

**LOOKING FOR THAT ‘SPECIAL’ LADY: EXPLORING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY
IN ONLINE DATING PROFILES OF TRANS-ATTRACTED MEN**

By
Hender Gercio

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Erzsébet Barát
Second Reader: Dr. Miklós Hadas

Budapest, Hungary
2015

Abstract

The scarcity of existing academic material that deals with trans attraction confines this configuration of desire mostly within the marginal/marginalizing discourses of psychiatry and mental illness, bars and sex work, pornography and fetish, and HIV/AIDS risk behaviors. This proposal to analyze and problematize trans attraction within the robust lens of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ formulated by Raewyn Connell (1987, reformulated in 2005) provides a novel framework in which to situate this phenomenon and also posits a new direction in the production of gendered knowledge on hegemonic masculinity. Through critical discourse analysis of trans-attracted men's dating profiles obtained from the top-ranked transsexual dating websites *transgenderpersonals.com* and *mytranssexualdate.com*, as well as through reflexive inputs from the author's personal narrative as a trans woman who has experience in online dating, the author explores how hegemonic masculinity is legitimated in transsexual dating websites, which aspects of trans attraction may be seen as complicit to hegemonic masculinity's cultivation, and which practices may hold transformative potential and can lead to hegemonic masculinity's contestation. The analysis demonstrates that it is difficult to predict what the full implications of trans attraction will be to hegemonic masculinity, since these men have been shown to perform masculine practices that were neither ‘thoroughly reproducing’ nor ‘thoroughly contesting’ hegemonic masculinity. Rather, there is a multiplicity of overlapping and sometimes contradicting practices and discourses that these men find themselves navigating, with some of them contributing to hegemonic masculinity's propagation and some of them to its contestation. On one hand, trans-attracted men can be seen to challenge hegemonic masculinity via the adoption of such strategies such as the ‘average nice guy’ discourse; showing emotional expressiveness/vulnerability, availability and kindness; expanding in a situated way the intelligibility of the category ‘woman’ by including trans women; and the openness to further sexual exploration (i.e. role playing, kink, BDSM). On the other hand, trans-attracted men can be seen as complicit to hegemonic masculinity through such practices as insisting on femininity and ‘passability’ (as a cis woman) as a partner requirement; rejecting feminism and upholding traditionally gendered relationship roles; fetishizing trans women; and the continued affirming of heterosexuality as an identity, which can lead to the marginalization of (male) homosexuality and homophobic remarks directed towards male-identified cross-dressers and possibly masculine-looking transwomen. Future exciting directions of inquiry include studying how trans women are being resistant or complicit to hegemonic masculine practices, as well an exploration of other configurations of trans attraction.

To my sisters and the men who desire them

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited	6
Chapter 3: Out of Shame and into the Love Game: The Emergence of Trans Attraction and Transsexual Dating Websites	12
3.1. Psychiatry, ‘Gynemimetophilia’, and “Gynandromorphophilia”	12
3.2 Pornography and the Rise of the ‘She-Male’	14
3.3 Trans Attraction and HIV/AIDS	15
3.4 Transpeople and Trans-attracted Men Speak.....	17
Chapter 4: Cyberlove and Online Transsexual Dating	20
4.1. <i>TGPersonals.com</i> : For those looking for Male, Female, MTF or FTM	22
4.2. “For transsexuals by transsexuals”: MyTranssexualDate.com	27
Chapter 5: “I just want to share myself with a wonderful person”: Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity in Transsexual Dating Websites.....	32
5.1. Just your average nice guy: An Alternative Notion of Manhood	32
5.2. The Other Woman: Expanding the Framework of (Trans)Gender Intelligibility	35
5.3. Versatility and Unsettling the Rigidity of Sexual Roles	38
5.4. More Adventures: Kink, Role Play and BDSM.....	40
Chapter 6: “You must be feminine, sweet and beautiful”: Reproducing Hegemonic Masculinity in Transsexual Dating Websites.....	43
6.1 The Passability Requirement: Femininity in Overdrive.....	43
6.2 Reaffirming Sexism through Rejecting Feminism.....	47
6.3 Fetishization and the Objectified ‘She-Male’	48
6.4 "100% Straight" and Homophobic Tendencies.....	50
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	52
Bibliography	55

Chapter 1: Introduction

Because our culture deems us undesirable, our lovers and partners are often expected to explain why they choose to be with us. Others may start to question their sexuality, or they may be ostracized from their straight or gay or lesbian communities. In a sense, they share a bit of our stigma—a stigma that is based on the presumption that we are unlovable. And we shouldn't stand for it!

- "The Beauty In Us" by Julia Serano, trans writer and activist

Regardless of what might be between her legs, I found her confidence, independence and grace inspiring.

- Thomas Matt, "I'm attracted to trans women"

My turn to trans-attracted men as a thesis subject was motivated by a desire to find a subfield of sexuality research that implicated the potentially fruitful crossing of transgender studies (especially those involving transgender/transsexual/trans women) with studies on men and masculinities. This proposal to analyze and problematize trans attraction within the robust and influential framework of 'hegemonic masculinity' formulated by Raewyn Connell (1987, reformulated in 2005) aspires to provide a novel perspective from which this configuration of desire can be situated. While there have been numerous scholarly studies both on trans women/MTF (male-to-female) transsexuals and sexual desire in (non-trans) men (both hetero- and homosexual variants included), research at the intersection of these two domains has so far yielded scant material and works that discuss trans attraction mostly in terms of the concerns articulated from the standpoint of psychiatry and mental illness (Money and Lamacz, 1984; Blanchard and Collins, 1993), bars and sex work (Weinberg and Williams, 2010), pornography and fetish (Escoffier, 2011), and HIV/AIDS risk behaviors (Operario et al., 2007; Reback and Larkins, 2006).

For the purposes of this study I shall limit my use of the term 'trans attraction' to the description of the erotic or sexual desire experienced by cisgender (i.e. non-transgender) men towards transsexual/transgender women or transfeminine persons. My basic research objective in writing this thesis is to explore whether trans attraction, as manifested in the online dating profiles of trans-attracted men, serves to challenge or repackage hegemonic masculinity, hereby defined as a normative set of practices that embody “the currently most honored way of being a man ... requir[ing] all other men to position themselves in relation to it ... ideologically legitimating the global subordination of women to men” (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832). I propose that the answer to this question cannot be articulated in an absolute binary (i.e. trans attraction either completely contests or completely affirms hegemonic masculinity). I will proceed with a more nuanced discussion and produce a positioned critique of trans attraction’s various aspects. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) themselves conclude that it is “not easy to be confident about the implications of transgender practice for hegemony” (p. 851). However, since they use ‘transgender practice’ in this instance to refer to the non-normatively gendered practices of trans persons, I argue that the concern is equally valid when applied to people who desire trans persons, more specifically, to men who are attracted to trans women. This claim serves as the springboard for my own version of what Messerschmidt (2012) calls the ‘academic appropriation of hegemonic masculinity’. Through the analysis of trans-attracted men's dating profiles obtained from two transsexual dating websites, as well as through reflexive inputs from my personal narrative as a trans woman who has experience in online dating, I hope to explore which aspects of trans attraction may be seen as complicit to hegemonic masculinity's cultivation, and which features of it may hold a transformative potential and can lead to hegemonic masculinity's contestation.

This project lies at the possibly fertile nexus of sexuality studies, transgender studies, and men and masculinities studies, and will contribute to the enrichment of these domains in two complementary ways: (a) it provides a novel framework in which to situate trans attraction, and (b) it posits a new direction in the production of gendered knowledge on hegemonic masculinity. The central questions I shall address in this thesis are as follows: How is hegemonic masculinity

legitimated in transsexual dating websites? Which articulations of (hegemonic) masculinity inform the dating practices of trans-attracted men, as manifested in their dating profiles and preferences? Do they remain complicit with the continued subjugation of women, gender/sexual minorities, and non-hegemonic masculinities? Which practices or aspects of trans attraction hold transformative potential, contesting hegemonic masculinity and inspiring new strategies in gender relations?

Bockting et al. (2007, in Weinberg and Williams, 2010) have noted the scarcity of research that focuses on sexual partnerships involving trans people. A reason for this lack could be that trans attraction (which Escoffier (2011) calls the “‘transsexualization’ of the heterosexual male”) as a form of sexual desire only recently fully emerged into existence, when late 20th-century advances in medical technology such as synthetic hormones, breast augmentation and other feminizing facial or bodily surgeries paved the way for the partially feminized, 'pre-op' (i.e. prior to obtaining sex-reassignment / genital surgery) MTF (male-to-female) transsexual embodiment to become a realizable possibility (Escoffier, 2011, p. 209). Blanchard and Collins (1993, in Weinberg and Williams, 2010) referred to most trans-attracted men as ‘partial autogynephiliacs’ who are “erotically aroused by the image of themselves as a mixture of male and female anatomical features” (p. 375). Escoffier (2011) intimately correlates the growing number of trans attracted men with the rise of ‘shemale’ or ‘tranny’ pornographic websites, where men “purchase and watch videos and use them as passports [to escape] into a fantasy world of women with penises who fuck men” (p. 278). The transsexual female's penis in this case serves as a Freudian fetish, and the transwoman is reconfigured as the ‘phallic woman’ (p. 278). Most of the sociological research of trans-attracted men have typically portrayed them as disinterested customers of transwomen sex workers (Driscoll, 1971 and Pettiway, 1996, in Weinberg and Williams, 2010). Operario et al. (2008) conducted interviews with trans-attracted men on how they saw their sexual orientation and how this corresponded with their sexual behavior with transwomen, but this was done in the context of HIV risk assessment and epidemiological surveillance, since both trans-attracted men and transwomen are classified as high-risk groups when it comes to HIV transmission (p. 25).

I claim that the approaches I have mentioned above all betray, albeit in varying ways, the stigma and shame that still hound trans attraction to date. As a trans woman who has experienced loving and erotic relationships and as an advocate of transgender rights and acceptance, I am in search of a fresh, constructive lens with which to view men (and other genders) who desire us, a perspective that does not ground trans attraction in pathological or fetishizing / exoticizing discourse. This attempt to study trans attraction using the framework of hegemonic masculinity is in line with the aspiration to bring transness “into a sex-positive arena of language, practice, and erotics that celebrates trans identities and bodies and makes it acceptable to speak the erotics of trans in sex-positive and affirming ways” (Tompkins, 2014, p. 774).

The two transsexual dating websites that I shall examine contain profiles of trans-attracted men and transwomen from a wide range of ages, ethnicities and countries. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) and Messerschmidt's (2012) analyses did not explicitly mention a case study on online dating. In my project, I justify that the thousands of combined profiles of trans-attracted men and the online popularity of these sites as evidenced by their top Google search page ranks¹ can attest to legitimacy of these transnational (albeit virtual) spaces as venues wherein a ‘global’ level of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 849) (as opposed to a regional or local one), can be reproduced or challenged.

Another appropriation strategy that I will deploy is to examine the widespread ‘masculine character traits’ (Messerschmidt, 2012, p. 6-8) associated with trans attraction as manifested in the trans-attracted men's dating profiles, and how these contribute to the continued patriarchal subordination of transwomen and (trans)feminine persons. Messerschmidt (2012) views this association of hegemonic masculinity as “constituting widespread character traits, as equated with the most influential manliness, and as consisting exclusively of specific toxic traits consolidated in a particular group of men” (p. 9) to be troubling and outside of the concept's (2005) reformulation. In spite of his suggestion, I contend though that this direction still offers revealing insight when used to examine and problematize the predominant patterns that are

¹ *Tgpersonals.com* and *mytranssexualdate.com* rank first and second, respectively, based on the Google keyword search for ‘transsexual dating’ (ranking as of 20 Mar 2015).

manifested in trans-attracted men's online dating behaviors and utterances. For example, the insistence on a 'passable', hyper-feminine partner and the denigration of male homosexuality in some dating profiles can be interpreted as behaviors that are complicit to hegemonic masculinity's cultivation.

It will also be productive to consider how trans-attracted men can be seen to contest hegemonic masculinity and its associated practices when it comes to sexual attraction and gender / sexual expression and roles. For example, how do trans-attracted men expand the intelligibility of the 'woman' concept? How do they loosen rigid, hegemonic masculine sexual roles? A more thoughtful enquiry into these queries may unlock subversive patterns that can gesture towards inspiring new strategies in gender relations.

Chapter 2: Hegemonic Masculinity Revisited

Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) seminal article "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept" traced down how the concept of hegemonic masculinity has been formulated, utilized, critiqued, and reworked in research involving men and masculinities since its inception in the early 1980s. This article plays a central role in my research since hegemonic masculinity is the theoretical framework I will engage with when analyzing the online dating profiles of trans-attracted men. For the purposes of my project I will also utilize the Connellian definition of hegemonic masculinity, as that of the normative "pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that... embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, ...required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and... ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men" (p. 832).

Hegemonic masculinity has been shown to be a very influential framework in interdisciplinary gender studies, yet even Connell and Messerschmidt admit that it has been far from exempt from serious criticism, which they addressed in their 2005 article and lead them to an improved, reformulated notion of the concept. Connell and Messerschmidt retained the following arguments from their earlier formulations: the notion of multiple masculinities, the concept of hegemony, and the emphasis on change (p. 846). They admit that the one-dimensional treatment of hierarchy and the trait-based conceptions of gender need to be discarded (p. 846-847). The authors propose a reformulation of hegemonic masculinity with respect to four areas (pp. 847-852): (1) a more nuanced conceptualization of gender hierarchy that is open to the change brought forth by women's agency; (2) an affirmation that there are different geographies of masculinities that interact across local, regional, and global levels; (3) a more precise consideration of embodiment when discussing privilege and power; and (4) a more pronounced focus on the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity, which grants space for internal contradictions and the possibilities for moving toward gender democracy.

These four concerns can be translated into considering the following four corresponding questions: (1) how the agency of trans women affects gender hierarchy; (2) how transsexual

dating websites function as a global level where hegemonic masculinity can be reproduced or challenged; (3) the ways the embodiment of trans women, and the desiring of it by trans-attracted men, resignify meanings of body parts like the penis, or the meanings attached to (penetrative or receptive) sex roles; and (4) how trans-attracted men, through their practices, seem to both challenge and repackage hegemonic masculinity in different ways.

In 2012 (six years after the publication of the original article by Connell and Messerschmidt), Messerschmidt performed an evaluation of the academic appropriation of the reformulated concept of hegemonic masculinity by tracking the progress of how hegemonic masculinity has been imagined differently across several studies. He identifies one set of studies (Morris, 2008; Weitzer and Kubrin, 2009; and Hatfield, 2010, all in Messerschmidt, 2012) that in his readings show how hegemonic masculinity is validated across local, regional, and global levels, thus adhering to the concept's original reformulated model (p. 5-6). At the same time, he also classifies another set of studies (Logan, 2010; Smith et al., 2007; and Gage, 2008, all in Messerschmidt, 2012) that approaches hegemonic masculinity as an exclusive compendium of 'masculine' character traits, which harkens back to the pre-reformulated figuring of hegemonic masculinity that only employs trait terminology (p. 6-8). As an affirmation of the original 2005 article's vision, Messerschmidt also brings along studies that he sees as new patterns in the appropriations of the concept (Talbot and Quayle, 2010; Irvine and Vermilya, 2010; Duncanson, 2009; Light, 2007; Groes-Green, 2009; and Broughton, 2008, all in Messerschmidt, 2012). He points out the ways how these studies broaden our gendered knowledge on hegemonic masculinity. These new directions in his opinion include: (1) how women's practices can become conducive to hegemonic masculinity's cultivation (p. 9-10), (2) what strategies can be actually used to challenge hegemonic masculinity (p. 10-12), and (3) how the dynamics of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities in 'peripheral' countries are affected by neoliberal globalization (p. 12-15). Messerschmidt, however, does not recall their concern in the 2005 study and does not have anything to say about transgenderism/transsexuality. That is yet another reason why I attempt to enrich the second pattern he noticed above, namely strategies that can be used to challenge hegemonic masculinity, by showing how much the dating practices that trans-

attracted (cisgender) men employ on transsexual dating websites can be seen as contesting hegemonic masculine practices.

Does hegemonic masculinity present a workable framework within which to situate trans attraction? I justify my ‘yes’ answer to this question by expounding on the reasons supplied by McCormack (2012) in his book. First, he contends that the sheer amount of masculinities research that has successfully made use of this theory of hegemonic masculinity across a wide-range of academic disciplines lends credence to its versatile theoretical applicability (ibid., p. 39). Second, hegemonic masculinity was conceptualized partly as a product and response to an era wherein homophobia was culturally very prevalent (Anderson 2009, in McCormack 2012, p. 39). I believe that the assertion that homosexual men are “at the bottom of a gender hierarchy among men” (Connell 1995, in McCormack 2012, p. 39) maintains its salient resonance up to the present times. In the same vein, many trans-attracted men’s claim in my data to their sexual identity as (primarily) heterosexual is questioned (and even maligned) by the homophobia of the greater public because they desire someone whose self-identified gender as a woman (albeit being assigned as ‘male’ at birth) is being doubted. Therefore, using hegemonic masculinity to characterize and critique discourses in dominance on cisheteromascularity can also be problematized in the case of trans-attracted men.

Third, if we accept that hegemonic masculinity is a useful tool in examining male power in arenas where traditional masculinity exerts a continued commanding presence (McCormack 2012, p. 39), the field of dating (or specifically in this case, online dating) will be a qualified and interesting application of this theory. There is already a growing amount of research in this area. As an example, Currier (2013) has analyzed how both hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are maintained in American college heterosexual ‘hook up’ culture. Choi and Chan (2013) used hegemonic masculinity and interpreted internet dating as a ‘strategic game’ wherein men can be seen as trying to ‘chase’ women and maintain cross-border relationships. Similar to what I shall do in my project, Wang (2011) investigated Taiwanese Yahoo! Personals dating profiles and reconfigured (heterosexual) online dating websites as “heterotopic” spaces where both the performance of marginalized masculinities and the ‘naturalization’ of hegemonic

masculinities simultaneously happen. My focus on transsexual dating websites presents a logical and worthwhile extension of this trajectory.

Lastly, hegemonic masculinity's practicality cannot be emphasized enough. The relative accessibility of concepts like 'hegemony' and 'subordination' makes the theory easy to comprehend (at least at a cursory glance), with the concepts of 'privilege' and 'power' well-integrated in its analysis of how women (and many men) are subordinated within the gender hierarchy (Moller, 2007 and Connell, 1995, both in McCormack, 2012, p. 39). Many of the dating practices of trans-attracted men could be argued as subordinated forms of masculine practices.

All influential theories will receive their fair share of criticisms, and hegemonic masculinity is not exempt from it either. McCormack (2013) devotes a chapter of his book to these critiques (pp. 37-45), while Howson (2009) deconstructs hegemonic masculinity through a post-Marxist approach. Hegemonic masculinity has been portrayed as a model that reifies typologies and one that postulates a rigid and binary distinction between hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinities (McInnes, 2008 in Bartholomaeus, 2013:, p. 281). The Connellian concept of 'multiple masculinities' has also been problematized as not granting enough leeway for fluidity and the possibility of people belonging to more than one type of group (e.g. hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, marginalized) (Pringle 2005 in Bartholomaeus, 2013, p. 281). Bartholomaeus hurdles this rigidity problem by considering hegemonic masculinity from the Foucauldian vantage point of discourse. She does not see hegemonic masculinity as a grid or typology of traits but conceptualizes it as a "discourse on hegemonic masculinity, that which is most influential in defining what is most 'masculine' in any given setting, and that ensures men's (as a group) authority over women (as a group)" (Bartholomaeus, 2013, p. 281).

Applying the concept of 'discourse of hegemonic masculinity' to my project allows me to better characterize discursive movements and changes, and it also allows me to see trans-attracted men as engaged in multiple discourses, continuously creating/recreating and combining

different discourses that could challenge and/or sustain hegemonic masculinity. I hope to highlight this “messiness and incoherence of [trans-attracted] masculinities” (Bartholomaeus, 2013, p. 281) in this research while at the same time recognize that a particular (cis-hetero) hegemonic masculine discourse remains privileged. I also believe that the dating practices of trans-attracted men cannot be simply fit inside a single box and be labeled ‘hegemonic’ or ‘subversive’. Situating my project within the particular context of online/internet dating also affords me the advantage of veering away from the typical monolithic framing of hegemonic masculinity, which can result in a more nuanced portrayal of trans attraction as a set of novel, transformative (sexual and relational) practices that may be complicit to or present an opposition to the hegemonic masculine discourse.

Howson (2009) also distinguishes between two types of hegemony. One is the so-called *dominative hegemony*, which is the one that we usually associate with hegemonic masculinity and is associated with “capitalist, Anglo, white, Christian, heterosexual, Western, masculine identifications and practices” (p. 18). The other is the oppositional form of hegemonic masculinity called *aspirational hegemony*, which aims to “construct a progressive, moral and intellectual hegemonic force” (p. 17) and “promotes consensus and gives recognition to the heterogeneity of the people” (p. 17). This distinction clarifies the concept of hegemonic masculinity by emphasizing that it is not just a collection of negative, toxic character traits, but rather a dynamic process of negotiation that can also bring about features that can lead to its active contestation. It will be interesting to uncover in my internet data how practices of trans-attracted men straddle and conflate both types, such as cases of trans attracted men promoting sexual freedom while at the same time privileging traditional masculine-feminine dynamics in relationship roles.

I end this chapter by underscoring that trans attraction can be considered as a form of a “new masculinity” (Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 53) that can somehow gesture toward a sexual ‘utopia’ wherein men have the potential to be free from the baggage of obligatory sexual and gender roles that are privileged in hegemonic masculine discourse. Fernández-Álvarez originally applied this ‘new masculinity’ to describe gay men and their openness to explore their affective

and emotional faculties (p. 53), but I extend this argumentation to also include attracted men, who also at many times have been termed as ‘gay’. If we accept that the post-modern age we are currently in mandates a reconsideration of “sex, love and eroticism within a framework of enquiry into human identity” (Giddens, 1992 in Fernández-Álvarez, 2014, p. 53), we will realize how trans-attracted men negotiate and practice such values as emotional availability, sexual openness, and most of all the recognition and embracing of (trans)gender diversity, wherein they eschew the oppression of trans women and treat them as women irrespective of these women’s genital status.

Chapter 3: Out of Shame and into the Love Game: The Emergence of Trans Attraction and Transsexual Dating Websites

I have preliminarily tackled in the introductory chapter the sparseness of available academic literature on trans attraction and how many of them seem to situate this desire within marginalizing discourses. Recent interventions by trans scholars themselves and their allies (Tompkins, 2014; Davy and Steinbock, 2012) have laid the groundwork for re-imagining trans attraction by breaking away from existing stigmatizing discourses and putting this configuration of desire at the front and center of transgender politics. In the first part of this chapter I shall map out and engage with the emergence of various discourses on the phenomenon of trans attraction. The remaining half of the chapter will be devoted to examining transsexual online dating as a specific practice, with a particular focus on the dating websites that I have used for this study, *tgpersonals.com* and *mytranssexualdate.com*.

3.1. Psychiatry, ‘Gynemimetophilia’, and “Gynandromorphophilia”

Money and Lamacz’s (1984) article is the earliest source I have discovered that implicates what we can now characterize as trans attraction. The authors’ term for a trans-attracted man is *gynemimetophile*, a lover of a *gynemimetic* male, or what we can call now a trans woman or transfeminine person (p. 392). The authors defined *gynemimesis* (the word of Latin origin literally means ‘the mimicking of a woman’) as “a subtype of gender transposition or gender dysphoria in which a person with male anatomy and morphology lives in society as a woman without genital sex-reassignment surgery, and with or without taking female sex-hormonal therapy” (p. 392). The “gynemimetic ladies with a penis in American urban society” were cross-culturally compared with such identities as the *xanith* of Oman and the *hijras* of India as manifestations of this syndrome (p. 402). However, there is not much discussion on trans attraction in the article as it focused more on the transgendering practices of gynemimetophiles. Granted that this article was published more than thirty years ago, it is interesting to note though that there was already an attempt on the part of psychiatrists/psychologists to dissociate gender identity from gender expression and sexual orientation:

[Gynemimetic males] are homosexual insofar as they fall in love with and/or have genitosexual relations with someone of their own morphologic sex. They are transvestite insofar as they cross-dress and present themselves in public permanently as a member of the sex to which they do not belong morphologically; however, they are not fetishistically attached to clothing for erotosexual arousal and orgasm, as in the manner of the paraphilic transvestite. They are transsexual insofar as they may change their body morphology by taking the hormones of the other sex. But they are not transsexual insofar as they live continuously with the genitalia with which they were born, rather than claim the right to genital surgical sex reassignment-even though they may claim the right to cosmetic transformation of other secondary-sexual parts of the body by plastic surgery" (pp. 392-393).

The tendency to subsume gynemimesis, and, by extension, gynemimetophilia, into the realm of abnormal mental / psychiatric conditions was also adopted by Blanchard and Collins (1993), who coined the term *gynandromorphophilia* to designate "all men with distinct sexual interest in feminized men, including the latter men wearing women's attire and men with surgically or hormonally feminized bodily contours but intact male genitalia" (p. 570). These authors noted the paucity of psychiatric and psychological knowledge on men with specific sexual interest in transvestites and transsexuals (p. 570) and proceeded to break new ground by studying them through two new communication technologies that have become available that time to persons wishing to advertise for romantic or sexual partners: computer bulletin boards and voicemail systems (p. 571). The parameters that these researchers investigated include masculine self-description, the wish to treat their partner as a woman, dominant / insertive preference, feminine self-description, the wish to be treated as a woman, submissive / receptive preference, and transvestism / fetishism (p. 572-574). They concluded that gynandromorphophilia constituted a "distinct erotic interest" (pp. 570, 574). The 'computer bulletin boards and voicemail systems' as media for partner-seeking that the authors mentioned find their contemporary parallels in my research in the form of transsexual dating websites, although of course the technological advancements that have occurred since this article was published also greatly affect how the dynamics of online interactions between trans-attracted men and their partners unfold.

Gynemimetophilia and gynandromorphophilia, which have a distinct clinical ring to them, is no longer used in contemporary research on trans attraction, granting these terms an archaic status. In spite of the fact that Blanchard and Collins (1993) called gynandromorphophilia an erotic interest and not an overt disease, the fact that these two articles were published in *Comprehensive Psychiatry* and the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases*, respectively, reveals the authors' pathologizing stance towards this phenomenon.

3.2 Pornography and the Rise of the 'She-Male'

Escoffier (2011) links the historical development of trans attraction to the emergence of the transsexual pornographic video as a heterosexual male genre (p. 270). Escoffier argues that trans attraction as a form of sexual desire did not strictly exist before the late 20th century because the medical/surgical technology necessary to achieve the desired identity of the "pre-op" male-to-female (MTF) transsexual woman—a "partially feminized male-bodied person who typically has breasts developed through hormone therapy or breast augmentation and some other female characteristics but who has not yet undergone female-to-male sex-reassignment surgery" (p. 270) also did not exist prior to that period. Escoffier focuses on the sexual dynamics of the male spectator and the 'male' (MTF) performer, their self-identification and what conceptions of gender they both hold, and how the adult entertainment industry structures, reflects, and influences sex and gender conventions and practices (p. 270). He points out that "the genre and its popularity among heterosexual men challenges our conception of straight male identity and the ways in which male heterosexuality is or is not a sexual orientation analogous to gay male identity" (p. 270). The salience of sexual activities like mutual fellatio and anal sex (in which either party can be active or passive) in these videos is used by Escoffier to assert that trans attraction is being "straight with a twist" (p. 275). He posits that the erotic appeal of pre-op transsexual women is "in their exoticism; they transgress conventional definitions of masculinity and femininity through their physical appearance and their sexual behavior. They are often both hyperfeminine in appearance and sexually aggressive" (p. 275). This is claim that I would like to validate using the online dating profiles that I will be examining. For Escoffier, transsexual porn "introduces heterosexual men to a fantasy of sexual surrender, to the intense pleasure of discharged tension, and ultimately to the psychic shattering of the self via the intensity of anal

intercourse" (Bersani, 1977; in Escoffier, 2011, p. 280). As much as it sounds dramatic and revealing, the preliminary inquiry into the dating profiles I have gathered shows that this claim is a bit over-reaching, since not all trans-attracted men desire to be anally penetrated (some are exclusively 'top'/active), nor would like 'surrender' themselves sexually to that extent.

Escoffier's article is helpful in tracing the history of how the MTF transsexual body developed as an object of sexual desire. My research, however, deals with an entirely different online arena (dating versus pornographic websites), so Escoffier and I may arrive at different findings as to what makes transwomen attractive to men. I also did not appreciate how Escoffier kept on referring to transwomen as 'male-bodied' performers throughout his essay. Calling people who self-identify as women as 'male-bodied' presumes that genitals still possess primacy with regard to what one's 'real' gender / sex is.

3.3 Trans Attraction and HIV/AIDS

Operario et al. (2008) conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and qualitatively analyzed the responses of "men who have sex with transgender women" (MSTGWs) with regard to describing their sexual orientation identities (p. 20-22), and from this data they infer the correspondence between these men's identities and their sexual behaviors with transgender women (p. 22-24). All of this was done in the context of public health and HIV risk; insofar as transgender women are acknowledged as a priority population for HIV prevention, there is still little research on the men who actually have sex with them (p. 18). The authors encountered a myriad of responses in the ways the participants self-identified and explained their sexual orientation, and found no conclusive patterns correlating the men's their sexual orientation identity to their sexual behavior and attraction to transgender women (p. 18). I found their findings significant, however, because they seem to be contradictory to what Escoffier argues for in his article (i.e. that it is primarily a physical/erotic attraction which dominates trans attraction). Operario et al. maintain:

We observed three general trends by which men described their personal and erotic attractions to transgender women. The first general trend was a tendency among men to describe being attracted to specific individuals who happened to be transgender women, rather than being attracted to transgender women in general. Accordingly, men described a unique interpersonal and emotional connection with a transgender partner, and this person-specific attraction appeared to prevail over preferences based on erotic or anatomically gendered tendencies. These narratives suggest that some men minimize physical preferences in favor of emotions and personality drawing them to transgender partners (p. 22-23).

This ‘unique interpersonal and emotional connection with a transgender partner’ that predominates over erotic or anatomic preferences is an observation that I am excited to verify in my research using hegemonic masculinity as analytic lens. While I understand that this research on trans-attracted men is again subsumed under disease discourse (i.e. HIV/AIDS), it relies on data that is grounded on trans-attracted men's lived experiences, which can be re-appropriated to produce a productive and positive picture of trans attraction as a practice.

Reback and Larkin (2006) published a monograph (which was funded by the AIDS Coordinator Office of the city of Los Angeles, California) wherein they sought to elucidate the social and sexual meanings of casual sexual encounters with a male or a male-to-female (MTF) transgender person for heterosexually identified men who have sex with men (MSM), and ascertain the corresponding HIV risks of these sexual encounters (p. iii). Through the use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with men who self-identify as heterosexual yet say to have had or continue to have sex with a male or a MTF transgender (p. iii-iv), the authors discuss some of the social and psychological strategies these men use to maintain their heterosexual identity in spite of their non-normative sexual practices. They include “depersonalizing the sexual partner, refusing to kiss / hug / talk and leaving immediately after the sexual act, avoiding gay-identified venues, and placing the responsibility for their sexual actions on other external or internal reasons” (p. iv-v). Many of the men who had an occasional sexual encounter with a transwoman emphasized “the importance of maintaining the illusion of a biological woman. Some did not look at or interact with the transgender woman’s penis. Others enjoyed the sensation of a woman ejaculating” (p. v). The possibility of validating this finding of theirs and reconciling it as an aspect of trans-attraction that reproduces hegemonic masculinity can also be

argued for in the context of my project. The strict requirement for the performance of femininity can be interpreted as a hegemonic masculine practice that allows for the continued domination of femininities (and subordinated masculinities).

Reback and Larkin (2006) cite several reasons as to why these heterosexual men have been motivated to have sex with men or transwomen. They include (pp. vi-vii): (1) the easy and straightforward nature of the sexual encounters that avoids typical male—female sexual politics; this 'disposability' criteria was further rationalized by participants by defining MTF transgender partners as “not real women”; (2) the sexual encounter’s experimental quality, which could come across as too 'kinky' or 'dirty' for their biological female partner; and (3) the inability to find a biological female partner, since transwomen were perceived to have lower standards. In my opinion, these findings can be interpreted as both challenging and reproducing hegemonic masculinity in different ways. On one hand, there is the misgendering of trans women and the subsequent homophobia/transphobia that is a negative character trait that can be associated with hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, the findings also gesture toward a longing for a greater degree of sexual freedom and roles on the part of these men, which can be interpreted as a consequence of trans sexualities challenging hegemonic masculinity.

3.4 Trans people and Trans-attracted Men Speak

The general continued portrayal of trans attraction as a dehumanizing fetish (with the ‘she-male’ trope as one of its manifestations) prompted trans scholar Avery Tompkins (2014) to analyze ethnographic data from YouTube videos combined with in-person observational data from US LGBTQ and trans conferences to argue that “a sex-positive trans politics cannot emerge in trans and trans-allied communities if the rhetoric of the 'tranny chaser' continues to inform discourses of desire and attraction to trans people” (p. 766). *Tranny chasing* is a concept often associated with trans-attracted men; it means desiring a trans person solely or primarily because they are trans. Tompkins questions the potential harmful impacts of the circulating discourse that “transness cannot be specifically desired along with the rest of an individual” (p. 767). He submits that a sex-positive trans politics can only develop in trans and trans-allied communities

if we cease policing this kind of desire (the policing of which is due to the fear of the ‘tranny chaser’ label), and in doing so become more open to speak about these attractions outside of the realm of private relationships and lives, expanding the possibilities for trans sexualities to play a role in trans politics (p. 767-768).

In many ways, the goal of my project is similar. I seek to bring ‘trans’ inside “the realm of sexual intelligibility and acceptability in a variety of communities and conversations... to consider the ways in which we can attempt to bring “trans” into a sex-positive arena of language, practice, and erotics that celebrates trans identities and bodies and makes it acceptable to speak the erotics of trans in sex-positive and affirming ways” (p. 774). Through examining trans-attracted men's dating profiles I hope to discover signs of “a sex-positive trans politics that recognizes and celebrates diversity in identities, bodies, and constructions of sexual relationships” (p. 776).

Tompkins discusses examples of sources that depict transsexualities in sex-positive and affirming ways, including video and photo pornography (p. 775). In my project, I claim that transsexual dating websites can also be included in this rubric, especially if trans people themselves are involved in the design and daily management of it (as in the case of *mytranssexualdate.com*, one of my data sources). Transsexual dating websites can serve as sites of information and discussions that “...can be affirming and contribute to a rhetoric that counteracts pathologizing research and exploitative depictions of trans people... It also has the potential to serve as a catalyst for new conversations around trans sexualities in our communities” (p. 775).

This ‘reclaiming’ of sex-positive discourse on trans attraction is also practiced in Internet forums, websites and discussion boards. Escoffier (2011) supposes that trans attraction as a form of sexuality has immensely benefited from the connectivity that the Internet provides (p. 275). More and more men are having the courage to ‘come out’ and profess their trans orientation. A famous recent example of this is the October 2013 piece written by Thomas Matt for *Salon* titled

“I’m attracted to trans women”, wherein the author declares that he is “ready to stop hiding the truth” about his desires:

I’ve had enough of this shaming. It’s created a disgusting culture of trans-attracted men using trans women for sex but never forming a committed relationship with them. Most trans-attracted men are only trans-attracted at night. Then, during the day, they run back to their heteronormative relationships with cis-women of whom they are not ashamed. Even men who are in committed relationships with trans women will often tell those women that they could never introduce them to their friends or family. Imagine a woman who has been to hell and back trying to transition into who she really is only to be told by her lover that he is ashamed to be with her. The hardship that trans-attracted men go through (and believe me, it is hard) does not even come close to what trans women have to go through in their day-to-day lives. That is why it’s so important for trans-attracted men to start coming out of the closet. Personally, I am proud to be attracted to women who are so strong.

Chapter 4: Cyberlove and Online Transsexual Dating

The growth of online transsexual dating can be situated within the development of internet and dating technologies in general. From the message boards and chat rooms (e.g. IRC or internet chat relay) of the early 1990s to the development of instant messaging (e.g. ICQ, Yahoo Messenger) in the mid-1990s to the rise of online dating websites in the 2000s, improvements in internet connectivity speed and more diverse modes of communication have fostered the development of a more spontaneous and intimate form of online courtship. Choi and Chan (2013) offer a neat summary of these trends:

First, the mode of communication between users has changed. In the past, the medium of communication was mainly text, but now using pictures, webcams and voice message to communicate is very common. The communication method has transformed from static to dynamic. This change may alter the online interaction between people. For example, physical attractiveness may become an important factor in online interaction when users are no longer so reliant in textual modes of communication. Second, the anonymity in online dating becomes less important, although it is still a salient factor. In the past, internet users seldom shared their personal information with others. Nowadays, online dating sites are very common. People are now more willing to share their personal information with others. Third, Cyberlove II (forming a romantic relationship without meeting each other) is diminishing because meeting others is much easier before. The emergence of online dating agencies for people looking for cross-border relationships is indeed an indicator which shows that physical distance has become less of a constraint (p. 35).

Online (MTF) transsexual dating has exponentially grown over the past ten years, along with the rise in the consumption of transsexual pornography (Escoffier, 2011, p. 269). Claire (2009, in Escoffier, 2011) claims that “traffic to transsexual porn and dating sites has literally exploded. Growing by more than 5,000% in the last 5 years, the business news website www.examiner.com recently estimated that more than 188 million men (worldwide) have gone to these sites. During the three summer months (June-August) of 2009 traffic to both transsexual porn and dating sites grew by 350%” (p. 269). A cursory Google keyword search for “transsexual dating” reveals more than 2.8 million results. The top two websites that showed up in the search results, tgpersonals.com and mytranssexualdate.com, both have more than 30000

registered profiles of men who are looking to date trans women. These two dating sites, which I will use as the source of the trans-attracted men's profiles for my analysis, share many similar features, but as will be shown in the later part of this chapter they are also fundamentally different in some aspects.

I have conducted a critical discourse analysis of a random sample of four hundred dating profiles of trans-attracted men, collected from two transsexual dating websites: *tgpersonals.com* and *mytranssexualdate.com*. As I have justified in the introductory chapter, I have chosen these two websites based on their top-ranking online popularity. I will specifically analyze profiles that contain responses to questions such as:

- How do I see myself as a man?
- How do I see/describe my sexuality/sexual orientation?
- What is my ideal kind of woman?
- How do I see trans women?
- What kind of relationship am I looking for?

While my methodological approach is primarily that of critical discourse analysis and rhetorical analysis of argumentation, my personal experience as a transsexual woman is also very much relevant to my theorizations. I have spent a considerable amount of time as well in the past on online dating websites and met interesting trans-attracted men in the process.

I have analyzed some four hundred dating profiles coming from the two websites. All personal information (e.g. name, country, age) indicated in the profiles have been hidden to maintain the owners' privacy. The forty profiles I have chosen for a more detailed examination are diversely represented in terms of age (ranging from 19 to 53 years of age) and country (ranging from Western Europe [10], the United States [12], Australia [6], to India [3], Brazil [3], Japan [2], the United Arab Emirates [2] and Hong Kong [2]).

The phenomenon of trans attraction, as it is considered throughout this paper, has also been narrowed down to include only the sexual / physical or romantic desires of (cis)men towards transgender / transsexual women and transfeminine people. Since I will focus on men and hegemonic masculinity, I shall not include the exploration of the sexual / physical or romantic desires of (cis)women towards trans people (both trans men and women) in this study.

4.1. *TGPersonals.com*: For those looking for Male, Female, MTF or FTM

TGPersonals.com, the top-ranked for online transsexual dating, is actually a mirror website for *MyFreePersonals.com*, as stated in its “About Us” page. This means that *TGPersonals.com* and *MyFreePersonals.com*, although they have different URLs, redirect to the same site that utilizes the same dating database. This means that TG Personals was not created as a niche, stand-alone website for transsexual dating, but as an integrated component of the main site My Free Personals. *MyFreePersonals.com* was created in 2011 and is being run by a person named “Mike” (who I presume is a cisgender man) who lives in New York, using an open-source software called Elgg. Mike claims that this dating website will always remain free / not-for-pay for everyone who is interested in creating an account, and he maintains it be getting revenues from sponsors who put up banner advertisements on the site:

I can promise you that it will always be 100% free to use. Eleven years ago I registered the domain name with the intention of launching a free personals site for a general audience. I had run social networking sites before and I always hoped open source software could eventually be used to launch a completely free personals web site to compete with the yahoo.com and match.com pay sites dominating the online dating scene at the time. Pay sites rake in huge profits from people looking for love. Their costs are low and their profits are high. It just doesn't seem right. My goal was to put them out of business. (“About” page, tgpersonals.com)

This democratizing move to make everything free / no-cost ensures that anyone who is older than 18 years old and has internet access and a valid email address can create a dating

profile in the site; the website has no territorial restrictions. The terms of use explicitly state that nude or explicit photos, as well as advertising goods or services, are prohibited and will be removed.

TGPersonals **TLOVERS.com** **Meet Trans Women. Register for FREE.** [Log in](#)

[Activity](#) [Blogs](#) [Members](#) [Photos](#) [Search](#)

Search Profiles

I am

Interested in

Ages -

Looking for

Location

Within miles of

With pictures ☐

Sorted by

Keywords

[Find profiles](#)

Newest Members

Recently Active Members

100% Free and Always Will Be

No one under the age of eighteen is allowed to use this free personals site. [Click here](#) if you are under eighteen. Please be careful of romance scam artists. Don't give strangers money or personal info like your email address.

Top referring sites

Username or email

Password

[Log in](#) ☐ Remember me

[Register](#) | [Lost password](#)

Figure 1. *tgpersonals.com* homepage

The preliminary step in the search procedure in *tgpersonals.com* involves indicating your (gender) identity and the (gender) identity of your partner of choice. There are four choices for both fields: ‘Male’, ‘Female’, MTF (Male-To-Female) or FTM (Female-To-Male). The age and location preference should also be narrowed down, and the option to select only those profiles with photos on them are also present. One can also specify the intent of the search if it is for “Sex”, “Love”, “Friendship” or “Roommates” (all options can be checked at the same time).

The logic behind the search formula “I am a (Male / Female / MTF / FTM) seeking a (Male / Female / MTF / FTM)” reveals interesting assumptions that, in my reading, produce both positive and negative effects. On the positive end, the effort to recognize trans attraction is present via the ‘MTF’ and ‘FTM’ labels. Trans women can choose to identify as ‘MTF’ to highlight their transsexual status. Correspondingly, trans-attracted men can choose ‘MTF’ for their partner preference. I was able to obtain the approximate number of trans-attracted men registered in the site by doing the ‘I am Male interested in MTF’ search, which yielded more than 30000 results. Another advantageous effect of this search formula is that several combination of searches can be done using a single database, theoretically producing a myriad of configurations of desire:

Male interested in Male

Male interested in Female

Male interested in MTF (possibly trans-attracted)

Male interested in FTM (possibly trans-attracted)

Female interested in Male

Female interested in Female

Female interested in MTF (possibly trans-attracted)

Female interested in FTM (possibly trans-attracted)

MTF interested in Male

MTF interested in Female

MTF interested in MTF (possibly trans-attracted)

MTF interested in FTM (possibly trans-attracted)

FTM interested in Male

FTM interested in Female

FTM interested in MTF (possibly trans-attracted)

FTM interested in MTF (possibly trans-attracted)

The search combinations above show that the website can also be used by those who may conventionally identify as heterosexual (men and women who like the ‘opposite’ gender), gay (cismen who like other cismen) or lesbian (ciswomen who like other ciswomen).

On the other hand, fixing the four rigid identity categories mentioned above and requiring people to adopt them when doing the search may impose an unwarranted exclusion to those who do not self-identify with any of the given choices, such as genderqueer or gender non-conforming people. Since you cannot choose more than one preferred partner identity, this also leads to the erasure of bisexuality / pansexuality (choosing both men and women, or everything) as a legitimate dating identity, although admittedly this can be remedied by doing multiple partner searches, which is of course more inconvenient. Lastly, transsexuals are forced into a quandary through this search logic by asking them to choose between the binaries Female-versus-MTF (for trans women) and Male-versus-FTM (for trans men). This search logic does not consider the possibility that transwomen are women and can choose to identify both as female and MTF.

TGPersonals.com also has links on its site that redirect to resources that are of relevance to trans people and the people who love/desire them, such as The Transgender Guide (*tgguide.com*), an “Online Community for Transsexuals, Crossdressers, Transgender & All Gender Variant Individuals”, and *ABGender.com*, which contains information that may be useful for trans women and transfeminine people, such as feminizing clothing, fashion, transitioning, cultivating a ‘feminine style’, among others.

Since *TGPersonals.com* / *MyFreePersonals.com* caters to the general public, the look of the profile pages are similar to those found in standard online dating profiles. The page specifies the person's username, nickname, and most of the time contains their photos, as well as a 'Headline' that serves as the person's come-on line to attract others to message them. The profile is divided into three parts: a 'Basics' portion, where one's name, age and location is listed, along with a field that the person can fill in with any information about themselves; a 'Details' part which lists the person's more specific physical attributes (e.g. height/weight), tastes, hobbies, etc.; and the 'My Match's Detail's' part, which states the person's partner preferences.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL tgpersonals.com/profile/Dom_Gentleman. The page features a blue header with the 'TGPersonals' logo and navigation links: Activity, Blogs, Crushes, Members, Photos, Search. A red heart icon and text 'TLOVERS.com Transgender Dating!' and 'Meet Trans Women. Register for FREE.' are also present.

The profile is for a user named 'George'. It includes a profile picture of a man in a grey jacket and dark pants. The 'Basics' section contains the following information:

- Headline:** Gentleman for a sweet T-Girl
- About Me:** Dom gentleman, wise, intelligent, handsome, financially secure, romantic
- seeking** a sweet T-Girl/T-Lady for LTR
- (I'm TG experienced)**
- beautiful, honest, serious, intelligent**
- I like culture(s), art, travel, gardening, my home, a good glass of red wine, the fireplace, discussions, evening out with my dreamgirl.**
- You are my partner in life, love in heart, wife in society, whore in bed. I'm monogamous, top, straight. escorts no chance!**
- Age:** 52
- Gender:** Male
- Interested in:** MTF
- Looking for:** Friendship or Love or Sex
- State / Nation:** Switzerland

The 'My Details' section includes:

- Personality:** Straight, loyal, intelligent
- Want Kids:** No
- Have Kids:** No
- Favorite Books:** so many e.g literature, art, travel, countries
- Weight:** 170 lbs
- Height:** 6' 0"
- Politics:** mine, I hate politicians
- Smoke:** Yes
- Favorite Places:** home, garden, magic places of power, foreign countries
- Favorite Music:** classic, reggae, pop rock, salsa, actual
- Religion:** yes
- Ethnicity:** caucasian
- Favorite Things:** YOU maybe
- Drink:** Socially

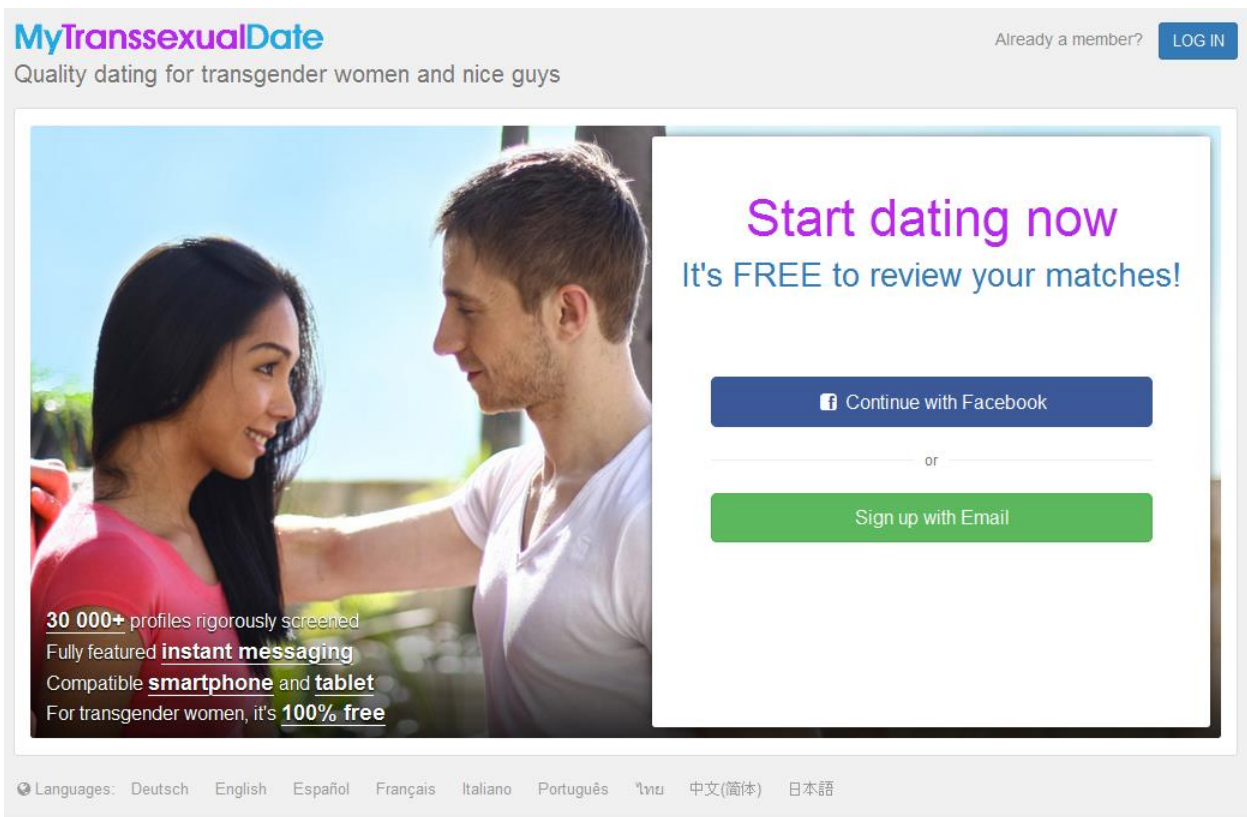
The 'My Match's Details' section includes:

- About my match:** My soulmate!
- My Match's Minimum Age:** 25
- My Match's Maximum Age:** 45

On the right side of the profile, there are sections for 'Blogs' (No blog posts), 'Friends' (a grid of 10 profile pictures, some with question marks), and 'Activity' (a list of recent actions, including 'George is now a friend with Jess Humm 10 hours ago' and 'George is now a friend with angelinaa225 2 days ago').

Figure 2. Sample dating profile from *tgpersonals.com*

4.2. “For transsexuals by transsexuals”: MyTranssexualDate.com



Last online members

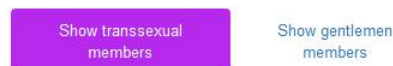


Figure 3. MyTranssexualDate.com homepage, featuring the owners, a French (man)-Filipina (trans woman) couple

My Transsexual Date states on its website that that it is “best dating site for transsexual women” and that it is “the first decent dating site for transsexual women”. Unlike TG Personals, it is a stand-alone site that caters specifically to trans women and the men who desire them. Co-founded in 2014 by a French trans-attracted man named Simon Deleaux and his Filipina trans woman fiancée Maki Gingoyon, the site contains more detailed information than those found in TG Personals as to its history and the purpose of its creation:

Our mission is to provide a quality and decent dating service for transgender women and the men who know how to appreciate them. We are against the current bad image that the internet reflects on transgender women, giving the idea that they are always related to porn or prostitution. There are very few decent websites and resources online made for transgender women and "transoriented man". Especially, there is no dating site for transgender women which the sexual aspect is not played, and that's the reason we decided to open My Transsexual Date. ("About Us" page, *mytranssexualdate.com*)

We believe that through education and decent services (such as this website), we can make a difference in how society views transgender women (as well as their friends and lovers). We believe that we are providing the best dating experience in the world for transgender women / transoriented men and that this is what they were all waiting for. ("About Us" page, *mytranssexualdate.com*)

While the intention of the website creators to dissociate trans attraction from porn- and prostitution-related discourses could lead to a productive new path wherein trans attraction is 'normalized' like typical heterosexual attraction, I interpret their linking of 'porn/prostitution' to 'decency' to be highly problematic. Some trans women are indeed engaged in pornography and sex work. Should this make them un-dateable? And why is pornography and sex work 'indecent'? My Transsexual Date's claim that they "emphasise on sincere dating and promote real loving relationships" translates to policing overtly sexual ads and photos, pre-judging them as obscene and as something that 'serious daters' would never be capable of doing:

We review every profile carefully, so that we are sure that the members of our site are seriously looking for a relationship. Prostitution, pay for pleasure, sexual encounters, hookups... are thing that we strictly prohibit, and our moderators take care of strictly enforcing this policy. We ask that all our members be respectful, courteous, and decent. ("About Us" page, *mytranssexualdate.com*)

The fact that the moderators police calls for hookups and casual sex means that "respect", "courtesy" and "decency" in this context may very well just mean desexualizing oneself and portraying a self-image that valorizes romantic notions of feelings over sexual pleasures. This is

not the case in TG Personals, where people can advertise separately for sex and ‘fun’. In this aspect, TG Personals becomes a more accurate example of a venue where what Tompkins (2014) calls a ‘sex-positive trans politics’ can more readily develop.

My Transsexual Date justifies its expertise in online transsexual dating by pointing out that most of their team is made up of trans women:

What makes My Transsexual Date unique, is that our team is essentially made of transgender women. So we know very well what are the challenges that transgender women face for finding love. And we respect and value our fellow trans women so much that we refuse to contribute to all the stereotypes that affect them (and therefore, us). (*mytranssexualdate.com* homepage)

I wonder, how many trans women are part of their team? While I recognize the lived experiences that these trans women administrators bring with them when they manage the website, I sense from the justification above a certain universalization of the transgender experience, wherein the experience of these administrators are made to represent the experiences and preferences / desires of all transgender women. Do all trans women want a desexualized dating environment, for example? This ‘transgender experience’ is also very much affecting by the trans person’s positioning based on class, race, age, etc., and I do not think the moderators have considered this when arguing for their point above.

I understand that the next question may border on speculation, but hopefully the trans women who are part of the team are compensated monetarily for the work they do on the site. This is because the site actually derives income from the trans-attracted men who sign up and would like the option to be able to message the trans women whom they are interested in:

To ensure the quality of our site, our male members will be asked to upgrade to a Premium membership in order to use our chat system, but making your profile

and reviewing your matches is totally free. And for transgender women, the site is 100% free, and will always be! (*mytranssexualdate.com* homepage)

Why is the site free for transwomen but a paid service (starting at 9.90 Euros a month for premium members) for trans-attracted men? This is a further testament to the growing demand for transsexual dating, wherein some sites could now actually charge men for the privilege of dating trans women. What does ‘ensuring the quality of the site mean’? I find this justification to be quite vague. Does it mean weeding out trans-attracted men who are not ‘serious’ enough to pay (or maybe not rich enough to do so)? If yes, this imposes a classist dimension to the dating process. This also commoditizes trans women by portraying the privilege of being able to chat with them as something that can be bought.

The profile pages in My Transsexual Date are similar in structure to those found in TG Personals, with two important trans-specific additions. First, the preference for the trans woman’s genital status is supplied. The men can specify if they would like their partner to be ‘pre-op’ (no surgery yet but eventually are planning to), ‘post-op’ (had has genital surgery) or ‘non-op’ (does not want the surgery). Second, the preferred sexual role of the person is also indicated. ‘Top’ means the person prefers the active/insertive role during (anal) sex. ‘Bottom’ signifies the passive/receptive role, while ‘Versatile’ denotes the capacity to enjoy both top and bottom roles.


https://mytranssexualdate.com/profiles/cjx69365

My Transsexual Date My profile Online Search

8 85 212


Looking for love.

About Photos (4) PREMIUM

 active 6 days ago

CJ

40 · male · Single

Auckland 

ID : 69365

Message

Add to favourites

I am interested in **pre-op, post-op & non-op trans** between **22 and 35**

I am looking for **Making friends, Relationship, Marriage**

About

Status	Single	Occupation	Law
Children	No	Education level	College
Languages	English	Ethnicity	Caucasian (white)
Height	184 cm (6'0")	Religion	Christian
Weight	92 kg (203 lbs)	Eating habits	All
Body type	Athletic	I live	With my housemate(s)
Physical look	Average	I drink	Sometimes
Style	Sporty	I smoke	Never but I stand smoke
Would travel ?	Yes	Zodiac sign	Libra
Would relocate ?	Yes	Chinese zodiac sign	Tiger
		Sexual role	Versatile
		First timer	No

Description

I am a single male looking for love. Hoping to find a partner for life and marriage. I like to keep active and fit and I need fitness for my job aswell. My interests and hobbies are sport/target shooting and flying. I enjoy Asian foods and love trying new dishes.

I am kindhearted and respectful of peoples needs and who they are and I am non judgmental as I beleave we are not here on earth to judge others.

If you would like to know more about me then please say hi.

See translation

Figure 4. Sample dating profile from *mytranssexualdate.com*

Chapter 5: “I just want to share myself with a wonderful person”: Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity in Transsexual Dating Websites

Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) reformulation of the concept of hegemonic masculinity affirms the “possibility of change in gender relations, on the idea that a dominant pattern of masculinity was open to challenge” through “new strategies in gender relations... and result in redefinitions of socially admired masculinity” (p. 846). Since they can be considered as subordinated masculinities, I submit that trans-attracted men are one of these ‘bearers of alternative masculinities’ (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846) whose practices offer resistance to the kind of masculinity that is currently hegemonic in cisgender-heterosexual dating and relationships. In this chapter, I highlight and analyze the discursive patterns that I have discovered while examining the online dating profiles of these men, and offer a reading as to how some of them can be seen as contesting currently hegemonic masculine practices. These ‘practices of resistance’ can be grouped into three broad categories: depicting an alternative, more down-to-earth concept of manhood; re-defining the concept of ‘woman’ as trans-inclusive; and unsettling the rigidity of sexual roles.

5.1. Just your average nice guy: An Alternative Notion of Manhood

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) view gender relations as perennial “arenas of tension... [where] a given pattern of hegemonic masculinity is hegemonic to the extent that it provides a solution to these tensions, tending to stabilize patriarchal power or reconstitute it in new conditions” (p. 853). I would argue that one way patriarchal power is stabilized in conventional dating websites is via a hegemonic masculine discourse that emphasizes men as successful, powerful, independent individuals with impressive credentials, whose self-mastery is conducive to their continued authority and dominance over women. I will expound on this discourse of independence/success in the next chapter. For now, I would like to foreground an alternative discourse of masculine identity that was frequently reiterated in many of the dating profiles, which was that of being a normal, ‘average’ man whose defining characteristic is kindness/caring, and who values the capacity for kindness/care the most in his partner as well. In profiles such as those below, there is a noticeable sense of humility and generosity, the lack of

the desire to impress women via physical or socio-economic achievements, as well as the absence of typical partner requirements such as demands for physical attractiveness (italics for emphasis mine):

No Hercules, just a regular guy. Chances are you've read lots of profiles from guys describing their Herculean achievements, exotic adventure and lofty goals. Well, I'm not one of them. *My achievements are modest, my adventures mundane, and my goals are in reach.*

looking for a shemale for LTR or marriage. *Im not Prince Charming* But i Have a True and Big Heart Full of *LOVE, CARING, RESPECT AND PASSION* If you are interested then pls reply ..

Just looking for someone special. Lets see I am 41yrs old, 6'3", 250lbs, brown hair and eyes, average looks and build, *no fabio but no toad either.* I have a wide range of likes and interests ranging from going to the movies to dining out to spending a night of dancing. I also like to hike and walk my dog, star gaze when the sky is clear and warm out plus various outdoor activities .I also like to go to concerts, museums and plays. My personality would be the *nice guy type* that has a streak of wildness in him. So i guess i am the *knight in tarnished armor* then.

pleased to meet you :). i live around the london area. the thing is i dont get many opportunities to meet mtf women and hopefully with the help of this site i will be able to. *im a kind person. i believe in kindness.* im average height. im slender. i guess what i want is *a nice undiscriminating person.* to be with and have fun with :)

Looking for love. I am a single male looking for love. Hoping to find a partner for life and marriage. I like to keep active and fit and I need fitness for my job as well. My interests and hobbies are sport/target shooting and flying. I enjoy Asian foods and love trying new dishes. *I am kind-hearted and respectful of people's needs and who they are and I am non judgmental as I believe we are not here on earth to judge others.*

Looking for my partner in crime : D. Hello ! I am a guy who is *laid back and down to earth*, I'd like to have a serious and meaningful relationship with a special someone. I'm open minded, social, love to have a good laugh and enjoy travelling. I think life has more fun when you share it with your soulmate :)

No more flakes please. Like everyone else I have had my share of bad relationships. I'm hoping to meet someone who will treat me like a person, an equal. *I am not perfect by any means.* I am not tall or rich, *I'm just a normal guy.* Bit of a geek, really. I want someone who is *kind and caring*. I know things take time so I'm not rushing into anything. Eventually though I do want to put a ring on someone's finger someday. I am still saving up. *I don't think anyone should settle for someone who accepts what you are but rather for someone who wants you to be the way you already are.*

Eisler et al. (1988, in Smith et al., 2015) argue that men adhering to hegemonic masculine practices experience stress and anxiety in situations where their masculinity is compromised. Eisler et al. theorized on this further by conceptualizing the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale, which is made up of five situations “hypothesized to threaten hegemonic masculinity: physical inadequacy, emotional inexpressiveness, subordination to women, intellectual inferiority, and performance failure” (Smith et al., 2015, p. 161). Utilizing this scale as a guide to interpret this marked diffusion or relinquishment of masculine control within the ‘average nice guy’ discourse, we are able to see how much of a departure the reactions of trans-attracted men are from the usual hegemonic masculine practices. In lieu of physical perfection, we are presented instead with an admission of lackluster looks (‘I’m no Fabio’, ‘I’m not Prince Charming’). The profiles above were also emotionally upfront and demonstrative of how these men see themselves and their ideal partner (‘I’m just a normal guy. Bit of a geek, really. I want someone who is kind and caring. I know things take time so I’m not rushing into anything. Eventually though I do want to put a ring on someone’s finger someday.’). Instead of the intent to dominate the woman and their relationship, there is an emphasis on equality and sharing between the partners and the acceptance of their faults and humanity (‘I’m hoping to meet someone who will treat me like a person, an equal.’, ‘I believe in kindness... what I want is a nice undiscriminating person.’, ‘I am non-judgmental.’). The men behind these profiles also embrace instead of eschew the fact that they cannot be or they ‘fail’ to be the ‘ideal’ man (‘I’m no Hercules’, ‘knight in tarnished armor’).

What can explain this tendency in the men's profiles above to concede weakness and vulnerability? I contend that by being assigned the status of a 'subordinated' masculinity, trans-attracted men are afforded less pressure and more leeway to explore their masculinity and be more vulnerable than those men who adhere more strictly to hegemonic masculinity. Instead of getting stressed from not living up to traditional hegemonic masculine roles, they are able to reimagine alternative ways of reaffirming their masculinity without engaging in the attributes valorized in the stress scale above. This emphasis on kindness, caring, respect and equality can be read as a subversive masculine strategy that can contest hegemonic masculine practices and inspire a change in future gender relations.

5.2. The Other Woman: Expanding the Framework of (Trans)Gender Intelligibility

I begin this section by asserting that the internalized shame and social stigma that comes with trans attraction can be construed as a hegemonic masculine practice. This stigma reproduces hegemonic masculinity in two ways. First, it facilitates the subjugation of transwomen by socially legitimating both misogynistic (i.e. 'She's too masculine-looking / not feminine enough to be a woman.') and transphobic (i.e. the 'fake woman', 'deceiver', and 'man in a dress' tropes) discourses. Second, it makes possible the continued subordination of trans-attracted men by making them vulnerable to homophobic anxieties (which is linked to the preceding transphobic discourse).

My personal dating experience (both online and in-person) can also attest to the effects of this stigma. There have been many times (e.g. in parties, in conventional/non-trans dating websites) wherein a man with whom I was feeling at ease and having a great time suddenly recoils and stops further interaction after I disclose to him that I am transsexual. This usually followed by the question "Does it mean that you have a dick?", then by the coup de grâce "Sorry, you are lovely and all, but I'm not gay".

The increasing visibility of transgender rights activism has inspired more trans women to come out and publicly affirm their womanhood like that of American writer and trans woman of color Janet Mock (2013):

“I am a trans woman. My sisters are trans women. We are not secrets. We are not shameful. We are worthy of respect, desire, and love. As there are many kinds of women, there are many kinds of men, and many men desire many kinds of women, trans women are amongst these women. And let’s be clear: Trans women are women.”

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) maintain that the contestation of hegemonic masculinity can happen “through the efforts of the women’s movement (at the local, regional, and global levels)” (p. 853). Trans women’s movements should be considered as an integral part of this greater (i.e. intersectional, trans-inclusive) women’s movement. By working to propagate the discourses that ‘trans women are women’ and ‘there is no shame in being attracted to trans women’, trans women (supported by their allies) are reclaiming their identity and at the same time are encouraging trans-attracted men to express their feelings in the open. This combined discourse of respect for a trans woman’s womanhood and honesty/openness about one’s feelings is persistent across many of the dating profiles I have examined (*italics for emphasis mine*):

Looking for my soulmate. Handsome, kind, active man, who has learnt to *respect TS ladies the same way as cis-ladies.*

Curiosity can lead wayward minds to bliss. I’m a guy that’s new to this. Not sure what I’ll find. I’ve been pulled this way for some time and finally willing to brave the unknown. *I am open to anything. I think women are the most beautiful things on this earth. I am bi curious, but don’t really find men attractive. Though a penis can arouse me.*

Gentleman for a sweet *T-Girl*. Dom gentleman, wise, intelligent, handsome, financially secure, romantic.

Seeking a sweet T-Girl/T-Lady for LTR. (I'm TG experienced) beautiful, honest, serious, intelligent.

dr needs love. Looking for a ltr with a *transgender female* ltr would include operation if desired. Want to love and be be loved by a t girl.

Trying this out again. Successful young entrepreneur looking for a *woman* who has a great sense of humour, is caring, adventurous, open minded who likes to explore all life has to offer.

Genuinely sweet man from the US seeking soulmate. I have traveled the world. I am a romantic at heart. I enjoy good conversation, great food with someone I can have a deep and meaningful conversation with. I love to travel and am really big into seeing the world around me in all of its beauty. *I seek a girl (or a woman to be precise)* to make my life complete. Whether she travels to me, or i can travel to her. I know it is hard to find the one true love, but I am optimistic. I have loved in the past, im ready to open up my heart again to a good girl. I want a person who has confidence and compassion and isn't afraid to go out into the world and experience all it has to offer.

The salience of labels like 'lady', 'woman', 'girl' and 'female', and the usage of female pronouns to refer to trans women in the profiles above highlight the recognition by these men of a trans woman's (female) gender identity. However, an interesting point of divergence can be noted between profiles that utilize 'trans' as a qualifier before the 'woman' label ('TS ladies', 'T-girl', 'transgender female') and those profiles that simply mention 'woman' without any qualifiers (the last two profiles above). What does the emphasis on the analytically distinct category 'trans woman' in the first case (as opposed to just plain 'woman') imply? Beyond the fact that these profiles were collected from (exclusively) transsexual dating websites, I also read this explicit mention of transness as a transgressive—albeit situated—strategy on the part of trans-attracted men to acknowledge the erotics of female/feminine trans sexualities as something that is compatible with and pleasurable to male (hetero)sexuality. This will be the focus of the next section; however for now I would like to extend this theorization and explain how this strategy also helps grant 'credibility' and legitimacy to trans women's claims to womanhood.

Hegemonic masculinity necessitates stability and fixity in order to keep the prevailing gender order intact. Davis (2009) argues that “changes in the array of gender possibilities are rooted in variations in the rules of intelligibility and authentication” (p. 103). Trans women, according to Davis, can be seen as performing ‘situated fluidity’ by disrupting gender norms while at the same time negotiating social structures and processes in order to be “authenticated as credible” (p. 103) women. I expand this line of argumentation by considering it from the sexual point of view of men who desire trans women. I argue that trans-attracted men perform a ‘situated sexual fluidity’ within the discourse of (a modified sort of) heterosexuality, contributing to the social authentication of trans women as women. The combination of the mutually sustaining discourses “I may be a trans woman, but I am a woman” and “I am a straight man who can be attracted to all women, including trans women” result in the granting of credibility to both the trans women’s and trans-attracted men’s identities (as a woman and as a heterosexual man, respectively). While this unsettles the hegemonic gender order by blurring the boundaries of who a woman is, the privileging of (male) heterosexuality in this case can lead to a reproduction of some hegemonic masculine practices (such as homophobic discourses, which I discuss in detail next chapter).

5.3. Versatility and Unsettling the Rigidity of Sexual Roles

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) discuss the importance of masculine embodiment and its linkage to the prestige that is conferred on men with heterosexual partners and an appetite for sexual conquest (but only within a cisgender-heterosexual context) (p. 851). They also emphasize how bodies “participate in social action by delineating courses of social conduct—the body is a participant in generating social practice. It is important not only that masculinities be understood as embodied but also that the interweaving of embodiment and social context be addressed” (p. 851). In the context of challenging hegemonic masculinity, it is relatively easy to see the relevance of these statements when it comes to how transsexual / transgender / gender non-conforming bodies blur, redefine or interrogate masculinity qua masculinity. How does this translate though to the case of trans-attracted (cisgender) men, who are seen normatively male-bodied?

In this aspect, trans-attracted men can be seen as contesting hegemonic masculinity instead through their behavior, specifically by linking novel, subversive practices to their masculine identity, which include re-signifying the concepts of heterosexuality and sex positivity by making them trans-inclusive. Escoffier (2011) characterizes trans attraction as being “heterosexual by default” (p. 278), meaning that unless they explicitly express sexual attraction towards men they are typically not considered as gay or bisexual, as shown in the profile below (*italics for emphasis mine*):

i'm a creep i'm a weirdo. if you(yes you! if you are watching) ask me why i interested with ladyboy (*actually i don't like the term "ladyboy", because you're not a boy, you definitely are girl in you soul, right?*), i can tell you, i think they (you) are kindness, caring, honest, they (you) brave and proud to be who they (you) are and i think they (you) know what LOVE is LOVE. so i want to know you more and more. yes i think love is no limit, not with gender, height, weight, achievement, religion, age and nationality, Love is all about giving, if you love some one you can give anything with no refund, so i hope one day gay marriage is legal in all around the world. (*yes i'm straight guy, i interested in girl including you*).

The notion of ‘reimagining heterosexuality’ as demonstrated in the profile above does not equate to the queer radical, deconstructive perspective that seeks to completely overthrow the heterosexual system and established gender order. Rather, trans-attracted men (and also trans women) become ‘weirdos’ by working within embedded social structures and ‘widening’ the category ‘woman’, ultimately depicting trans women as being the same as other women. This discourse of inclusion relies on the performative dictum ‘If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it must be a duck’ instead of the more restrictive, essentialist trope ‘If it has a penis, then it must be a man’. The penis, therefore, loses its signifying phallic role as the key masculinity indicator if it is attached to a transwoman’s body, and is overridden by the transwoman’s feminine performance. On the other hand, the association of being anally penetrated by a penis to that of being feminine or homosexual is loosened if the person who does the penetration is a trans woman. This relaxation of hegemonic sexual identifiers and roles (i.e.

man = penis, active, woman = vagina, passive) leads to interesting and liberating sexual configurations, as seen in the profiles below” (italics for emphasis mine):

rêveur dans l'âme solitaire dans le coeur. homme de 27 ans a la recherche d'une jolie *transsexuel de preference non opéré*. je veux quelqu'un de sérieuse avec un travail et une perspective d'avenir a deux. n'hesiter pas a me laisser un message.

[Translation: “**dreamer in the lonely soul in the heart.** 27 year-old man searching for a pretty *transsexual, preferably non-op*. i want somebody serious who has a job and the goal of sharing the future with someone. don't hesitate to leave me a message.”]

Seeking sexy femme thai trans lady for life. Sawasdee kap. I have always admired trans ladies since i was a teenager, they are so feminine and glamorous and sexy. Iam seeking to date a lovely *post op trans lady* who fits that bill, she must be from bangkok in thailand as this is the place i visit most.

Wants to be bottomed. I'm looking for a ladyboy for a girlfriend or someone I can have some fun with until the right girl comes around. *I would really like a girl who is not afraid of me playing with her genitalia or can be versatile. I am a top, but really want to experience being a bottom with my partner for the first time.* Sex with my girl is very important to me.

This degendering (i.e. of the penis and of anal sex) strategy disrupts hegemonic masculine practices by gradually incorporating “the erotics of trans identities and bodies... slowly allow(ing) the category “trans” to operate at the level of sexual intelligibility in a sex-positive manner” (Tompkins, 2014, p. 775). The transgressive form of sexuality that is practiced in these cases are nothing short of inspiring and may also contribute to the increased recognition and acceptance of transsexualism.

5.4. More Adventures: Kink, Role Play and BDSM

Sex positivity, as continued from last section's discussion, refers to a “cultural philosophy that understands sexuality as a potentially positive force in one's life... [it] allows for

and in fact celebrates sexual diversity, differing desires and relationship structures, and individual choices based on consent” (Queen and Comella, 2008 in Tompkins, 2014, p. 774). This insistence on the diversity of desire and relationship (and consequently power) structures, as well as shared sexual consent between partners, makes trans-inclusive sex positivity a good strategy to challenge dominant and dominating hegemonic masculine (sexual) practices. There were a significant amount of profiles that can be classified as going beyond conventional sexual practices, aside from the reconfigured ‘heterosexual’ sexual ones I have discussed in the previous section. These profiles, such as the ones below, involve invitations to engage in BDSM (bondage, discipline and sado-masochism) relationships, which can also involve activities like role-playing and cross-dressing (*italics for emphasis mine*):

Dom seeking feminine sub to serve. I am a *Master* seeking to find a TS *sub* to serve my needs on a regular basis, preferably a pre-op that is feminine.

Kik or snap chat me. ExMarine here 5'10 175 35 7-8 inches long with a fat pink mushroom head on the west/nw. Kik or snap chat me [username withheld] or email me [address withheld]. *Peter Whacker is waiting for you.*

I want her to be happy. In public, I am a gentleman and will treat you like the beautiful lady you are.. in private, I'm fully functional and versatile but would happily *submit to an active dominant top lady*—to be her bottom, pleasing her however, whenever and as often as she desires... my wish is for my partner to be happy, satisfied and content all the time.

What can explain this relative openness on the part of the trans-attracted men above to express their kink and BDSM desires matter-of-factly in their profiles? I link this to the fact that the emergence of trans attraction as a recent phenomenon has been heavily influenced by the pornography industry. This of course does not mean that trans attraction is completely an oppressive practice since it is linked to pornography. On the contrary, Escoffier (2011) argues that pornographic films are “a ‘passport’ into a fantasy world. It creates a safe space for where sexual fantasies and gender roles can be enacted without the attendant anxieties, shame, and various physical limitations impeding sexual arousal and orgasmic resolution” (p. 279). BDSM

viewed from this perspective can be seen as providing release from the masculine gender role stress that accompanies men's strict adherence to hegemonic masculinity.

Chapter 6: “You must be feminine, sweet and beautiful”: Reproducing Hegemonic Masculinity in Transsexual Dating Websites

Appropriating the idea of hegemonic masculinity as “a specific contextual pattern of practice that ideologically legitimates the subordination of women and femininity to men and masculinity” (Messerschmidt, 2011, p. 5) and using it as the guiding concept within which to situate trans attraction allows for a more nuanced analysis of how trans-attracted men see themselves, women (both trans and cis) and other men. The previous chapter demonstrated how trans-attracted men can be seen to contest hegemonic masculinity by helping to expand the acceptable definitions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' (i.e. 'trans women are women', 'some women have penises') and unsettle the rigidity of sexual roles. However, the results that have been gathered from examining trans-attracted men's dating profiles reveal that trans attraction as it is currently practiced is not completely exempt or redeemed from practices that also implicate hegemonic masculinity in action. This chapter will tackle how hegemonic masculinity can be repackaged in transsexual dating websites in the form of misogyny/anti-feminism, homophobia, the fetishization of trans women and other associated meanings.

6.1 The Passability Requirement: Femininity in Overdrive

Many profiles expressed a preference for the trans woman to be ‘passable’—meaning that she should not look markedly trans and appear feminine and blend in seamlessly with other cis women. This may necessitate a smaller build, long hair, a feminine face, voice and mannerisms, among others. I interpret the passability standard as not merely an expression of dating preference, but as an insidious way for hegemonic masculinity to continue its domination of women and femininities via a rigid set of beauty requirements. The overwhelming demand for femininity is salient in most of the men's profiles (*italics for emphasis mine*):

San Diego gentleman here. Hi I am looking for a true, real and deep connection. I am a normal, respectful, mature gentleman looking for a non-op MTF who is *slimmer*, friendly, *feminine* or has a bit of an edge.

Seeking pre-op TG/TS for relationship. Seeking a young, *femenine* [sic], attractive, pre-op TG/TS for relationship. Must be non-smoker, able to speak English well and passable.

Gentleman looking for a companion. I am a very nice, mature, kind hearted gentleman eager to meet someone who's alluring, *feminine*, passionate and sweet.

One can read the insistence on femininity for trans women as the manifestation of hegemonic masculinity's investment in maintaining the rigid and hierarchical divide between men (who are dominant and masculine) and women (who are submissive and feminine). While it is true that the demand for femininity, which in women is often equated with beauty, applies equally to both cis and trans women (Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) offers an in-depth analysis of this), it presents a special compounded dilemma for trans women since it constrains them to satisfy the requirement on two levels: (1) the need to look like a (cis) woman (passability) and, on top of that (2) the need to look like a beautiful woman. The statements below highlight the combination of these meticulous standards (*italics for emphasis mine*):

Are you for real? I prefer. .to see a picture of the real you.. *without make up* as I want to see your *real beauty* . .to see who I will wake up with each day! I want to be with a feminine girl.. with *real breasts rather than false.. less surgery.. a smaller waist than hips.. feminine curves!* I have a thing about feet, *don't like big feet!*

Where are you my princess. I am looking for a *naturally feminine* (MtF) transgender girly girl *low maintenance type with long hair* (Non-OP) *living as female 24/7 permanently* and proud of the person they are!

Wildman. She must be *passable* so others do not know what she has unless it is asked of her.

Looking a long term lover and friend. Am seeking a long term playmate who is pre op and *convincing*.

Looking for love. Straight, bi, or transgender M2F pre op/ M2F post op, 24/7 as a woman, and *on HRT* [hormone replacement therapy] I love it all.

Demands on women's waistlines, skin, hair and even feet size seem unconscionable and would likely provoke rebuke if read by both men and women in typical cisgender-heterosexual dating sites. However in transsexual dating websites they are currently relatively commonplace. What can explain this disjunct? It could be that because cis (and straight) women's sexual/gender identity as women is hardly in question (despite of how problematic the category 'woman' can be), more cis women can afford to exert power and resist the imposition of physical standards by men, since they do not run the risk of losing their womanhood. Self-identified women who were assigned men at birth and cherish their earned 'woman' identity are in a more precarious position when doing gender, since as part of their life projects, as well as to be understood by the public, they are pressed to express their gender “in a manner that is comprehensible and understandable and that results in social authentication” (Davis 2009, p. 143). Hegemonic masculinity, since it requires femininities and subordinated masculinities to be complicit to it, allows for the control of women's bodies and the present proliferation of these beauty and femininity criteria.

The usage of the words ‘passable’ and ‘convincing’, aside from being misogynist, is also indicative of a narrowed-down sort of transphobia--in this case the aversion to those trans women who are not (traditionally) feminine. ‘Looking for love’ above does not really “love it all” (i.e. all types of women)—he only loves women who 'perform' womanhood well (even those who are on estrogen therapy). Womanhood in this situation is severed from identity (self-identification to be precise) and instead is gauged through physical presentation and expression of gendered cues. Trans women, under threat of ‘failure’, rejection and ridicule, are supposed to act out stereotypically feminine looks and behavior and ‘convince’ other people that they are indeed women, instead of others affirming trans women's womanhood simply by virtue of trans women saying they are women.

‘Wildman’'s statement above that valorizes passing so that “others do not know what she has unless it is asked of her” also hints at a certain shame of “being found out” in public to be

romantically and sexually attracted to trans women. If we accept that the stigmatization of associating with trans and gender non-conforming people is a practice linked to hegemonic masculinity (since trans people in many ways have the potential to make hegemonic masculinity fail), then we can consider this tendency to 'privatize' trans attraction (i.e. "Yes I can desire you, but nobody has to know.") as a repackaging of hegemonic masculinity as well.

The exhortation to "pass as a woman" in order to be desired presents a taxing double bind to trans women. On one hand, it is imperative that trans women look and act feminine. For many trans women, 'looking like a woman' can be accomplished through clothing, hair and makeup, hormone replacement therapy (HRT), and facial and bodily surgeries, while 'acting like a woman' implies fragility, passivity and submission to male authority. On the other hand, the statements above reveal that looking and acting too much like a woman puts trans women at risk of being 'outed' as trans and being rejected as well. Conditions like "without make up", "real breasts rather than false", and "naturally feminine and low maintenance" betray a primacy placed on "natural femininity"—or more precisely—"natural-looking femininity". But it is extremely difficult to achieve this in the case of most trans women, who were born with bodies and features normatively associated with men and masculinity, and who are also raised (even coerced) to embody and internalize masculinity growing up.

This discourse on effortless, natural femininity essentializes 'femininity' as a concept and presupposes that Femininity (with a capital F) is an attribute that all women (cis and trans) share, or should share. While trans attraction broadens in a situated way the conception of who can be a woman, it can also contribute to the reification of what is 'feminine' and consequently forecloses the possibilities of what a woman--or at least what a desirable woman--should be like (i.e. normatively feminine). This eschewing of (perceived) artificiality in trans women is conducive to hegemonic masculinity's reproduction since it further solidifies the idea of an inherent binary difference between men/masculinity and women/femininity, and also legitimates the corresponding hierarchy and the dominance of men associated with it.

6.2 Reaffirming Sexism through Rejecting Feminism

After discussing how trans-attracted men contest hegemonic masculinity in the last section, it would seem logical to connect the practices associated with trans attraction to the feminist project of securing gender and sexual equality between the genders. However, some of the ideas expressed in the dating profiles denote a preference for the glorification of patriarchal stereotypes between men and women in heterosexual relationships, and a non-acceptance of feminist ideals. It would appear then that challenging hegemonic masculinity does not automatically mean turning entirely feminist, validating Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) assertion that it is “not easy to be confident about the implications of transgender practice for hegemony” (p. 851).

Gentleman in search of love. *Traditional man looking for a wife who knows how to act as a woman in a relationship, and will be a submissive and respectful wife. I am looking for a woman who will respect and honour and look after her partner, and in return I will care and provide for her and be a loyal, loving and faithful husband. If you have feminist beliefs, please don't contact me. I don't think feminism is a good thing and I want a submissive wife, not a feminist, so please only contact me if you want to be completely submissive and feminine in your relationship with your husband.*

Looking for MTF preop. I am looking for a girl who is genuine and real. She is confident and respectful, but not full of herself. She is feminine and attractive. *If her expectation of a man is traditional, so are her expectations of herself (feminism has not killed chivalry...yet...or has it?).*

Gentleman for a sweet T-Girl. You are my partner in life, love in heart, *wife in society, whore in bed.* I'm monogamous, top, straight. escorts no chance!

Wildman. I am a very dominant man and looking for a woman or ladyboy that is more submissive, one who will compliment me. I want her *to be able to wear what I want her to wear... when I ask her to...no matter what and where, she must enjoy showing me her body and if I ask her to wear something sexy when I am around others, then she will do so.* I want her to be willing to explore in and out

of the bedroom...whenever I decide... I am not asking for a slave, just someone to share my lifestyle.

The prominence of words like ‘traditional’, ‘chivalry’, ‘dominant’ (man) and ‘submissive’ (woman) in the statements above incontrovertibly exposes these men's investment in hegemonic masculinity and it's continued subjugation of women and femininities. “Respecting and honouring” your male partner, if we are to analyze ‘Gentleman in search of love’'s statements above, can translate to absolute servility, whole-heartedly obeying your partner's wishes and letting him make the major decisions in the partnership—“acting as a woman”, in short. ‘Wildman’'s dominance extends even further, unapologetically requesting for complete control of his partner's body through what she wears and when should take it off. He might deny that his idea of treating his partner is different from “asking for a slave”, but that is precisely what happens when women are deprived of the conscious choice of acting as agents and are under the complete control of their male partner (the ‘master’).

What enabled these trans-attracted men to imagine these kinds of sexist ideals? I contend that hegemonic masculinity allows for the continued reiteration of these practices, even if in this context it is situated within trans partnerships. “Masculine” character traits (Messerschmidt 2011, p. 6-8) such as assertiveness and aggression, negative attitudes towards women, and violence being configured as ‘manly’ continue to figure prominently in hegemonic masculine discourse, according positive value to pronouncements such as “treating her as my whore in bed”. It will then be understandable how feminism is regarded as the enemy, with its insistence on sexual freedom and the destruction of gendered stereotypes, the very things that hegemonic masculinity needs for its sustenance.

6.3 Fetishization and the Objectified ‘She-Male’

The usage of ‘shemale’, ‘tranny’ and other similar terms to describe trans women or transfeminine people has proliferated in numerous transsexual dating sites. Some of the men in both websites I examined routinely refer to the ‘she-male of their dreams’, while some of the TS

women. The term ‘she-male’ remains problematic because it has its roots in exploitative pornography and it is considered very derogatory in English-speaking transgender communities. It presently invokes several insulting tropes when uttered: transwomen as ‘deceivers’/‘fake’ women, transwomen as aggressive sexual predators, transwomen as sad, tragic men, among others. My own lived experience of transphobia and being aware of these images used in media, popular culture and everyday life as a provocation to misgender, harass, and even murder transwomen worldwide makes it painful and counter-intuitive for me to accede to the continued usage of these terms to describe people like me, and much worse to actually self-identify using them. Off the top of my head, I cannot, for instance, imagine how shemale can be used in future ordinary contexts (e.g. ‘That shemale is hot.’, ‘I want you to meet a shemale friend of mine.’) as anything but denigrating of a transwoman’s womanhood.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) argue that “we also must factor in the institutionalization of gender inequalities, the role of cultural constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class, and region” in order to analyze the relations between masculinities (p. 839). This interplay, I believe, also influences that relationship between masculinities and femininities. I argue that exoticizing women by focusing incessantly on their transsexual status, racializing them, or containing them exclusively in other fetishized categories is a way of subordinating them and is a practice that can be associated with hegemonic masculinity.

One of the salient features that differentiate transsexual dating sites from typical cis/hetero dating sites is that men on TS dating sites are afforded more freedom in explicitly expressing their sexual desires without the risk of being shamed or judged as a ‘pervert’ by the women. A reason for this sexual confidence can be attributed to men thinking that transwomen, since they were raised as men, can relate more closely to the centrality of sex in someone’s life. While I believe that sexual freedom is one way for women and subordinated masculinities to overcome hegemonic masculinity, the explicit sexualization and focus that some trans-attracted men give to the trans woman’s genitalia or what she can do during sex can cross too easily to the

realm of fetishization and sexual objectification of transwomen, such as what can be seen in the following profiles (italics for emphasis mine):

Looking for sweet Tgirl to love. I joined this site looking for specifically a pretty, cute, feminine, sweet, fully functional, *heavy cummer* is a must, *fully developed*, caring transgender babe to chat and get to know and ultimately meet and date. Favorite Things: Cuddling, Clubbing, Photography, Watching Movies, Parties, Going Downtown, Sex, *Swallow cum*, snuggling, relaxing, reading, hangout with friends, love, walking, coffee, fetishes, coming, *heavy cumshots*,

Mr curious. 6'4 tattoos bi curious few extra pounds ATM but losing it I'm fairly muscular I'm looking for a *mtf pre op with boobs* if possible I want to try this *its my first time with anyone Other than a woman who is going to Pop my cherry ???*

Willing to Do anything. honest loyal lonely I want a intense relationship I want to be tied up and power down on for long period at a time *make me gag make me beg blind folds plastic bags hard-core fantasy's I am not the do anyone type but I am the do anything for the right one type.*

6.4 "100% Straight" and Homophobic Tendencies

There were plenty of dating profiles that can be summarized as something like 'I am not gay. I am not attracted to men, just to ladies with something extra between their legs.' The exciting possibility of a woman with a penis, a particular gendered embodiment, can be seen as the catalyst for the creation of trans-oriented desire. I read this attraction as a 'situated' kind of sexual non-conformity, as something not completely queering or shattering the heteronormative system, but nonetheless expanding the domain of what it means to be woman-attracted, even if that woman may have a different genital configuration. Trans-attracted men can be seen to perform gender transgression while at the same time their valorizing hyperfeminine gender presentation.

In spite of their demonstrated sexual non-conformity, I believe that this seeming insistence of trans-attracted men on affirming their straight identity is worth problematizing. What makes them continually want to assert their straightness? I argue that this is, in part, a form of internalized homophobia, a hegemonic masculine practice of dissociating oneself from anything that may be thought of as 'gay'. This homophobia is clearly exhibited in some of the profiles that were examined (*italics for emphasis mine*):

Longing for someone special. I would like someone over 31 with some experience of life.. *Someone who lives full time as a woman and not just a gay boy.*

Looking for a partner. I want only 100% real pure BOTTOM ladyboy. *If you fuck men, and you let them suck your cock then please keep away from me.*

not sure about this?? im not into men at all. some of you are more beautiful than any woman i met so i just gotta give it a try , so feel free to contact me any time because im very interested. so please be patient with me, im willing to meet you on your terms. just give me the opportunity to meet and know you better. hopefully it can be more than a one nite stand. *im not interested in a man with a wig and dress please nothing against you, but im not into men, only passable please...*

In this homophobic discourse, being with a woman, even if she may have a penis, absolves the man from being thought of as gay. The stringency of the men in delineating the line between 'trans woman' and 'gay man' and ensuring that the trans woman looks and acts 'as a woman' via the passability requirement can be sensed in the statements above. In the case of 'Looking for a partner', the active / penetrating sexual role is also valorized and associated with the dominant, masculine role.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

I have demonstrated through my exploration of the online dating practices of trans-attracted men how the Connellian concept of hegemonic masculinity can be ‘loosened up’ from its tendency to be interpreted as consisting of rigid, reified, binary (i.e. hegemonic versus non-hegemonic) typologies. While recognizing that a particular (cis-hetero) hegemonic masculine discourse remains privileged in online dating, I have established that the dating practices of trans-attracted men cannot be simply fit inside a single box and be labeled ‘hegemonic’ or ‘subversive’. It is difficult to predict what the full implications of trans attraction will be to hegemonic masculinity since these men have been shown to perform masculine practices that were neither ‘thoroughly reproducing’ nor ‘thoroughly contesting’ hegemonic masculinity. Rather, there was a multiplicity of overlapping and sometimes contradicting practices and discourses that these men find themselves navigating, with some of them contributing to hegemonic masculinity’s propagation and some of them to its contestation. In the same vein, these dating profiles also indicate how conflation between the dominative and aspirational forms of hegemonic masculinity are possible. This portrayal of trans-attracted men as being involved in a ‘discourse of hegemonic masculinity’ leads to a more nuanced imagining of trans attraction and prevents hegemonic masculinity from being imagined solely as a rigid, monolithic concept consisting solely of negative masculine character traits.

This project has explored the complex ways in which trans-attracted men engage with hegemonic masculinity in transsexual dating websites. The popularity of the ‘average nice guy’ discourse in many of the profiles gestures towards a kind of masculinity that is not preoccupied with masculine ambition and consequently does not suffer as much masculine stress from the pressure to be independent and successful. The trans-attracted men who employed this discourse also combined it with strategies depicting emotional expressiveness, availability and kindness. Trans attracted men also expand in a situated way the intelligibility of the category ‘woman’ by including trans women, who may have been assigned male at birth but deserve to be affirmed in their self-identified (female) gender. Accepting trans women as women also leads to trans-attracted men becoming more open-minded and flexible in their sexual roles and practices, and recognizing that taking whatever role in sex (active, passive, versatile) with a woman with

whatever genital status (penis or vagina, pre-op, post-op or non-op) does not pose a threat to their masculine identity. This view may encourage further sexual exploration (i.e. role playing, kink, BDSM) and could lead to a more honest, uninhibited pursuit of sexual pleasure between the trans-attracted man and his partner.

On the other hand, many of the dating profiles examined also expressed a preference for (hyper) femininity, which can be read as an example of how trans-attracted men can be complicit to hegemonic masculine practices. This insistence on femininity and ‘passability’ (as a cis woman) creates the demanding standard ‘there is only one way to be a woman if you’re a trans woman’ and may further marginalize those trans women who cannot / do not want to conform to it. This requirement for (traditional performances of) femininity on the part of trans women also came with a marked disavowal for feminism and the continued propagation of normative gender roles. Some fetishizing practices (i.e. reducing trans women to their genital status) have also been observed. While the practice of being hetero-flexible is indeed subversive, the continued insistence on heterosexuality as an identity does not necessarily equate to an acceptance of other sexual orientations, most notably (male) homosexuality, as evidenced by some homophobic remarks directed towards male-identified cross-dressers and possibly masculine-looking transwomen.

There are several limitations to this research, given the time and space constraints provided. First, the sampling may not be representative enough of the entire population of trans-attracted men who engage in online dating. The random four hundred profiles examined (based on the date of their last login) may not be representative of the sixty thousand combined profiles in the two dating websites. The forty profiles subjected to the more detailed analysis were chosen because they contained the most substantive information based on the guide questions I have mentioned in the introductory chapter. The discursive patterns I have identified could have been different had many of the men written more information on their dating profiles. The substantiveness of the dating profiles also took primacy over the men’s personal particulars such as age and country of origin.

I was also not able to consider more profoundly a ‘regional’ dimension of gender dynamics operating in relation to the meanings of categories like ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’, which are culturally specific. ‘Transsexual’ and ‘transgender’ were labels coined and popularized in a primarily Western (US/European) settings. In non-Western contexts, the salience and preference in adopting ‘third gender’/‘third sex’ (i.e. transfeminine yet not ‘woman’) identities such as the *kathoe*y (from Thailand) or *bakla* (from the Philippines) could also add another dimension for men who are attracted to these persons as they negotiate their own sexual identities. It is recommended that a more thorough reflection on the relevance of cultural and political geography when theorizing ‘transgender’—and consequently trans attraction—be carried out in contextualizing future projects.

This particular (online) dimension of trans attraction could also affect the nature of these discourses. Specifically, I believe one cannot really get to thoroughly know a trans-attracted man by solely examining his dating profile. There may be information in the profiles that are missing, inaccurate or intentionally misleading to attract more potential partners. This discontinuity between profiles and actual, off-line behavior may be remedied by future research on actual (in-person) dating practices of trans-attracted men.

An exciting direction of study involves investigating how women can contribute to hegemonic masculinity’s cultivation or contestation. Unfortunately, not a lot of consideration has been given to this area in this project. A further inquiry on how trans women are being resistant or complicit to hegemonic masculine practices sounds like a worthwhile transgender studies project that I would be personally interested in doing. Finally, this study has only focused on (cisgender) men who are attracted to trans women. There are many configurations of trans attraction (e.g. trans-attracted women, men who are attracted to trans men, trans people who desire other trans people) that can only invite more interesting possibilities for future research given the present scarcity of material on the area.

Bibliography

Bartholomaeus, Clare. "Colluding with or Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity? Examining Primary School Boys' Plural Gender Practices." *Australian Feminist Studies* 28.77 (2013): 279-293.

Blanchard, Ray and Peter Collins. "Men with Sexual Interest in Transvestites, Transsexuals, and Semales." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 181 (1993): 570-575.

Choi, Maurice and Kwok-bun Chan. *Online Dating as A Strategic Game*. Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 2013.

Connell, Raewyn. *Gender and Power*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987.

Connell, Raewyn and James Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19.6 (2005): 829-59.

Currier, Danielle. "Strategic Ambiguity: Protecting Emphasized Femininity and Hegemonic Masculinity in the Hookup Culture." *Gender & Society* 27.5 (2013): 704-727.

Davis, Erin. "Situating "Fluidity" (Trans) Gender Identification and the Regulation of Gender Diversity." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15.1 (2009): 97-130.

Davy, Zowie and Eliza Steinbock. "'Sexing Up' Bodily Aesthetics: Notes towards Theorizing Trans Sexuality." *Sexualities: Past Reflections and Future Directions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 266-285.

Escoffier, Jeffrey. "Imagining the She/Male: Pornography and the Transsexualization of the Heterosexual Male." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 12.4 (2011): 268-281.

Fernández-Álvarez, Óscar. "Non-Hegemonic Masculinity against Gender Violence." *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 161 (2014): 48-55.

Howson, Richard. "Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity: Contradiction, Hegemony and Dislocation." *Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies* 4.1 (2009): 6-24.

Matt, Thomas. "I'm Attracted to Trans Women." *Salon*. Salon Media Group, 23 Oct. 2013. Accessed 20 Mar 2015.

McCormack, Mark. *The Declining Significance of Homophobia: How Teenage Boys are Redefining Masculinity and Heterosexuality*. Oxford: OUP, 2012.

Messerschmidt, James. "Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities* 15.1 (2012): 56-76.

Mock, Janet. "How Society Shames Men Dating Trans Women & How This Affects Our Lives." Janet Mock's personal website. 12 Sept. 2013. Accessed 20 Mar 2015.

Money, John and Margaret Lamacz. "Gynemimesis and Gynemimetophilia: Individual and Cross-cultural Manifestations of a Gender-coping Strategy Hitherto Unnamed." *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 25 (1984): 392-403.

Operario, Don, et al. "Men Who Have Sex with Transgender Women: Challenges to Category-based HIV Prevention." *AIDS and Behavior* 12 (2008): 18-26.

Reback, Cathy and Sherry Larkins. *Once in a Blue Moon: Toward a Better Understanding of Heterosexually Identified Men who Have Sex with Men and/or Preoperative Transgender Women*. Los Angeles: AIDS Coordinator, City of Los Angeles, 2006.

Serano, Julia. "The Beauty In Us." Julia Serano's personal website. 26 June 2009. Accessed 20 Mar 2015.

Smith, Rachel et al. "Deconstructing Hegemonic Masculinity: The Roles of Antifemininity, Subordination to Women, and Sexual Dominance in Men's Perpetration of Sexual Aggression." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 16.2 (2015): 160-169.

Tompkins, Avery Brooks. "'There's No Chasing Involved': Cis/Trans Relationships, 'Tranny Chasers,' and the Future of a Sex-Positive Trans Politics." *Journal of Homosexuality* 61.5 (2014): 766-780.

Wang, Yow-Juin. "Internet dating sites as heterotopias of gender performance: A case study of Taiwanese heterosexual male daters." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15.5 (2011): 485-500.

Weinberg, Martin and Colin Williams. "Men Sexually Interested in Transwomen (MSTW): Gendered Embodiment and the Construction of Sexual Desire." *The Journal of Sex Research* 47.4 (2010): 374-383.

Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: HarperCollins, 2002.