is not about moving from one group to the next; rather it is about securing the positionality to which s/he believes s/he belongs. The transmen are simply trying to take control of how others read them, whether they want to be read as men, queer, genderqueer, or transgendered. The desire to control one’s online persona and the presentation of self is rooted in successfully completing authentication protocols. Online authentication protocols can consist of filling out a membership form in which boxes are checked to indicate sex, age, race, sexuality, location, ethnicity, etc., or it could be writing a bio for a blog, or even simply the context that is created when leaving a comment on someone’s webpage or YouTube channel. These are all authenticating protocols that if done properly will lead to others reading our online identities as we intend. In order to navigate successfully authentication protocols, it is necessary for the user to be familiar with the culture in which they are performing the
authentication. I argue that the MighTMenFTM vloggers authenticate themselves through successfully communicating their masculine gender while at the same time contextualizing it within the sphere of transgendering. The MighTMenFTM vloggers authenticate themselves through the performance of the transgendered.

Control and achievement are two ways that masculinity is authenticated. Trujillo (1991) wrote that Nolan Ryan’s masculinity was constantly reproduced through his ability to control the velocity and direction of the baseball. His masculinity was also measured by his achievements both individually and as a member of a team. Though Trujillo spends considerable time linking achievement to the work of baseball, it is prudent to consider achievement in general and not just in relation to work or career. In Kendall’s (2002) analysis of the online community BlueSky, she observed that masculinity was associated with technological control. She gave examples of how BlueSky users demonstrated their masculinity by displaying their extensive knowledge of computer programming and by being able to solve programming problems. Kendall further explained that in technological environments having control over technology is a great achievement.

The producers on YouTube demonstrate their control over the technology in different ways. Mash-up videos provide one way to do this. The joining of different messages in a successful manner takes considerable time and technological expertise. Learning how to edit videos, manipulate sound, and add transitions is not an easy task. Though the users on the MighTmenFTM channel did not create mash-up videos, they had to learn to control technology in different ways. Camera angles were exceedingly important in the creation of the vlogs. The vloggers took special care in deciding what parts of their bodies would be visible in the camera frame. The most common angle for these videos was from the collarbone up. I found these
headshots to be significant because all of the discussions revolve around the body and how the body should be used in order to perform masculinity correctly. In one of his vlogs, Jace (MTM5: Masc. and Fem.) appears to be shirtless, but the camera angle does not allow the viewers to gaze below the collarbone. This image of Jace is very masculine because men can go shirtless in public, but women cannot. In previous videos, Jace has stated that he is a female-to-male trans man. Coupling Jace’s publicly known status as a female-to-male trans man and a video of him shirtless, I begin to wonder about his body. Jace is effectively playing on the tension between his performance of masculinity and the audiences’ knowledge that he is at that time a pre-op trans man. Over a year later, Jace (Revealing) posts a vlog to his personal channel where he again is shirtless, but this time his entire torso is within the frame of the camera. In this video, Jace is showing the scars from his double mastectomy and pectoral implants. The deliberate display of the body and the presence of the large and still healing scars again create a tension between sex and gender for the viewer. Viewer comments include:

**King:** Hey. You look cut, very well built and defined musculature. Your voice and appearance are completely masculine, I was quite surprised that you were once a female.
Keep up the good work, I’m all guy and you look more buff than me.

**Daryn:** Dude!!...I can’t believe u ever were a female...lookin hot☺

**Ryan:** Were you seriously born a female or am I missing something? If you were born a female why are you showing this?

**Random:** It looks great! When you stepped back it looked like you didn’t even have it [surgery], and the scars aren’t looking that bad at all☺
Dave: Considering it’s only been a few weeks, you’re looking amazing! You are still one of “the” sexiest guys on YouTube. Do all of your posts shirtless from now on! 😊 Well, I can dream, right? LOL

Anonymous1: Doesn’t showing your chest scars defeat the purpose of transitioning?

AnotherX: You look amazing! Very sexy…although, I did find you sexy before, so…I guess my opinion doesn’t really count 😂. So, are you like gonna get bottom surgery? And if so, how is that possible????

Jace: Thanks for all the wonderfully supportive comments. I can’t wait until I can go shirtless in RL.¹⁵

The tension between sex and gender is most apparent in Ryan’s comment that asks if Jace was really born a female. Ryan’s comment indicates that he is experiencing a disconnect between the body that he sees in the video and the spoken narrative and textual comments that accompany the video. The MighTMenFTM videos challenge traditional definitions of the subject and poses a unique way to conceive of subjectivity and the agency and power that is implied therein. If subjectivity as a clean category is no longer unified or dichotomous as asserted by postmodern theorists, then this project describes an emergent subjectivity, one that is multiple and ironic. The locus of inquiry starts with the hybridized moniker: YouTube. Through this classification, both female and machine become united in the creation of the cyborg subject. Haraway’s (1991) cyborg counters the notion of the unified subject because it is a compilation, a combination of parts rather than a singular organism or machine. In the combination of flesh and hardware, a dynamic and unique entity arises. Within Haraway’s framework, Jace exists as a cyborg, disrupting boundaries and resisting monolithic definitions of the subject simply by the fact that

¹⁵ RL—Real Life—relating to the offline world.
he has integrated himself with technology. Just like Haraway’s cyborg, Jace embraces aggregation rather than unification. YouTube serves as a visual representation of the aggregated body. The images of Jace are re-produced at the YouTube interface through the public display of a private body. Coupled with Jace’s assertion that he is only showing his transitioning body on YouTube blurs the boundaries between wo/man and computer.

Another component of being a cyborg is Jace’s undermining of traditional, unspoken lines of the public and private self. The erosion of the line between the public and the private composes part of the fascination with the abhorrence of the MighTMenFTM videos as a perverse text. For many, Jace is making a spectacle of himself by transgressing notions of masculinity that uphold that masculinity is not to be displayed in such obviously theatrical ways. The display of his scars tells the story of his transformation into a man. Further, questions from Ryan and Anonymous1 about why he would show his body in mid transformation indicate that they find it puzzling that others would expose themselves in such a graphic and public way. That Jace provokes such responses suggests that his presentation of identity transgresses normative expressions of subjectivity. Jace’s re-presentation of his identity stabilizes and yet disrupts the process of subject formation by repeating and yet resisting cultural norms. Through this new means of re-presentation, Jace and YouTube confounds “the domains of political and linguistic ‘representation’” that have “set out in advance the criterion by which subjects themselves are formed” (Butler, 1990, p. 1) by simultaneously signifying as a man and yet acting in a very unmanly manner by displaying a masculine body that was created rather than born. The anxieties centered on Jace’s video and those of the other transmen vloggers suggest a breakdown in normative practices in how subjects are constituted. By acknowledging and reproducing traditional representations of men, MighTMenFTM reiterates normative standards regarding
gender. However, MighTMenFTM also discloses the ideological rules that govern binary oppositions by communicating tensions and de-naturalizing the formation of the subjects.

The discussions surrounding Barret’s videos serve as an important example of how the transmen communicate the tensions and de-naturalize the formation of masculine subjects. The discussion topic for week 5 was “Masculinity and Femininity.” Barret’s video *MTM5: girly-man* explores his thoughts on the topic of masculinity and femininity and where he fits in. Barret explains that he thinks he still looks feminine even though his wife views him as a guy but more of a flamboyant gay guy, which he says is ok. When talking about masculinity, Barret goes on to say that he is not into sports but he played soccer, has always had short hair, even used to shave his head, and always tried to “woo the ladies.” He explains that he did not make it a point to do things that were masculine. This is unlike when he was younger and living as a female. He remembers being at church when he was younger and getting in trouble because he was sitting with his leg up. Of course, he was reprimanded and told not to sit that way because a young lady crosses her legs. For Barret, masculinity is “not really something that I think about it’s just something that I do” (*MTM5: girly-man*).

Barret’s last point about masculinity just being something he does without thinking is very important. In the mundane everyday performances of masculinities, men do not think about how they are performing their masculinity; they just do it. Barret’s description of his unconscious performances of masculinity reflect how unconscious and inarticulate the white, middle class, male forms of embodiment are. Perkinson (2002) points out that white, middle class male forms of embodiment “tend to encode technologies of normativity that do not require the work of conscious performance. They constitute an unproblematic physicality in the body politic. They navigate social space—both public and private—unobstructed, un(re)marked” (p.
174). Even though Barret was born with a female body, his transformation to a male body through testosterone injections (often referred to as T) and surgery indicates that he navigates spaces as male. Further, his unconscious performances of masculinities indicate that even though he was not born male, he was still socialized to know what masculinity was and how to perform it correctly.

Barret also confesses to wanting to be a drag queen after surgery. Most of the comments left by viewers revolve around him not appearing feminine and his desire to be a drag queen. The following excerpts detail these exchanges:

**Fudge:** U don’t look at all feminine!

**Barret:** Well, thank you.

**NO:** I agree I don’t see the feminine in you. Don’t be silly.

**Barret:** Haha. Thanks.

**Quin:** A trans man drag-queen! Heh. That’s just awesome!

**Barret:** I hope it happens soon! haha

**Beth:** Love, true love is awesome

**Barret:** Indeed, it is.

**HHH:** Curious, pre-T would you have been willing to be a drag queen?

**Barret:** probably if I had had chest surgery, but otherwise, I doubt it. I mean, its something I’ve always wanted to do.

**HHH:** I’d like to be a drag queen, but right now that’s too close to doing what I’ve done for the last 20 years. granted that was forced, and this would be by choice, but I think that’s my hesitation.

**XX:** I’m interested in being a drag queen also! Do you watch Queer as Folk? when
Michael did drag in Season 2 I almost died out of disbelief in how gorgeous (s)he looked. I would hate to present that female AS a female—not just because it’s expected, but because it doesn’t fit. I don’t want to go out to a formal dinner wearing a dress, I want to go out formally in a suit. But at the club? I think I would love to doll myself up.

**Barret:** exactly

**Cat:** I thought you are a guy! I don’t see anything feminine in you…You look and talk like a guy!

**Barret:** because I am a guy.

**Jouck:** when you said “wife” my first thought was, “O holy shite! How old ARE you?!”

**Barret:** I’m twenty seven.

**Makeup:** I’m not trying to be rude or offensive AT ALL when I ask this, I’m just slightly confused: but why would you want to dress or be a drag queen after your surgery? Doesn’t that kind of defeat the purpose? (*MTM5: girly-man*)

The discussion surrounding Barret’s desire to be a drag queen but reluctance to do drag clearly demonstrates how oppressive the female/male dichotomy is. Barret does not explain why he wants to be a drag queen. However, the way in which he declares this desire leads me to believe that he wants to be a drag queen for an occupation. In the comment section, Barret explains that he is taking testosterone shots. However, he also states that if he were not taking testosterone the only way he would do drag is if he had surgery. HHH responds, “I’d like to be a drag queen, but right now that’s too close to doing what I’ve done for the last 20 years. Granted that was forced, and this would be by choice, but I think that’s my hesitation” (*MTM5: girly-man*). HHH’s response about being forced to perform female for the past 20 years is particularly insightful. Thinking about everyday performances as drag is nothing new, but Barret and HHH are hesitant to do drag
if they do not first present as male. Even though Barret says in his video that he wants to do drag well, he still wants to be perceived as a male performing a female. Both Barret and HHH are cautious that their biologically born body would contradict the drag performance as a performance and would instead reiterate hegemonic norms indicating a desire to perform the female subject (Butler, 1993). However, successfully performing the drag queen would reproduce masculinity because to be a drag queen the performer must be male, which is made most evident through contrived feminine performances representative of a masculine point of view.

The performance of the drag queen is about the over dramatization of femininity. The drag queen places femininity on display, so the audience can see the constructed nature of femininity. These female impersonators utilize a masculine (objective) view of a hyper-feminine appearance and mannerisms because they have no subjective knowledge about what it is like to be a woman, nor do they have a desire to be a woman (Schacht, 2002). The performance of drag kings or the performance of masculinity is much different than the performance of the drag queen. The performance of masculinity is about non-performativity (Halberstam, 1998). The best drag king performances are indecipherable from a performance. In fact, audiences will question whether women are really playing the male roles. The non-performativity of masculinity is also apparent in cyberspace. Masculinity is often measured though the objective knowledge and skills with which users are able to interact in cyberspace in other words; masculinity is about asserting power and control over machines and technology (Segal, 1990). The vloggers on MighTMenFTM assert their non-performativity in every video. The vloggers are never overly dramatic; in fact, they are usually quite prosaic.

To embody a transgendered experience on YouTube supports Hayles’ (1993) position that the body points to the “normalized” and embodiment refers to the “contextual” and
“enacted.” In the sense of the body being normalized, Hayles views the body as a cultural construct or the material on which meaning is applied. The body of a transman is then a female body. On the other hand, embodiment is the experiences that individual people within a culture feel and articulate. In this sense, the embodiment of the trans man is then the experiences of the individual. All of the vlogs that were analyzed featured some discussion of what it means to be a man or to be masculine. Brett (MTM15: Maturity) responds in his vlog that being a man is about “growing up” and “doing what you think is right.” In Spencer’s (MTM21: Comparisons and Expectations) vlog, he explains that he tries not to compare himself to non-transmen because even though he has a fiancé and a 5-year-old son, he cannot be a stereotypical male because he was born female. Finally, Gate (a biological male) leaves a comment to respond to Barret’s vlog question “What makes a man a man?” Gate explains, “I am a man, and I never asked what other than my genitals made me one. I honestly don’t know what makes a man a man, other than the physical part. I will have to think on it. You look pretty good, the voice is great. If you were to go through the drive through window, I would think by your voice alone you were a male” (MTM15: what makes a man a man?). The above discussions and comments reveal that YouTube producers and users are able to experience masculinity and maleness not through reproduction or passing but rather through re-producing what they think it means to be male. The vlogs produced and distributed on MighTMenFTM give the producers and users a chance to experience a subject position that is not dictated solely by their biological bodies and experience rooted in daily life, rather through their everyday life experience of performing masculinity. In this mode of digital embodiment, users and producers alike are given the freedom to re-produce their gender identity and to have experiences that allow them to know the world through their preferred gender performance rather than through their biological sex.
The conversations surrounding Barret’s desire to be a drag queen after transitioning more and Arden’s description of how to pass as a man (in essence, how to play the drag king) are clear examples of authenticating. In both instances, the constructedness of gender is placed at the center of critique. Barret’s refusal to perform the drag queen until he is sure that the performance will be read as a performance marks the difference between wanting to pass and wanting to be authenticated. If Barret is seen as a drag queen, then at the same time, he is authenticated as male because a drag queen is a male performing a female. Arden, on the other hand, is explaining how to pass as a male in meatspace. His discussion of how to pass in meatspace is an act of authenticating his YouTube transgendered subjectivity. Remember, on YouTube, these transmen are not trying to pass as male; rather, they are performing the transgendered or the cyberqueer.

Chase is at an early stage of transitions and tells the viewers that he is not even sure exactly of who he is. He describes his voice and face as unisex, and explains that everyone knows him by his female name. Chase is questioning whether he really belongs on MighTMenFTM because he presents as unisex at best. Grayves responds, “Hey Chase, dude I think you’re legit. And I think you hit one of the bigger notes when it comes to diversity in the colab. As long as you keep making vids (through mtm or not) I’ll still watch” (MTM5: Masssssskk&Femmmm). Other users also comment that they like Chase because he is at this beginning stage. They appreciate the fact that he does not have all the answers. For example, Christina commented on Chase’s MTM15: Manly, Man, Man, Man... vlog,

Im so glad you’re a part of the mtm channel. I relate to you the most out of everyone on the channel. I see a lot of myself in you. I’m trying to find out who I really am too. I’m doing the research and watching videos and I really think I need to make the transition to a male. I look in the mirror and I don’t see what I want to see.
Chase’s struggles and confusion serve as a point of connection for users because they can empathize with him. Either the users are exactly where he is in the process, or they have been where he is. The sharing of these common experiences authenticates Chase’s performance of masculinity within the context of the MighTMenFTM users. Though Chase feels that he looks unisex at best, the users accept his performance and embodiment of masculinity, as evidenced by their comments.

**Men Not Boys**

A common thread linking these YouTube videos and the animutation videos that Kendall (2008) wrote about are the effeminate or feminized characters and the childish or children’s media characters. Kendall (2008) posits that users must reject these characters in order to conform to hegemonic masculinity. The MighTMenFTM users echo Kendall’s claim. In the following comment log, the users are discussing how being treated like boys rather than men makes them feel:

**XX:** Looking in the mirror and seeing a teenage boy, and being treated by society as a teenager, really has a large effect on my identity. I end up identifying with teenagers even though those years are over…I agree that the body must follow the mind for it to all come full-circle. You spoke really well in this video, esp. about mirroring and male/female validation and independence. But that’s expected from you. ;)

**KrisE:** Thanks a ton for your feedback, yeah part of me isn’t interested in being perceived as a man yet despite my age as I am not interested in missing out on adolescence again….does that make sense.

**Marm:** totally

**KrisW:** Hey man, great vid. I know for me (I’m pre everything) I feel like I need to have
my proper childhood and then go back through puberty. I’m 25 but inside I still feel like a little boy because I haven’t been able to have the same experiences that males normally get as they grow up. So I feel like I need to go through some of those stages before I can fully become a man on the inside if that makes any sense.

Adam

KrisE: Yeah totally makes sense… and I think that even after beginning T there is still space to embrace the little boy….

Marm: Totally agree with you on that. (MTM15: Manhood)

Even though the users are talking about embracing the little boy inside of them, they still talk about validating or authenticating their performances as male by invoking the social categorization of “adult.” When exactly then does one become an adult? These users point to the socialization process boys go through to learn how to become men and master masculinity.

Consider the following excerpts:

**HHH:** I think it’s interesting that the stereotype is that women are more mature than men. What I’m experiencing is that, in certain ways that’s true, but that emotionally there’s a lot of immaturity that’s socially allowed from women that isn’t allowed from men.

Before I came out, I used a lot of characteristically female communication patterns, but now I’m very aware that, even though I’m the same person, there is a pressure to take more responsibility for my actions, not to complain so much, (cont)

**HHH:** (cont) not to whine so much. I’m expected to stand up for myself to authority figures (rather than finding or expecting someone else to do it for me), and I’m respected more if I am confident in my opinions rather than stating what I think and then asking for someone else’s approval/validation.
I’m still doing the whole “teenage boy trying to figure out how to ‘be a guy’” thing,
where you’re just a little too loud, a little too chummy…you want to fit in, but you don’t
know how

**KrisE:** I definitely feel you on that! *(MTM15: Manhood)*

HHH’s comments illustrate the need to reject what he labels as “feminine communication
patterns.” HHH links characteristics such as whining, expecting someone else to protect you, and
seeking approval from others to immaturity, which he ultimately links to femininity.

The users’s explain that they think growing up and learning to be male is an integral part
of masculinity. Even though the vloggers and users often comment that they have always felt like
a male living in a female’s body they acknowledge that masculinity must be achieved and
verified by society. The remaining comments demonstrate how difficult it is to reconcile bodily
manifestations of masculinity with communicative behaviors.

**Merpez:** One thing I was thinking is that a lot of xy<sup>16</sup> guys play catch up too. Mainly,
that their bodies mature into adulthood often before they do psychologically. I don’t think
that people expect boys to be men inside before they’re man-like outside. For transguys
then, I think that element of inside-boyhood is ok, good even. I wonder how you could
know that you’ve reached manhood inside if that isn’t tested by the outside world. Not to
say that the world is the most important part, because it’s not.

**KrisE:** I think I totally get what you’re saying, kinda like how do you know if you have
met societies standards of being a man without that validation, and I’m not sure it is
possible to experience it without it because manhood in itself is constructed by society...

**Mouse:** People usually refer to me as a teenage boy…I’m trying to dress more adult I

<sup>16</sup> Biologically born males who perform normative masculinities.
guess…but I don’t think I look like a teenager…I do recognize though that I’m way too paranoid and anxious and skiddish…I’m trying to “man up” but it’s not my fault ya know…so ya…it’s messed up for us we haven’t had the chance to be young in a male body…society treated us different from childhood cause of the bodies we were born in…guys get treated differently than girls…it sucks but its true.

**Marm:** so true

**KrisE:** true true

**Jonsson:** Kris another great video! I think it makes perfect sense that you want to experience the life of a teenage boy (for a while). Enjoy it! Lloyd

**Jim:** I have a question- is everything male and female for you? I find in my every day life people see each other in a binary. I identify as a man but I don’t feel fully a man. I feel I am genderless. What are your thoughts?

**KrisE:** I personally don’t experience life within the gender binary but I do acknowledge that society as a whole very much does. I definitely identify as a man but don’t feel 100% male & I’m not sure that I ever will, however I do feel that I fit completely into society’s male box. That along with many other things is why I decided to physically transition.

But what it would be like if the gender binary concept didn’t exist is a boggling concept to ponder & I wonder if the trans identity would even exist. (*MTM15: Manhood*)

Finally, this comment log ends with the users talking about needing society’s validation in order to measure up as men. KrisE produced the vlog that these users have been commenting on. His sustained commitment to answering comments and engaging in typed dialogue with the other users helps to produce KrisE as a real person and not just a talking head. In effect, KrisE’s typed comments help him to become embodied by validating his perspectives and experiences through
the negotiation of communicative symbols with the other users. In his final typed comment, KrisE wonders if trans identity would exist and what the world would be like without the gender binary. It is quite telling that KrisE’s typed comment ends the discussion. It illustrates that the YouTube interface provides an environment conducive to productive interactivity that is not always available offline.

(De)centering?

MTM21: Gender Fluidity and Measuring Up as Men: This is one of three videos I found recorded outdoors. Watching Charles talk about gender fluidity and measuring up as a man outdoors had a different feel from all the videos recorded indoors, especially the videos recorded in bedrooms and closets. Those videos existed in a heterotopia of crisis because they seemed like confessions. The video, recorded in a park, had Charles centered in the frame sitting on the ground. In the background, all of the other people at the park were visible. In this setting, Charles talking about gender fluidity in a public park created a different type of heterotopia that functioned according to Foucault’s third principle. As Foucault (1986) explains, “The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible” (p. 25). Being in an open public space talking about masculinity and femininity in the context of gender fluidity creates a heterotopia; Charles is in a public park discussing topics considered incompatible within a public environment. Charles seems to recognize this incongruence, as he is constantly looking around and lowering his voice when people walk near him. In this way, he highlights the blurring of the public/private boundaries.

The transition for Charles has showed him that men and women are more alike than different. Charles (MTM21: Gender Fluidity and Measuring up as a Man) talks about being comfortable with gender fluidity, which he likens to being comfortable exhibiting female
characteristics. He explains that being a good man is not about being “manly, macho, or the strong one.” Instead, he explains, “A good man is someone who is in touch with their emotions.” Charles states, “Gender is a filter through which we navigate the world,” and he “prefer[s] to navigate the world as a male having a deep voice and having a cock.” In this excerpt, Charles invokes the image of the phallus, the most important symbol of what it means to be male and masculine. This phallic statement signals to me that even though Charles says he believes in the fluidity of gender, he also supports hegemonic masculinity. Consider the following comments that followed Charles’ video.

**LiveD:** I totally agree. That bit about gender fluidity is really interesting, I think that trans people really do have a better idea of what it is to be either gender…we at least in early stages pay so much attention to gender roles and what makes a person masculine or feminine and with that knowledge, if we’re brave or comfortable enough, we don’t have to bend to the ways of binary gender codes. Isn’t that what being trans is about? To be who we really are in terms of gender but out of either box.

**Mrx:** Hurray for Emerson! And great video. I’ve always held the same belief you have that gender being fluid and not binary. Also, I’m glad that you talked about hairstyles and length, because I think that’s very relevant to how some people perceive a person as being masculine or feminine.

**Moviebuff:** Love this vid Charles, full of wonderful thoughts and ideas, You look like a beatnik philosopher, diggin’ it.

Also makes me wanna chill out in the park, enjoy nature.

**Keegan:** I’m lovin the T-shirt Charles! I also completely agree with the fluidity of gender! I’ve BEEN saying that, for ages now. It’s more about strength of character…and
not about looks. :) I lover your videos Charles!

To be fair, Charles’ statement about gender being fluid and not caring if he exhibited feminine qualities needs to be contextualized. Charles presents as very masculine. He has a deep voice, a full and bushy goatee, and hairy arms. Charles, unlike Chase, is able to easily authenticate his embodiment as masculine. Because Charles is able to authenticate his masculinity by accepting, performing, and displaying some of the qualities of hegemonic masculinity, he would be able to exhibit some female qualities and still be considered masculine. On the other hand, as stated before, Chase has great difficulty authenticating his performances of masculinity. The consequences that followed Chase’s failed performance of masculinity are central to why he is changing schools. I agree that gender is fluid and that everyone has some masculine and some feminine qualities, but comparing Charles’ and Chase’s embodiment of masculinity suggests that to be able to deviate from the gender norm with little or no consequence, you must be able to be authenticated as either male or female.

The brief comment log above is really the first concrete indicator that these users and producers are looking for other ways to perform masculinity by questioning the gender binary. Masculinity cannot be separated from femininity because the gender binary sustains each category. It is the relationship between the masculine and the feminine that must be interrogated in order to expose hegemonic masculinities and mechanisms that sustain patriarchies (Brod, 1994). LiveD (MTM21: Gender fluidity and measuring up as a Man) states it best by pointing to the fact that transgendered individuals pay close attention to how society constructs gender, and with that knowledge, it should be possible to break the gender binary, which would allow for other options. Thinking of gender as fluid, rather than rigorously stable, is a way to resist the hegemonic structures that create masculinity and femininity.
Conclusion

The tension between reproducing hegemonic masculinity and re-producing alternative forms of masculinity are constantly felt on YouTube. On the one hand, the producers of the videos want to share their knowledge on how to pass with other transitioning people. They also want to explain that transgender masculinity is also a viable option and that challenging gender norms is good.

The transmen’s display of the weaving and unweaving of epistemological categories serves as “technological drag” in the same way that Butler (1993) talks about how dressing in drag undermines the naturalization of the categories of male and female. Enabled through YouTube’s interface, the MighTMenFTM embrace a playful and ironic stance of the subject/object position. At the same time that the transmen reproduce and re-produce, they announce their awareness of their position as something to be seen. They acknowledge their objectification through video posts where they post images of specific fragmented body parts, such as the scarred chest, along with a narrative about the procedure, effects, and future hopes of the transforming body. As Haraway (1991) writes, the cyborg is “no longer structured by the polarity of the public and private” (p. 151). They cyborg has no ties to protecting aspects of itself from the social, for the cyborg exceeds the boundaries by making explicit the link between the hegemonic structures that control masculinity and the subject.

MighTMenFTM’s combination of video and the Internet technologies of YouTube confuse the ideological rubrics, categories that implicitly bear the mark of gender. In its hybridity, The MighTMenFTM channel suggests a type of “subversive reterritorialization” of the semiotics gender with the process of subject formation and evolution (Butler, 1993, p. 19). By pushing against categories such as private/public, the transmen tacitly redefine what it means to
be fe/male within a given binary classification. In other words, the transmen may not be using the traditional tolls of drag to push against notions of gender, but in the productions of the videos, they force questions of the arbitrary boundaries through which masculinity is constituted, repeated, and naturalized.

The transmen on YouTube highlight the way in which the vision of the viewer does not produce stable knowledge. The transmen are always re-producing masculinities, never allowing for a final reading yet inviting the viewer to use his/her body as a canvas for the creation of meaning. The MighTMenFTM muddy our understanding of the power of watching and the privilege of sight in the way in which they push against definitions of private and public as well as the way in which they expose the shifting meanings of bodies. YouTube and the MighTMenFTM despite their apparent rootedness in hegemony, offer a text filled with play and complexity. MighTMenFTM offers an ironic cyborg subjectivity, one that uses the historical traditions of vision to tinker with the semiotics of re-presentation.
CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSIONS

Reading a book is an embodied experience; I feel the weight of the book, the texture of the covers and each page that lies within those covers. When watching a baseball game at home or at the diamond, my embodied experience is different because each location has different smells, sounds, and sights. However, in both places, I verbally cheer on my team and boo the other team. This same reasoning is valid when studying cyberculture, and the interface is an important part of cyberculture. The hum my hard drive makes as I wake my Mac from its sleep lets me know that it's working. My fingertips are kept warm from the air expelled by a fan through the keyboard. Pressing on the keys to produce text is a smooth motion with a dull tapping noise. I caress the mouse pad with my right index finger in order to scroll through pages. Closing, editing, jumping to new pages requires a caress from my right middle finger and a push on the mouse button from my right index finger. These movements constitute a relationship with the interface that allows me to enter, live, and leave cyberspace. However, these simple sensory and motor functions are not the only ways in which the computer user is embodied. Users are also embodied through textual descriptions, hyperlinks, and embedded images and video. The mashing-up of these elements produces digital personas that are as real as the meat of the body. Even in instances where the digital persona may not resemble the meat of the body, those personas are created through the experiences of the body, and choices are made based on those experiences. If I choose to perform a female, digital persona, all of my choices including how I choose to represent that self physically, emotionally, and discursively are dictated by how I think that persona would look, act, and talk. It is impossible to leave the body behind.
I started this research project two years ago at the beginning of the YouTube phenomenon. In the beginning, I was interested in the impact that YouTube was having on contemporary life in the United States. YouTube videos were going viral, and YouTube celebrities were being created. Presidential candidates’ faux pas were instantly available to watch and recirculate on YouTube, thus not letting the candidate or constituents forget. Major media conglomerates launched copyright infringement lawsuits against YouTube because users were reposting their content. More people than ever before were producing themselves and interacting in new ways. All of these changes to American culture were due to a video archive that was easily searched and allowed for the easy uploading of video.

Summary and Implications

I use videos produced by transgendered individuals to complicate normative notions of masculinity. These producers not only acknowledge that they are transgendered but also publicly announce and celebrate it with their videos. By purposefully and publicly displaying their bodies, these producers challenge audiences to interrogate critically epistemologies of sex, gender, and sexuality through the re-productions of masculinities.

In my attempt to answer the question “How do producers become digitally embodied on YouTube?”, I found that the producers authenticated themselves as transmen and had experiences on YouTube that they were not able to have in meatspace. The purpose of the MighTMenFTM channel was to be a collaborative space where transmen could produce videos that re-presented their daily lives. To be a trans man is often to be without the means of having an everyday life. These videos allowed these transmen to have everyday lives that center on being transgendered, rather than simply passing as male. YouTube did in fact allow this group of transmen to perform their transgendered identities, rather than their male identities. On
YouTube, these transmen performed a queer identity while explaining that in meatspace they perform the masculine. In meatspace, these transmen passed, and to pass is to be without a daily life because there is no freedom.

This leads to the next question: “Can digital embodiment contain properties that are transferable to offline lives?” Chase has the clearest case of digital embodiment influencing offline life. In a follow up video, six months after I gathered all the data, I found Chase explaining that he was transferring to a new college, and he was now wearing his binder out of the house. He is now performing his masculine gender in meatspace. He is even going to ask the instructors at his new college to refer to him as Chase, rather than his birth name. Chase explained that his interactions on YouTube gave him the self-confidence to live his offline life as the gender that he felt he was, male.

Finally, consider the last questions; “Does YouTube, a cyberspace rooted in visual representation, offer a space and means of experience for a group of people whose bodies and performances of gender are constantly in flux? Or, do the visual aspects of YouTube merely reinforce hegemonic notions of gender—specifically masculinity?” I found that the visual aspects of YouTube reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Though on YouTube these transmen embodied a transgendered or queer persona, they embodied or attempted to embody the masculine in meatspace. Their physical performances, such as the way they dressed, talked, styled their hair, and positioned their web cams, were strategic in helping them achieve masculine images. This was evident in Jace’s video where the camera was positioned to record from the collarbone up, giving the impression that he was shirtless. Physicality was also equally evident in Arden’s video where he described using all the senses to pass as male. Indeed, he was playing on all those senses, save the sense of smell, while producing his videos. So again, while
on YouTube, they embodied the cyberqueer, but in meatspace, their goal was to pass as a masculine male. Whether or not they were successful in their endeavors in meatspace is not important; what is important is that given the choice they would be part of the mainstream. This desire to be part of the mainstream as well as the video explanations of how others can pass as a masculine male, give direct evidence to the fact that YouTube can be a colonizing force to reinforce hegemonic masculinity just as easily as it can provide a space to live a daily life that is not afforded in meatspace.

A serious drawback that I see to the posting of videos on YouTube is that even though most of these men perform masculinity and maleness offline, they do not talk about the sex to which they were born. This indicates that even though they are willing to discuss their transgenderedness on YouTube they do not seem to be willing to have the same discussions in their offline daily lives. In this case, Foucault’s (1990/1976) notion of regulating biopower would seem to be at work. Creating a public space in cyberspace could easily be seen as a new form of the panopticon, in which the transmen are confined as others while being watched by the mainstream. YouTube then is seen as a window into the cell; perhaps the eye is so closely focused that neither the transmen nor the viewers of their videos can see the confines of the cell. In this sense, YouTube creates the illusion of freedom and public participation while in actuality it is just a means of control. Like lepers in a lepers’ colony, these transgender individuals on YouTube are free to move around and be seen but only in that confined space. Outside of their confined space, they become a threat.

What I found was that all of the producers reproduced ideas and images that were rooted within the power structures of hegemonic masculinity. For example, Arden takes great pride in having a deep voice and a muscular body. The users who comment on Arden’s videos support
his quest to achieve a strong worked out body, which is a form of hegemonic masculinity.

Though Barret and Jace are often mistaken for being gay males, which they do not mind, they are quick to point out to the offending party that they have girlfriends. In these instances, Jace and Barret maintain hegemonic masculinity by alluding to being in heterosexual relationships.

The re-production of masculinity for these vloggers begins with their names. Because they were all born biologically female, at some point, they asked to be called by a different name. Sometimes family and friends were supportive, and sometimes they were not. The creation of this subjectivity is important because to the transgendered individual, this subjectivity is the one requiring authenticating; the one created through biological appearance is the erroneous subjectivity.

Finally, the absence of any form of discussion revolving around race, ethnicity, class, etc. creates a very Western, white picture of what it is like to be a trans man. Furthermore, these absences create a perspective that sex and gender exist independently, and there are no correlations to other characteristic signifiers such as race, ethnicity, class, and able bodiedness. However, it is well documented that all of these “other” characteristics determine suitable performances of masculinity because the performance of masculinities, especially acceptable forms of masculinities, is determined and bound by the culture in which it is performed.

The critical reflections that occurred on the MighTMenFTM YouTube channel demonstrate that YouTube provides content that facilitates users’ participation as agents in a free, democratic society. YouTube is not simply functioning as a video warehouse. Instead, YouTube provides an environment that seeks to build publics without borders, where in effect, everyone has the chance to be heard and seen.

The suppression of transgendered identity not only affects the trans community but
everyone else as well. By suppressing transgender identity, society is denied the rich diversity of sex and gender expression and experiences that exists. The producers of MighTMenFTM created a community through extended discussions of the everyday lives of its producers and users. Examining the authenticating process of embodiment at the interface has illustrated how the boundaries between online and offline life are less apparent than once thought. In fact, some will say that the boundaries have been blurred to the extent that we cannot see where one ends and the other begins. Still others will say that the boundaries are permeable, allowing parts of each space to enter into the other.

As evidenced by the section on authenticating versus passing in chapter 4, most of the enacted performances and the described performances on MighTMenFTM were situated around stereotypical versions of hegemonic masculinity and how to achieve those versions that demonstrated strength, responsibility, confidence, independence, and body images that included body hair, facial hair, and short hairstyles. However, YouTube provides a space that allows for some loosening of those rigid performances of hegemonic masculinities. YouTube provides a space for the vloggers to engage in critical commentary regarding their performances. The more they felt like men, the more they felt like they could deviate from those hegemonic ideals and create performances that embraced both their masculine and feminine characteristics. All of the vloggers agreed that showing emotion, as well as maintaining a comfortable personal style and self-expression, were the most accepted female characteristics.

Moving from simple users to producers on YouTube has allowed the producers on the MighTMenFTM collaborative channel to engage in an epistemology of doing (Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007). Through the production of their YouTube videos, Barrett and Chase were able to know through doing. Barrett was able to articulate why as a trans man he still wanted to do drag,
but more importantly that he only wanted to do drag once his transition from a female to male was more complete. This clarification becomes more apparent in the comments that follow the video because the commenters explain the difference between drag and passing. Passing is explained as being what they (trans people) are forced to do in order to fit in. Drag is a fun performance, which my reading of the discussion equates to gender parody. Here, Barrett and the other users who left comments are actually interested in drag as transgendering or attempting to break down the gender dichotomy.

For Chase, YouTube represents the only space in which he engages in a gender performance that does not necessarily correspond with his biological sex. Chase is skeptical to say that he performs masculinity in a way in which he would be able to pass in everyday meatspace. However, he does state that he believes that he falls into a category that would label him as “ambiguous.” Chase’s fears are not rooted in his gender performances being misread like those of Barrett, but rather, in not being able to be read. In none of the user comments that follow Chase’s videos do users confirm Chase as passing as male; rather they encourage him to be who he is.

I find both of these videos and the comments that follow to be positive evidence of transgendering and breaking down the gender dichotomy. Through these two videos, the producers demonstrated that YouTube could be used as a transformative space.

Authenticating the embodiment of the transgendered vloggers was not strictly limited to the appearance of the body. Chase, who self professes to perform a transgender identity only on YouTube because he was afraid that he could not pass as a male in offline life, was authenticated time and again by the users of the channel. Chase’s conflict and self-doubt reflected many of the
users’ current and past experiences. The users projected their self-reflection onto Chase and unquestionably accepted him as transgender.

The interface has created a very visible intersection between gender and sexuality. Very few of the MighTMenFTM vloggers mention, and none of them discuss, sexual orientation. My reading of this omission on their part is based on their performances of hegemonic masculinity. I base this criticism on the fact that they are dating people who are the opposite gender of their preferred gender presentation, meaning they are dating women and the relationship visually mimics heterosexual relationships. Within this group of individuals who strive to be men and masculine through any means necessary seem to also accept that to be a real man and to be masculine you must be heterosexual.

Methodologically, this study builds upon the cyberethnographic agenda to study how people make sense of routine activities as online/offline spaces intersect at the interface. Cyberethnography is like other forms of ethnography because it provides a method to listen to silenced voices, balance diverse meanings, and connect speech with action (Gajjala & Altman, 2006; Star, 1999). Looking at cyberspace as a culture and as a cultural artifact redirects the scholarly gaze onto something that is simultaneously mundane and spectacular, which makes visible the resistance and challenge--the obvious characteristics of culturally and socially constituted technologies (Hine, 2000).

Through a use of epistemologies of doing (Gajjala, Rybas, & Altman, 2007), I was able to gain much deeper insights into the cultural practices of the producers and users of the MighTMenFTM channel. I learned that making a simple vlog often took multiple attempts to get just the right recording. I also learned that talking into a camera made me self-conscious about what I was doing with my face and body, and it was difficult to connect with an audience. The
vloggers who look directly into the camera as if they were talking to a specific person had a much better chance of connecting with the audience than someone who was watching the image on the screen. A few of the vloggers displayed difficulty looking into the camera, and as an audience member, I subsequently felt disconnected from them. Chase, however, is the one exception. Chase’s inability to maintain eye contact with the camera and his constant fidgeting helped to construct and authenticate his embodiment as a transgendered individual who was is trying to come to terms with how he feels and what his body looks like.

Theoretically, this research pushes the work of Butler (1990a, 1993, 2004) and Foucault (1972/1971, 1990/1976, 1995/1975, 1988) into the digital age. By weaving together Butler’s work on performativity and Gajjala, Rybas, and Altman’s (2007) epistemologies of doing, it becomes apparent that the interface serves as a bridge to performing online identities and the performances of daily life. These theoretical connections blur the boundaries between online and offline life in such a way that they each become part of the other. Foucault’s work then intersects and illustrates that the panopticon and docile bodies are present in cyberculture. The cyborging of the body, or adding digital prosthetics, still re-presents hegemonic cultural norms. As has been proven in this research, entering cyberspace by no means separates the mind from the body.

Unanswered and Emergent Issues

Originally, the intent of this project was to create a theoretical framework that explained how YouTube users produced identities and how what they learned from producing those identities affected their interpersonal communication offline. However, what I learned during the course of this project was that before I can examine the production of identity I first needed to explore how users utilize the tools offered to them at the interface and how they use those tools to authenticate themselves in a digital communication context.
It would also be prudent to investigate the different ways in which to produce a vlog. For a standard vlog with the purpose of simply disseminating information, whether that is personal or political, there are three basic ways of production. First, there is the standard talking head as was the case with the MighTMenFTM producers. Second, there are the mash-up videos, which is where producers splice together multiple video and audio clips to create a message. Third, there are combinations of the talking head format and the mash-up video format. This third approach is going to be an important area of study because as the Facebook and YouTube generation ages, these digital technologies are going to become more prolific.

Will YouTube and the “culture of the clip” replace existing modes of media distribution, namely the Commercial Broadcasting Model? Because part of YouTube’s popularity relies, in part, upon recirculated selections of mainstream media, I argue that it will not replace existing models, but rather, change them. Now that video capturing and editing software and hardware are widely accessible, the regulation of copyrighted material will need to be redefined and expanded to include online environments, or at the very least a more concise and comprehensive definition of fair use will need to be created. I do not think people should be able to recirculate copyrighted material and claim it as their own or to make a profit from it. However, the media in question create and maintain cultural values and also affect cultural memory. The citizens who are affected by this dissemination should have the opportunity to critique it, and one way to do that is through the power of the clip.

Does YouTube as a form of media and culture provide content that facilitates user’s participation as agents in a free democratic society? The research contained within these pages suggests “Yes,” YouTube does facilitate users’ participation as agents in a free society. The MighTMenFTM channel provided a public space for transgendered users to explore and discuss
issues related to their gender identity. In my opinion, this public nature transformed a subject and a group of people usually hidden from mainstream society into active participants. Their visibility and active participation in the public sphere provides them with a certain amount of agency by declaring that it is ok to be different. However, this research only investigates the cultural issue of hegemonic masculinity in one group.

What’s at Stake?

The current and future studies of cyberculture as well as the positionality of the body and the embodied all question new media and the contexts that shape and inform them. The focus of this research project is not merely the Internet, but rather how the networked media and culture of today construct and reconstruct practices in everyday life. This philosophical, theoretical, and methodological engagement is necessary for developing a critical undertaking towards technology-mediated interactions, which are progressively becoming more prevalent in everyday life. It is also necessary to avoid taking these technological innovations as natural progression of human history that strengthens the status quo. Because technologies carry meaning, they contribute to negotiating issues critical for life in society: power, authority, knowledge, and representation. Communication is central at the intersections of online and offline environments and involves questions about who makes decisions, who speaks, and who remains silent. It is important to ask these critical questions, because as demonstrated in this study, the body never disappears, which indicates that power structures can and are being replicated in cyberspace. The good news is that if the interface is viewed as an intersection between cyberspace and meatspace, rather than two distinctly different spheres, then there are opportunities of transgression and reformulations of the power structures that exist in society.
The Greek agora, French salon, English coffee houses, and American state houses have been the past sites of public discourse. In each of the aforementioned sites, only select groups of individuals were allowed to speak. Now, with the Internet and the expansion of cyberculture anyone with an Internet connection can participate in and produce public discourse. YouTube is representative of one such Internet site. YouTube’s expansive popularity, both in the United States and globally, situates it as an important site of investigation for communication scholars.


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YOUTUBE VIDEOS REFERENCED


APPENDIX A: VIDEO DESCRIPTIONS AND COMMENT LOGS

WEEK 5: Masculinity and Femininity

MTM5: Masc. and Fem. (November 24, 2008)
Jace: During this video, Jace is shirtless, the cam shows his face to just below collar bone. (I don’t know and can’t tell if he has female breasts or if he’s had top surgery). He says that when he’s with gay men and lesbians he doesn’t have to watch what he says or does in terms of trying pass. He goes further to say, “but around old, redneck, straight people I do.” He says that he has a tendency to sit and cross his legs like a dude, but sometimes he sits with his legs crossed like a girl. When he sits like a girl he thinks he shouldn’t do that. He concedes that around straight people he is less confident and tries not to draw any attention to himself. Unlike when he’s around gay people because he feels confident around them.

Tonya:
nice tat

You:
i agree pretty tatt

Vuji:
I see you as a male...not a butch lesbian. You do look young though. But that is not a bad thing. When your 80 people are going to think that you look like you 60...it will be great! Embrace it.
peace
dunielle

Bigstring:
hey hows it goin? i just wanted to comment really quick and say that i think when you do start T that its going to work out really well for you body shape wise. i dont know if that sounds weird and im not trying to sound weird,but i know my own shoulder muscles and the way the connect to my neck wouldnt be as masculine as i would like them to be but it seems like you will have fantastic results so congrats on that man. im jealous. and just be yourself and relax a little cause you seem cool.

Johnson:
My impression of your presentation (both in person and on your videos) is of a teenaged boy. I have never seen any behavior that says trans or gay to me. You are doing great!

Mlando:
He doesn't look THAT young. I mean, I look so much younger than him, but I think that all FTM's looks younger than they really are, but testosteron helps alot tho! I'm kind of jealous!
You're so masculine :P

Jason:
Just watch your vid, and you look and sound just like a young bloke. Not a lesbian, as your not
being "butch". God luck for the future.

AssD:  
dude, I think you're just reading too much into it.  
people will see you the way you see yourself.  
keep that in mind.

Dao:  
Dude I get the "lesbian" clock all the time, even from straight people!, I understand how frustrating that is. Points to your voice though, its a lot deeper than mine and it doesn't sound like you're trying!!

Winter:  
I totally understand the age thing; people usually think I'm a 14-year-old boy :/ And I'm 18... Lol... OR they'll think i'm 18, and the moment i open my mouth, and ppl will be like *????* :O

Chi:  
wow! just wow...
your like spilling out words that feel like my own!  
pretty much everything you just talked about sounds like my life.  
i try to deepen my voice around people in public or somtimes i just stay silent unless you NEED to speak.  
and alot of people think im like a 14 year old boy.  
and as soon as i cut my hair short, alot of people were calling me "that gay kid" everyone calls me a kid still cause im 20 LOL.  
but yeah, thanks dude for letting me know that im not the only one like this

Jace:  
no problem, dude. that's awesome that you feel the same why i do. it's amazing! thanks for watching and tune in again!

HHH:  
i can relate to a lot of what you said. sometimes i catch myself sitting with my legs crossed that way too! i think once i start T and doing "feminine" things isn't a signal to people that i'm female, i won't be as worried about doing that stuff, or feel like i have to turn into a macho man either.  
keep your chin up - literally and figuratively!

Becoming:  
a biggest part of my dysphoria is that people think i'm a really butch lesbian.

KrisE:  
I totally feel you on the straight environment vs. a gay one. My confidence level completely drops when I am around straight folks because I feel like they can see right through me almost...
JayYankee:
great video about masc and fem and passing. I know that at the gay bars, I have men who think
I'm a gay man and women see me as a butch lesbian. Then straight people see me as straight
unless I wear pink. I worry about mannerisms too. At my job people think I'm only 16 or 17. I've
also gotten 12 and 15 hoping that now I'm on T i can get some facial hair and jaw definition.
Hope your weeks going well.

Xchris:
you look great;not feminine at all.
i'm mistaken for a 16 year old boy too-it'll pay off when we're old guys!
peace!

xcx

XX:
PT 1: I call myself the Chameleon, because my gender presentation (how femme I allow myself
to act) changes depending on the ratio of heterosexuals to homosexuals present.
And I definitely feel you about the friends; I feel like my friends see me the same way.

PT 2: If I met you, I would not think you were female. That said, I have all the same insecurities
you do, and people tell me the same thing about myself. [I don't believe them.]

Jaks:
I think you look really masculin man! You really don't have to worry, I'm surprised you're not on
T yet cz you pass really really well!

Watch:
i think you are a beautiful person!

stay true and shine on!

Mcole:
.omg girls make the cutest guys i sware.

MTM5: Masculine & Feminine Behavior and Passing (November 24, 2008)
Arden: Arden starts by telling a story about getting his ears pierced twice (1 on each ear).
He said that he ended up taking one out because 1 pierced ear is masculine. He said he told
his mom that the 1 ear got infected and that is why he took it out. Some of things Arden
suggested in order to pass is to have a short haircut, always wore guys clothing, (he goes for
the surfer/skater look), and practice lowering your voice. He talks about scent and said he
always men’s deodorant. He used to use Old Spice aftershave, but his mom said he smelled
like his grandpa. He remembers that early in his transition when people saw him and
couldn’t read him as male right away: “they would see me, hear me, smell me.” And in the
end because of all the things he did had had more he points than she points. He said he
played off the senses as much as he could. In regards to attitude and interactions: he
advises to be who you are. For instance he liked gym and shop class. He was more
aggressive and vulgar than girls his age. He said, that’s who he was. He remembers a piece of advice his grandfather gave him, “look someone straight in the eyes, and when you meet someone give them a solid handshake. Looking someone in the eyes and them looking you in the eyes keeps them from looking anywhere else. Having a strong handshake illustrates confidence. Confidence is key; if you don’t believe you have it you won’t feel it.”

Wormwood:
Great advice at the end of the video. It's especially helpful to remember for those of us who are pre-everything.

Chase:
your face looks fine!

CSI:
ya with the flamboient thing i am gay and i pass 100% and i've only been on t for 4 weeks and i havent had anything really bad happen to me like not passing the last time i didn't pass was when i was early 13 and im 14 now so the tips really are helpful with people who are pre-everything. The smell thing and the attitude are really big and if u act flamboient you might actually pass as a gay man. that is how i pass.

VonC:
Arden is so charming!

Mlando:
I want your voice! lol. You look and sound great man!

HHH:
i'm pre-everything and i'm a cashier so i get to evaluate my passing literally 100s of times in a night (yay walmart). it is interesting to see what things make a difference in how customers see me. my voice is very high, even when i lower it, so i usually pass until i open my mouth. unavoidable as a cashier!
thanks for the advice, man!

Hola:
good video. good topic.

Arbitrary:
what a diva. kitty wants to be on camera. good vid.

Smick:
he-points and she-points totally made me laugh. but actually it explains it really well.

i'd consider myself genderqueer and totally confused some people switching between being stereotypical male some days and very feminim other days. they thought i was two different persons, myself and my brother.
smell really is a big thing and most people don't thing about it. but like you said the major thing is confidence, if you have that you're more than halfway there.

love/sara

You:
prairie surfing, lol?

Christov:
he-points, she-points: LOL!
i used to do the old spice thing, too, when i was really young. to this day, i can't get my grandfather out of my head when i smell it! love it tho!
arden, your vids are great; keep it up!
christov

Live:
At like 3:57 I can see the tail of a black cat as it walks past the mirror in the background and then there's an MSN message sound. lol...sorry. I really was paying attention...I have to say that I'm guilty of thinking in terms of the point system too...but yeah, I totally get what you're getting at. And I love the smell of oldspice! Unfortunately my mom absolutely hates it...but, oh well.

Brover:
I hate the killer hand shake... not my fault my hands are slim sometimes they are just crushed :(

MTM5-Behavior and its effect on “passing” (November 25, 2008)
Troy-talks about when he could act feminine and people not question him (his sex). Troy focuses on the physical not the behavior. He talks about to sitting with legs spread not together. He remembers being told that he can’t sit like that because it’s not feminine, just like he was told that he shouldn’t be so into sports. He was afraid that boys wouldn’t like him as a girl (because he liked to do masculine things, see previous sentence), and people would question gender and sexuality when he looked like a girl. Troy works in retail sales and sells purses sells. He said that his female customers never questions his sex. He believes that they think he’s gay though, which he said is ok. He said that “people don’t question my gender now; they question my sexuality,” which he attributes to looking and sounding masculine.

You:
used to sit with my legs apart too. Strangely enough, it was the boys who noticed and questioned it.

Chase:
i like this video :)

Jay:
great video. i was just thinking of this topic the other day. can't wait to see the other guys responses.
Dan:
you are awesome.i love ur videos.

Thatgirl:
you're so attractive and intelligent

MTM5: Massssskk&Femmmm (November 26, 2008)
Chase: Chase’s videos are usually very short. He is usually very fidgety and doe not usually look directly at the camera. Chase only performs his masculine gender on YouTube, never outside of his house because he doesn’t think he can pass. Chase describes his voice and face as unisex, but everyone knows him by his female name. He finishes by saying that it helps to have short hair, which he does, but everyone thinks he’s a dyke.

Lid:
I watch your videos! I love your videos! =]

Two:
I watch them, and I like them too :)

NO:
That's picture is kinda freaky. Maybe it's because it's so big/

Dan:
i watch your videos!!ur one of my faves on the channel!!i wish you made more!!

YngJ:
dude, i'm really sorry about that old picture. i know i would not be a happy camper if i had to look at a huge poster of myself around hs graduation

Dmb:
HAHAHAHAHA!!
"That was the sexiest thing you've ever seen."
FUCKIN HILARIOUS.

Laurel:
You're always sexy!! I think you look very masculine. I don't think you look like a dyke. Don't be unsure of yourself you look great and you totally pass in my book.

Dmb:
P.S. you ARE awesome & cool. so there.

Comment(s) marked as spam

Dimi:
We all watch your vids! And it's cool you're on this channel. You really cover the whole spectrum.
Graves:
hey Chase, dude I think you're legit. And I think you hit one of the bigger notes when it comes to
diversity in the colab. As long as you keep making vids (through mtm or not) I'll still watch.
Cheers!

Chase:
:) thankssss

Mufcgirl:
"that was the sexiest thing you've ever seen"
haha
& stop saying your vids are boring - they're not.

COUTURE:
Damn, boy... do those dishes. *lol*
Nice video, by the way.

XX:
YOU are awesome. I share a lot of the same feelings that you expressed here. I have a gay guy
that's been interested in me for some time now, and he keeps making comments about me taking
T (because he's openly and admittedly biased) and I keep telling him... you know what? a) I don't
really know who I am and what I want and that is a commitment for life I am not prepared to
make at this time, b) My house is DECKED OUT in pictures of the old me? Don't you think
seeing that EVERY DAY effects me,

XX:
at least a little bit? It's hard when at home you still go by your birth name and female pronouns
and have to see pictures of the old you (and not one of the new you) everywhere. I think it makes
"finding yourself" even harder. I also think that it makes us stronger -- for being able to develop
an identity separate from that, all on our own, while we have our past looming over us at every
angle.

<3 you, boy.

MyteeMenz5: HEY BOYHHH.. oh wait (November 26, 2008)
Jarred: Cooking Thanksgiving dinner and talking about masc and femm.
Jarred watches other guys and sees what they do, then reproduces those performances.
“I’m on T and so I pretty much pass 100% except for people who know me.” For example
he says to say things like, “man” and “dude”

He also says that some people are just better able to pass than others. I can be very
flamboyant. He knows that not passing is a terrible feeling, but that you can not let others
define who you are. He ssed Frisbee to explain masculinity and sports; some men are good
at Frisbee and can throw it a long way and some can’t; just like some women can throw a
Frisbee a long ways and some can’t. Then he says he’s not sure if this is about being good
at sports or muscular? He decides that maybe it’s about athleticism? Jarred talks about
needing to be comfortable with yourself and once you are everybody else in your life will be too. He talks about leg crossing. His favorite quote is from Elenor Roosevelt: “No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.” He acknowledges that the general population will judge you, but you are a man, not inferior to anyone, and you’re stronger than them because you’re going through things they can probably never imagine.

Chi:
yeah potato!!

lol, yeah i have a hard time passing, but then im really not out in public much, im kind of isolated but hopefully that wont happen much longer

i hate being called a "maam" over the phone cause my voice is one thing i can't control. sometimes i wanna say "hey wait a minute who you callin a maam, im a guy!!"

but you have to pick your battles and put up with the maam comments i guess

Jarred:
true true i know how shitty it is when your maamed or missed :/ but hey its what make us tough

Laurel:
I totally agree! I get pissed when people call me ma'am and miss, but personally it makes me more of a man. I love your screen name btw. That's awesome!!

Gabv:
i like you, you're a wise kid. :]

Jarred:
thanks! :)

Dot:
You are so right about guys calling each other "Man" all the time. When I started passing, the first thing I noticed was that guys added "man" to the end of every sentence when talking to me. I was like, thanks, yes I am.

MGMT rocks. Isn't that song a mix with Justice? If so, I just discovered that one the other day too.

Tubesocks:
*prepares to be punched in the faace*
i was so pronouncing that wrong haha
i was on e of the ones saying it like "care-o"
damnn hha

Jarred:
ahahaha no its all good
its just my southern upbringing haha

NO:
Low rider skullcandy?
I got some silver and red. Nice

NO:
I love that song! I like you kitchen. That song always makes me want to dance. I know what you mean about mothers or people being right and it being true and it still being able to annoy the fuck out of you. Fore example I work with children and when the 5 year old goes Im bored I say "read a book" or "find something to do Or you can clean your room" I sound like my mother. but it works

Chase:
haha your vid is super funny!

You:
lol, "say man" ahaha. I do that when I'm trying really hard to pass, lol

CSI:
i pass 100% and im out as gay and i am very foamboiant. i jsut havent had any issues with not passing.

*MTM5: girly-man (November 27, 2008)*
Barret: Barret reflects on how he performs masculinity. He states that he always has short hair, in fact he used to shave his head. He states, “unfortunately, I think I still look feminine.” He explains that his wife views him as a guy but sometimes more of a flamboyant gay guy. He’s not into sports but played soccer as a kid, always had short hair, always tried to “woo the ladies.” He says that he didn’t make it a point to do things that were masculine. “It’s not something that I think about it’s just something that I do.”

Barret confesses that he wants to be a drag queen. He is very nervous about actually doing drag for two reasons. The first, he wonders if dressing in drag, wearing dresses and high heals, will come naturally or if he’ll have to practice. Second, he is afraid that he will be able to pass as a female, rather than being read as a drag queen. For this reason, he states that he will not do drag until he has completed his transformation.

Fudge:
u don't look at all feminine!

Barret:
well, thank you.

NO:
I agree I don't see the feminine in you. don't be silly.
Barret:
haha. thanks.

Quin:
A trans man drag-queen! Heh. That's just awesome!

Barret:
I hope it happens soon! haha

Beth:
love, true love is awesome

Barret:
indeed, it is.

HHH:
curious, pre-T would you have been willing to be a drag queen?

Barret:
probably if i had had chest surgery, but otherwise, i doubt it. i mean, its something ive always wanted to do.

HHH:
i'd like to be a drag queen, but right now that's too close to doing what i've done for the last 20 years. granted that was forced, and this would be by choice, but i think that's my hesitation.

XX:
I'm interested in being a drag queen also! Do you watch Queer as Folk? When Michael did drag in Season 2 I almost died out of disbelief in how gorgeous (s)he looked. I would hate to present that female AS a female -- not just because it's expected, but because it doesn't fit. I don't want to go out to a formal dinner wearing a dress, I want to go out formally in a suit. But at the club? I think I would love to doll myself up.

Barret:
exactly

Cat:
I thought you are a guy! I don't see anything feminine in you...You look and talk like a guy!

Barret:
because i am a guy.

Jouck:
when you said "wife" my first thought was, "=O holy shite! how old ARE you?!"

Barret:
im twenty seven.

Makeup:
I'm not trying to be rude or offensive AT ALL when I ask this, I'm just slightly confused: but why would you want to dress or be a drag queen after your surgery? Doesn't that kind of defeat the purpose?

MTM5: Mas and Fem behavior and Passing (November 28, 2008)
Josh: Never really had any feminine traits. I don’t really have anything to say about this topic. The video was 24 seconds long.

All comments about the red wall in the background or the posters on the wall.

MTM5: Masculine and Feminine behavior (November 28, 2008)
Brett: Asked for advice on livejournal.com on how to look and act masculine. Apparently someone responded by saying his clothes and hair were giving it away. He was instructed to buzz my hair, wear bigger shirts, and wear baggy jeans. At the time, he thought changing everything about him would make him feel more comfortable. Now, he’s telling his viewers that they need to hang onto themselves and be comfortable with who they are. He says that being masculine is about how you carry yourself and being confident.

LifeUnrated:
I totally agree with the style thing. I felt like I had to wear really baggy pants to pass, but I then got over that and realized that it's not about how I dress, it IS about how you carry yourself. For sure. This video doesn't suck at all, i thinks its great advise that people don't usually hear. Keep on keepin' on.

VonC:
i'm glad that you're a hipster transguy. there aren't enough!

Jarred:
i totally agree man that's why you transition is TO BE YOURSELF
great word
peace
jarred

Thegay:
Woo, I feel you man. It's ironic that I saw that post of ours before. I don't ask for advice either since the type of hair I want and the way I act is not "passing" enough. I don't want to pass and no be myself either

KrisE:
I LOVE the realness of this vid!!! Thanks man!!

Qld:
you make some good points. great video! and cool shirt :).
Twoheaded:
Awesome. Yours was my favourite video this week.

Vuji:
I think that majority of the time it is in the face. You know what I mean? I don't think it has much to do with the clothes or hair. I could be wrong, but that it how I see people anyway. For example, my male cousin has a pretty face. I always thought he would look good as a woman because his face is just so pretty. Does that make sense? A lot of men have pretty faces. Oh, and one of my male friends has a huge bubble butt. He has a butt that most women would kill for! Great video.

dunielle

Specify:
"be yourself" is always good advice.

Dots:
I agree with this so much. I think we're in some of the same LJ communities, and a lot of the passing advice is crap. It's just really... essentialist? It's very basic. And kinda boring as far as style goes, hah! My style is kinda similar to yours, and I'm a little girly looking, but I pass b/c my face has changed, my neck got thicker, and my voice dropped. People don't care about the rest.

Chase:
dude, this video is awesome, i totally agree with you :)

Jacob:
I related to what you said about feeling contradicted + uncomfortable in the efforts to be read as male yet sacrificing personal style. It is pretty crappy that some of us choose to let go part of ourselves in order to make other self expressive aspects more visible, we should just be be able to have it all. I also agree with the fact that T can eventually resolve the conflict other people have when perceiving your gender, but T isn't for everyone. So it's an ongoing problem for many.

Hola:
big polo shirts! i got that too! im a skinny jean fan myself.

HappyGav:
I'm wearing skinny jeans right now! lol
I'm cozy.
you're right man. cool video.
and love the shirt, i have it in green, brown and white.

Nicole:
You look like the actor from midnight express.

Trevor:
i totally agree with you on the masculin and feminen bein all bullshit!
Riotboy:
oooHH man where'd you get your shirt????!!!11

Batgod:
Well said!
To be a man/woman in most western societies is (besides biological traits) defined by what is expected that a man/woman should act like in our society. This is just something socially constructed we are taught from a very young age. Life is too short so people should wear what they like and behave as they like, you can never please everybody anyways.

Batgod:
Also, it's hard to be, or awkward to be around, a person who is uncomfortable with what they wear or how they behave. I am comfortable with dressing more unisex as well and I'd be pretty painful to be around if forced to wear big polo shirts and baggy jeans ha ha.

Bella:
you're a smart one.
You define things in ways, people dont normal experience. You look too deep into it.

keep it up

Ryan:
I totally agree!! I tried to wear so-called "manley" stuff that I wasn't comfortable in, and that doesn't make sense to do that. You are so right about just being yourself and wearing what you feel good in, because that will make you feel more confident in the long run. And yeah, the point to transitioning is to become more of the person that you truly are...so don't try to be something different.
You look like Jonathan Taylor Thomas (sort of), except you look buffer! Hot! :)

Sporks:
haha.

maybe someone SHOULD question the jonas brothers.

anyway, thanks a lot. it's good to hear someone say this.

Week 15: Manhood

MTM15 Maturity + Internal struggles (January 31, 2009)
Jacob: Jacob says it’s easier to locate masculinity than “male.” He states that the process of transitioning, coming out, T, surgery; helps you to mature. He identifies as a young man but he still have the sense of humor of a 13-year-old boy. He likens this experience to still going through puberty [think he’s 24 now].

Acoy:
Happy birthday! Hope you have a great day! X
Jacob:
Thank you, I will!

Bandit:
Happy Birthday!! *hugz*

Jacob:
Thank yous!

Five:
Happy Birthday! :)

Jacob:
:D Thanks

Five:
No problem. Have some fun for us. :P

Christina:
happy birthday! by the way what did you mean by trans specific spaces? im a trans guy myself but i haven't even begun to transition. i didn't think of myself as too much different from guys until like elementary school but i never grieved too much over the fact that i was born the wrong gender. i kinda just thought that every girl wished they were born a guy cuz i didn't understand y any girl would enjoy being female. lol

Rants:
i can't answer for jacob but i assume he means spaces where being trans isn't an issue and is the norm because everybody is. i think youtoov is great with the amount of trans people that blog because, you know, there is always someone who either blogs, comments or reads who has been/going through the same shit and most importantly is still around. they even give someone like me whose dating a transguy something.

Christina:
thanks.

Jacob:
that is exactly what I meant, thanks for chiming in

Tur:
Happy B-Day MAN!

Jacob:
A belated thank you!

Livelife:
I know a lot of people have already said it. but happy happy birthday!
Jacob:
Thanks!

Jsan:
Happy Birthday Jacob!!!! Hope you enjoy yourself!

Jacob:
Thank you!!

Keegan:
Happy Birthday man! I don't know how to address this topic... I'm still struggling with grasping the realization of being trans, I'm very much at the beginnings of this still... for a lot of reasons. Good video.

Camera:
Hope your bday was good. I agree on knowing which aspects about yourself are masculine/male. I think it is more innate than the general public gives us credit for.

Love:
you're such a strong guy jacob. i admire you and respect you so much.

MTM15-Manhood (February 1, 2009)
KrisE: Unlike biological men, transmen miss mirroring men in adolescence because they were women. Doesn’t know if he’s reaching any milestones of maturing into a real man. Starting testosterone is like going through menopause and male puberty at the same time. Insides + body = man. In the end he says, “It’s the journey to get there,” that makes you a man and that’s what manhood is all about.

Bandit:
w00t!

XX:
I made a video saying a lot of the same things earlier today (it's not up though). Looking in the mirror and seeing a teenage boy, and being treated by society as a teenager, really has a large effect on my identity. I end up identifying with teenagers even though those years are over... I agree that the body must follow the mind for it to all come full-circle. You spoke really well in this video, esp. about mirroring and male/female validation and independence. But that's expected from you. ;)

KrisE:
thanks a ton for your feedback, yeah part of me isn't interested in being perceived as a man yet despite my age as I am not interested in missing out on adolescence again.....does that make sense.

Marm:
totally
Krisw.
hey man, great vid. I know for me (i'm pre everything) I feel like i need to have my proper childhood then go through puberty. I'm 25 but inside I still feel like a little boy because I haven't been able to have the same experiences that males normally get as they grow up. So I feel like I need to go though some of those stages before I can fully become a man on the inside if that makes any sense.
Adam

KrisE:
yeah totally makes sense.....and I think that even after beginning T there is still space to embrace the little boy.....

Marm:
totally agree with you on that

Serena:
i love your dimples! sorry that was random lol
<3

HHH:
i think it's interesting that the stereotype is that women are more mature than men. what i'm experiencing is that, in certain ways that's true, but that emotionally there's a lot of immaturity that's socially allowed from women that isn't allowed from men. before i came out, i used a lot of characteristicly female communication patterns, but now i'm very aware that, even though i'm the same person, there is a pressure to take more responsibility for my actions, not to complain so much, (cont)

HHH:
(cont) not to whine so much. i'm expected to stand up for myself to authority figures (rather than finding or expecting someone else to do it for me), and i'm respected more if i am confident in my opinions rather than stating what i think and then asking for someone else's approval/validation.
i'm still doing the whole "teenage boy trying to figure out how to 'be a guy'" thing, where you're just a little too loud, a little too chummy... you want to fit in, but you don't know how good vid

KrisE:
I defiantly feel you on that!

Merpez:
one thing I was thinking is that a lot of xy guys play catch up too. mainly, that their bodies mature into adulthood often before they do psychologically. I don't think that people expect boys to be men inside before they're man-like outside. For transguys then, i think that element of inside-boyhood is ok, good even. I wonder how you could know that you've reached manhood inside if that isn't tested by the outside world. not to say that the world is the most important part, because it's not.
KrisE:
I think I totally get what you're saying, kinda like how do you know if you have met societies standards of being a man without that validation, and I'm not sure it is possible to experience it without it because manhood in itself it constructed by society...

Kyle:

Comment removed by author

Mouse:
people usually reffer to me as a teenage boy...im trying to dress more adult i guess...but i dont think i look like a teenager...i do recognize though that im way to peranoid and anxious and skidish ... im trying to "man up" but its not my fault ya now...so ya..its messed for us ..we havnt had the chance to be young in a male body..society treated us different from chilhood cause of the bodys we were born in..guys get treated differently then girls...it sucks but its true

Marm:
sor true

KrisE:
true true

Johnson:
Kris: Another great video! I think it makes perfect sense that you want to experience the life of a teenage boy (for a while). Enjoy it! Lloyd

KrisE:
Thanks Lloyd, I plan to and I kinda feel like to don't have a choice you know? My second adolescence has arrived, which doesn't mean I get to use it as an excuse but I do get to embrace it!

Jim:
I have a question- is every thing male and female for you? I find in my every day life people see each other in a binary. I identify as a man but I dont feel fully a man. I feel I am genderless. What are your thoughts? -James V

KrisE:
I personally don't experience life within the gender binary but I do acknowledge that society as a whole very much does. I def. identify as a man but don't feel 100% male & I'm not sure that I ever will, however I do feel that I fit completely into societies male box. That along with many other things is why I decided to physically transition. But what it would be like if the gender binary concept didn't exist is a boggling concept to ponder & I wonder if the trans identity would even exist.

Southy:
i feel you about not feeling like a man without T. i feel like the world sees me as a preteen boy cause i look like one.
but I think you are definitely mature in the way you speak. James V you are right "man" and "woman" are just labels or theories. what truly makes a person a "man"? also I feel like a dude inside however even tho ill transition ill still always keep certain aspects of my femaleness. I will never be fully male in many ways esp. physically so I'm coming to terms with my duality

KrisE:
And think that even cis men and women are never fully men or women either I think that everyone sits at a different point on the gender spectrum with different balances of masculine and feminine energy.

Bus:
"in order to get to point B where i feel fully a man, not a boy, not a woman, but a man.. my body needs to go along with me" - That's how i feel about it too. I'd say i'm pretty mature anyway, but i havent been through what guys go through when they're growing up.. so in a way i'm looking forward to doing that.. but i feel as though i'll be expected to be a man because of my age (i'm 24). Hmm.

You're right about this season getting people down. I can't wait for Spring to come :)

KrisE:
yeah there is definitely pressure and we definitely have responsibilities that adolescence don't have, what I am attempting to do is separate maturity and responsibility, if I can do that I think I'll write a book:)

Oh and have you tried a D3 vitamin supplement? They are pretty affordable and help during this season especially!!! I just started recently and am amazed by the difference in my energy level and overall well being!

Bus:
If you wrote a book i'd definetly read it! Your videos always make me think loads :)

I haven't tried D3.. maybe i should give it a go. I'm already taking multi-vitamins and iron, vitamin B6, cod liver oil, omega 3 AND tribulus terrestris.. i suppose i could throw it in and see if i start rattling ;p My mum's got one of those 'SAD lamp' things.. it's rather bright!

KrisE:
Thanks! Wow your line up is just as long as mine:) Those lamps are SO bright!!! My friend has one.....it's almost like you need sunglasses:)

Tylar:
i dont feel there is a difference in becoming a man on the inside or not. maturing as a person is the difference between a child and an adult. sayign you cant mature into a "whole man" is in my opinion in correct. who says what a man is and what maturing is. i dont know but i feel like as i sai dto somebody "i am more of a man that you will ever be" i feel its true. manhood isnt facial hair or having no emotions. its just being a mature responsible adult.
KrisE:  
I definatley agree to a certain extent however there certainly are differences between men and women otherwise there would be no need to transition you know?  

Qld:  
You do make sense :) and what you have to say is interesting too.  

KrisE:  
Thanks!  

MTM15-Manhood (February 2, 2009)  
Jace-Jackie Jace’s partner posted a short video saying Jace could not post this week.  

No Comments  

MTM15-Maturity (February 2, 2009)  
Brett: “Can’t think of a particular time that I became a man. It’s a process of growing up.”  
He questions some of the sayings out there like “be a man,” “grow up and be a man,” and “man up.” His interpretation of them is: “morality, doing what you think is right, and rules to live by.”  

Ley:  
I have to say I am always really impressed by your videos an how carry yourself. Props man.  

Blazzin:  
i gotcha man, 100% truly made me understand the meanings, thanks.  

CV:  
being a man or a woman is classified in SO many ways. society has guidelines, but it is up to the person to decide which path they choose and how and when they grow up and mature. i know plenty of immature guys and men, as well as women who havent grown up yet in my eyes. i totally agree with you dude, i completely agree on how about life is what you make it. it just sucks that we only get one shot, as i believe. people need to "man up" and stop trying to fit in a spectrum that doesn't exist.  

Lunch:  
Only your heart felt words could have been so eloquent. I have always felt the essence of a man was his heart and mind. Heart to love/care for himself and others freely. Mind to develop the wisdom to share his beliefs and create a world he wants.  

Ty:  
you're fucking awesome, a real role model I wish I had an older brother like you man.  

Flash:  
you're the shit. hands down. couldn't agree more on your take on this weeks topics. you should post a video on your channel some time about your confidence. if you have always been so
confident/insightful or if it's something you've worked up to. I think a lot of trans guys lack confidence in themselves and would love to hear your take. All the best.
-calvin

Auto:
i love when you post, man. thanks for the insight as always.

Aimee:
i know you have probably answered this before but how come you have the scottish flag in the background?
aimee x

Xavier:
Very well said man.

Yankey:
Hott

MTM15: Manly Man Man..Man (February 3, 2009)
Chase: When trying to figure out his gender identity Chase said he would go online and watch people’s videos, trans videos. Watching those videos made him realize that his insides leaned towards a stereotypical man. Chase comes off as kind of timid and not as sure about his gender identity as the other transmen posting videos. He self identifies in the middle of a continuum rather than all the way on one end (male or female). Several of the commenters say they really identify with Chase; probably because he doesn’t identify as hyper masculine or perhaps it’s because this user seems to be the newest to translife.?

Jace:
get well soon!

XXdrums:
get well soon. and good job

Johnson:
I hope you get well soon!

Daron:
Get well soon!c ;)

Mouse:
get better dude

XQueer:
great video! get well soon!

Crippled:
Do you speak French?

Chase:
yes i do

Crippled:
Are you of English ancestry?

Chase:
both french and english y?

KrisW:
good vid! Feel better soon!

Christina:
chase man! u shouldn't have made a video! your really tough to make a video despite your sickness. dude i hope you get better soon. im so glad your a part of the mtm channel. i relate to you the most out of everyone on the channel. i see a lot of myself in you. i'm trying to find out who i really am too. im doing the research and watching videos and i really think i need to make the transition to a male. i look in a mirror and i don't see what i want to see. sorry this comment is so long.

Chase:
hey! its great when comments are long, and im glad you relate to me and that you told me because sometimes i ask myself "y am i on this channel"
so thank you:)

Christina:
ur on the channel so other ppl like us know were not alone and that not all transguys have it all figured out. :)

Ditto:
I absolutely loved that last quote (If you can look at yourself for...) well said!
And do feel better soon!

Ashton:
I feel very similar to you about being trans. I know how I feel but I don't want to make any decisions until I'm absolutely sure it's what I want. I'm currently trying to figure that out.

I just wish I was figuring all this out when I was your age.

hope you feel better soon.

Crippled:
Are you more French than you are English?
Chase:
enlgish

Crippled:
Do you like being of English ancestry? How many Canadians are of English ancestry? Will you do your next video all in French?

Chase:
research it man
and im not going to do my next video in french because most people hear dont understand french

Jacob:
Hey, hope you feel better soon! Whatever bug you have sounds like it feels horrible :( And no need to say that you haven't evolved as much as the rest of us, you've found your own path, it may be different, but it doesn't take away from the steps you have already taken.

Dots:
I think you're a really great part of this channel. What you're going through right now is what every trans guy goes through, as well as many people who decide not to transition. Asking yourself these questions is probably the hardest and most frightening part. It's good for people to see that they're not alone in this part of the process.

Crippled:
Are my comments making you angry, too?

Chase:
of course, your dissing my canadian-ness

Crippled:
Why do you Canadians hate Americans? I don't get it. You think we're all fucking crazy, or something. Why?! UUUUUUUUUUGGGGGGGGHHHHHHHHHHHH!!! !!!

Chase:
your the one who is hating on us Canadians

Chase:
what is your problem? do you personally no people from canada who dont speak "real" french, there is no ONE WAY to speak french

Chernob:
I love you Chase, don't listen to those haters. I think you bring a lot to this channel, you're one of my favourite MighTMen.

**MTM15: I can Make You a Man…. (February 5, 2009)**

Xavier: is African American and is pretty animated when he’s on cam. He talks a lot with his hands and moves in and out of the cameras frame. When he thinks of men he thinks of
really serious businessmen, or hairy manly men who sit on the couch and watch football games (acknowledges stereotypes). He ends by saying responsibility is what manhood is all about. “I’m a man and I have to take responsibility for everything.”

Boxcar:
I was the one who asked the question and I think you answered it fine. I would have answered it the same way. I'm on the cautious side when it comes to calling myself a man. The whole question arose around my desire to want to acheive manhood on the inside before I presumed to take on the accessories so to speak. The positive thing is, it's something I took on as my choice and not an external pressure. That's a priviledge in fact.

Boxcar:
I definitely get how you claim "boy or boi" to describe youself. I used to be that way around "girl." I didn't see myself as a grown woman obviously. The opportunity to grow up to be a man is so cool. I take to heart the meaning of trans-ition. We're always changing and growing, like you said. It implies evolution. I'd rather approach manhood with humility than with a giant ego. For me that's the point about doing it right. We are special men with special qualities. Nice vid.

Xavier:
I couldn't have said it better myself*applauds* I'm glad I answered it well for you and I have actually learned from what you've said so thank you!

Tag:
DITTO.
Good luck with your transition :)

Xavier:
Thanks a bunch

Evan:
Yeahh Repo! <3

Xavier:
Hell yes! Amazing movie!

mtm15: what makes a man? (February 5, 2009)
Barret: Barret says that coming out to his mom was a defining moment to growing up and becoming a man. He said he was calm and understanding versus going ballistic and being immature. He said his mom was not supportive, which forced him to learn to fend for himself. He finishes by saying, “what makes me a man; I treat others as equals not as a gender.”

Becoming:
This is a really cool video, you said alot of the things I would with regard to 'what makes a man'. You're too cool bro :)
Shad:
OMG did you just say asshat? lmao finally someone else who knows that phrase! :P Great video, B! So many things I can relate to. As always, I love hearing your perspective. And I think the topic you started to go into but stopped would be a great thing to elaborate on sometime.

Gate:
You ask a good question. I am a man, and I never asked what other than my genitals made me one. I honestly don't know what makes a man, other than the physical part. I will have to think on it. You look pretty good, the voice is great. If you were to go through a drive through window, I would think by your voice alone you were male. However, those earings are horrible. Get a nicer pair that compliments your face.

Jacob:
"I dont drink beer and I don't think I grab my crotch". hahah. and dude I totally know what you mean about not having those pep talks anymore and how it's hard. but it's reinforcing to see that you, as in the general "you," can do stuff on your own.

Aerial:
dude, you look great!

Love:
i like that you stay true to yourself regardless of people's expectation of your gender roles. i hope to someday have a "wife" not legally but in spirit... i hope for myself that i'll be allowed the happiness of meeting my soul mate.

MTM15: Maturity in Manhood (February 6, 2009)
Josh: Started out outside (cold and snowy) then moved inside. Josh said there were two things in his life that forced him to be mature and made him a man. The first is when his mother got sick when he was 13 [and died]. Second, not acting out and not letting bullies get to him. (Still very difficult to understand him because of his accent, speech patter, and organization.)
No Comments

MTM15: Learn to Love, and Learn to Let Love In (February 7, 2009)
Eric: This is a very short video. Eric said that he felt like he was becoming a mean when started to be proactive in his behaviors and transitioning. He said that once he stopped hating himself and started to figure out how to become the person he wanted to be that he started to feel like a man.

Shay:
Wow your voice has changed! Sounds good!

Eric:
Hey thanks, but I think it is because I have a cold and I am all clogged up.
Shay:
ahh lol well I hope you start to feel better!

Eric:
thanks:-)

XX:
Good video. It's always much harder to let love in, and you're right, it is an important part of the maturation process. It's great that we're all a work-in-process, constantly growing and learning and loving! :)

Keegan:
hey what's going on with the t-shirt contest? I never heard what the outcome for that was... perhaps I missed that video.... I liked that quote you had too. Good video.

Eric:
people are still submitting until Feb. 15... Then there will be a video posted on all the Designs entered.

Keegan:
oh ok, thanks! I'll just have to wait it out I guess...

Lmh:
your voice is changing =) congrats!

Comment(s) marked as spam

Serena:
tuesdays with morrie is amazing!
loving yourself and others is definitely important.
<3
Mad:
your voice sounds awesome!!

Kal:
You're a good boy, Eric. I am proud to call you my friend. Thanks for sharing from your heart.

Jacob:
i <3 your positive attitude. i also live by letting others love me as well as loving others. and yeah i agree with what others have said, your voice is sounding deeper.

Eric:
Hey thanks!

Ryan:
That comment from "gateofsunshine" about not crying for a whole week made me laugh! That is
sooooo rediculous! You are not more of a man if you can hold in your tears! I think it means you are insecure about your manhood if you cant be comfortable enough to show your emotions! Come ON NOW GUY...What year is this now?!

I liked your video on this Eric!:

Eric:
ha yeah, it's just something some people don't get I guess, but whatever, I suppose that they are entitled to their opinions, and it doesn't bother me. Thanks for the comment! :-) 

Chantel:
...you've got perfect teeth!! :-) 

Eric:
lol. Thank you very much :-) 

Asteroid:
did you just say 'vag'?? It's pronounced 'vayg'. 

Eric:
ha ha, yeah I know, people make fun of me about that all the time. Have hard time pronouncing it. Its like I try to say "vayg" and it sound more like "Vag" i hate it. lol 

Kami:
Lol omg, I love the ending..too funny.

MTM15: Being a man and not a boy (February 7, 2009)

Liam:
Liam doesn’t think there is anything specifically that makes someone a man. He said that if he had to choose one thing that makes someone a man it would be, “responsibility.” He thinks you have to take responsibility for your own actions and do what you have to do even if it's inconvenient. He said that you don’t need to follow some list of traits and characteristics to be a man.

Preburn:
sorry to hear you aren't feeling well. warm thoughts headed your way. You are the man!

Keegan:
Good thoughts bro... good ideas... and now I have much to think on... Ah but doing what one needs as opossed to doing what one wants.... now that is something that shouldn't be hard but is; at least for me.

Preson:
Good take on what it means to be a man. Taking responsibility is something that recently I have been trying to achieve and some people have begun noticing that and treating me more respectfully and as an adult as a result. It in my opinion takes a huge amount of time and
whenever you think you have reached it, you still have far to go.

Mufcgirl:
ooooo is that tattoo half republic of ireland and half england?

Michael:
Looks like that's the UK flag, not the English flag. :)

Mufcgirl:
haha, that depends where you're coming from.

Liam

Week 21: Masculine Aspirations
“Our thoughts on aspiring to achieve masculine stereotypes.”

MTM21 Man or mouse (March 16. 2009)
Brett: Early on Barret thought that facial hair, scars, and physical labor were what made men, men. Early in transition, he would mimic guys that he had seen. He always opts for intelligence over brute strength. He did use to try to be a stereotypical man. Told people at work that he likes flower and that gardenias are his favorite flower and plans on getting one tattooed over his heart. Coworkers were stunned but then his boss said he really likes flowers too really made him feel at ease and his coworkers relaxed. “I was just too scared to say anything because flowers are feminine.”

Sox:
Definitely concur with ya bro...work smarter, not harder!

Comment(s) marked as spam

Mufcgirl:
i like your vids. you're really interesting. & you have/had top surgery today, gd luck

Benjamin:
Great video - I completely agree with you.

KrisE:
I completely enjoy your perspectives! Hope surgery went well and you were able to get what you wanted!!

Flash:
hey arden-
i liked your flower story bro. who says that being ourselves can't give others the courage to do the same? way to have the balls to just be you.

MTM21 Fears Around Achieving as a Man (March 17, 2009)
Troy: “Having the confidence of being a man makes you a man. Turning 18 and having a penis, being legally a male doesn’t make you a man. Being a man is about how you conduct yourself as a person. Not a boy but not a man.” He says it’s important to him to meet the goals society has put up, the positive ones not the negative ones. He likes having short hair, deep voice, doesn’t like being so hairy, likes having hard muscle. He wants to be viewed as a physically strong person, not stronger than women, just strong. Feels like he’s playing catch up, been on T for 3 years versus 12 years for born males [he’s 24]. It is important for him to be viewed as male, because he doesn’t want to be viewed weak.

Toby:
You're perspective is always worthwhile.

XX:
Preach. :) You spoke really well in this vid. No need to apologize, brother.

Keegan:
There is more to being strong than physically strong, personally I prefer strength of convictions, and honor over brute physical strength.
As for the rest, very good! My mother tried to impress this similar idea onto my brother, it"s not about, popularity or looks, it's about doing what you say your going too, and doing the right thing, over the expected thing. Good video. oh and as for estrogen... eat more broccolii... no seriously, broccolii has estrogen blockers naturally in it....

Dawg:
Very well said!!

Kev:
I know exactly what you're talking about. Well said. I feel the same way on this topic.

Johnson:
Troy: If you ever get to where you have no fears about performing as a man, you will have done better than almost all cisgendered males. In your studies of the criminal justice system, you will almost certainly study the use of the polygraph. A principal factor in performing a successful polygraph of males is in triggering sex insecurities. A retired polygraph examiner I know told me that in 30 years, he never had a male "subject" that he couldn't break in 15 minutes. Also, one of (cont)

Johnson:
(continued) reasons POWs from the Viet Nam War still exhibit so many mental problems is that their insecurities were exploited extensively by their captors. Many have never been able to rebuild themselves mentally. The insecurities they had were all there before they were captured, but were not strong.

Chillin:
Great vid, thanks for sharing, I think you make a lot of valid points and I feel that same way
about being viewed as strong.

Neverlookback:
Awesome video. I have a lot of trans friends including my boyfriend, and it does seem to be the common trend that they judge themselves more harshly than most bio guys do. There also seem to be a ton of misconceptions and it's too bad that there aren't more places online where all of those concerns and misconceptions are addressed. Most seem to be scattered about, hit or miss, but not overly concise.

MTM21: FEARS..ectt (March 17, 2009)
Chase: Chase is too scared to wear his binder outside of his house, because he’s afraid people will say things and look at him weird. “In my opinion I just look awkward. I’m scared, I’m a sissy boy, I’m a chicken shit.” He wants to figure out what would make him happy because he’s not happy.

He is changing schools next semester and is contemplating have the teacher call him Chase rather than his birth name. It would be the first time he would have ever asked anyone to do this. The only place where he is referred to as Chase is on YouTube and other Internet sites.

Casdon:
You don't suck! Fears are ok, and you will get there in your own time. No worries, i still love ya!

Aedn:
I don't want to minimize your fear, but about wearing the binder out: You will be more aware of it than others. Other people are surprisingly blind to those things. Unless you're in high school, where people DO say stuff, and I'm sorry. :( 

Chase:
im in college and thanks, that really helps.. im just scared becuase it makes my boobs kindof look uniboob-ish haha. chase

Michael:
Unless you're wearing a tight shirt, no one is going to notice.

People are not thinking about you; they're all too busy thinking about themselves.

Icarus:
I admire you for being able to talk about this stuff on youtube! I was able to get through transitioning but I've never had the courage to put my thoughts out there like you're doing.

Sweetcandy:
wearing it when you switch schools would be perfect.. i loved it when i moved because it is jus so great that people only know what you want to tell them so if you work up the courage i think that would be awesome for you.. but it'll all work out in time.. don't stress it =^)
Jordan:
i know its hard,,and it may be scary..but u have to live for yourself. i used to be worried about
what others may say but i said to myself "no 1 is payin my bills, no 1 is livin my life for
me"..that made me see that i have to do what makes me happy, just take those first few steps and
see how u fee inside

Tylar:
if you "lift and seperate", you can get rid of the uniboob thing. thats just how your man boobs are
laying in the binder. if you move them itll look flatter and youll mearly have pecks lol

Chase:
haha thank you :D -chase

MTM21: Comparisons and Expectations (March 18, 2009)
Spencer: I try not to compare myself to non-transmen. If I didn’t compare myself to non
transmen I would be happy with my body. I look at their bodies, chests, and body hair.
“Being male doesn’t mean being stereotypically male.” He says that he can never be a
stereotypical male because he was born female. Has a fiancé of 5 years and a son.

Thegay:
Well said Spencer, and welcome to our channel.

My hats off to you for being a dad as well!

Sky:
Thanks man! :)

KrisE:
I feel you Spencer! Welcome to the channel!

I think it's hard for us trans guys to remember that those comparison feelings are natural for cis
guys as well to a certain extent. Yet we hold on to it so tightly.....it is interesting!

Sky:
Hey Kris! Thanks a lot for the warm welcome.
I think this topic is really interesting also, especially when you realise like you said: non trans
males have these types of fears also.

Jackson:
Awesome man!
lol...im so happy for you! this is going to be a great addition to a rad channel! you are about to
blow shit up!
best wishes!

Sky:
You're so encouraging! Thanks man.
Jackson:
it takes a REAL man to be able to live like we have and to over come the odds and to find our own paths in that! The transmen i know are cooler and more interesting than most bio men i know.

Jackson:
ahh AND you are a hump day guy too! thank god for wednesdays!

Sweet:
trans or not.. i think all men (and women) look @ each other and compare themselves .. as much as we hate to admit it..
i bet other men look @ you and compare themselves too =)
great video! i'm glad you are joining the channel!

Sky:
thank you so much for the kind words!

Charles:
welcome to MTM, spence! i'm glad to share a day with you.

come to sf and we'll go skating.

Sky:
SF Is basically the only place in the world I *really* have to visit before I die.
And I wouldn't dream of visiting SF without at least a nice old school board - those hills are killer!

Kt:
good video man! i'd like to hear you talk more about being a dad by the way.

MTM21: Gender Fluidity and Measuring Up as Men (March 19, 2009)

Charles: Recording video outside at what looks like a park. Lots of people in the background. Stereotype of good man, manly, macho, the strong one. “To me a good man is someone who is in touch with their emotions.” He talks about feeling comfortable with gender fluidity. Going through the transition has showed him that men and women are more alike than different. He likes to navigate the world as a male by having a deep voice and having a cock. he then responds to Troy who says he likes having short hair and muscles and stuff.

Charles feels comfortable exhibiting female characteristics. “Measuring myself as a man is really measuring myself as a person. Am I a good person?” He ends by saying that gender is nothing more than a filter through which we navigate the world.

LiveD:
I totally agree. That bit about gender fluidity is really interesting, I think that trans people really do have a better idea of what it is to be either gender...we-at least in early stages-pay so much attention to gender roles and what makes a person masculine or feminine and with that
knowledge, if we're brave or comfortable enough, we don't have to bend to the ways of binary gender codes. Isn't that what being trans is about? To be who we really are-in terms of gender but out of either box.

Mrx.
Hurray for Emerson! And great video. I've allways held the same beilife you have that gender being fluid and not binary. Also, I'm glad that you talked about hairstyles and length, because I think that's very relevant to how some people percieve a person as being masculine or feminine.

Moviebuff:
Love this vid Charles, full of wonderful thoughts and ideas. You look like a beatnik philosopher, diggin' it.

*Also makes me wanna chill out in a park, enjoy nature.

Keegan:
I'm loving the T-shirt charles! I also completely agree with the fluidity of gender! I've BEEN saying that, for ages now. It's more about strength of character... and not looks. :) I love your video's Charles!

MTM21: I Made a boo boo (March 21, 2009)
Eric: Video with a link back to personal channel because he did a direct upload by accident and was afraid he’d have to remake the video, and in effect lose spontaneity?

No Comments

MTM-21/22 Masculine Aspirations/Dating (March 22, 2009)

Kris: Posting a video for last week and this week. “Having a hard time with this one.” Kris starts and stops to explain what aspirations he has to be masculine, but he can’t seem to put what he’s thinking into words. What he ends with saying is, “Stereotypes aren’t what makes a man a man.”

HHH:
i definitely find myself frustrated at work by not being as physically strong as other guys, and i hate having to ask them for help lifting things.
but i think my frustration comes from the fact that i'm transitioning on the job, and i'm trying to reestablish myself as a guy. at home or with friends who already see me as a guy, i don't feel that pressure. i'm hoping that once i get to that point with my coworkers that i won't feel that need to live up to a stereotyped version of manhood.

KT:
excellent points about stereotypical gender roles validating gender dysphoria... good stuff to think about it.

Chillin:
I hear you on the stereotypes, This world would be a much better place if we could learn to accept people for who they are instead of who you expect them to be. Like you, I feel my strength to come from my being and that it really has nothing to do with my gender.

Keegan:
I also find that there is more to being a man than physical strength and for me, it's more about how I choose and follow my values, than meeting or matching some society ordained stereotype. Actually I strive to always smash through or surpass all stereotypes, why? Because I can. Good Video!