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Trans-masculinities in *Original Plumbing*:
Community, Queer Temporality, and Embodied Experiences

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Abstract

This thesis examines how trans-masculinities function in the context of *Original Plumbing*, an independent magazine published by and for trans* men. First, it proposes trans-masculinities as a theoretical framework that highlights the discursive and embodied aspects of performativity that subvert hegemonic masculinity. It then traces themes of trans-masculine embodiment, queer temporality, and kinship and community across the issues of *Original Plumbing* and suggests the implications of each theme within the trans-masculinities framework.

The cover of the first issue of *Original Plumbing* features a masculine-looking person wearing a pair of boxers with a picture of a large penis on them and an ace bandage wrapped around his chest. Even the name, *Original Plumbing*, places the body at the center of a provocative tension with the subject matter focusing on transgender experiences. *Original Plumbing* is an independent quarterly publication by and for trans*¹ men. This first image is emblematic of the provocative and productive juxtapositions that have continued through present issues of *Original Plumbing*. This analysis traces themes of embodiment, temporality, and community in *Original Plumbing* as a way to understand how trans-masculinities function in relation to hegemonic standards.

Background of *Original Plumbing*

Amos Mac, a photographer and writer, and Rocco Kayiatos, a rapper by the stage name Katastrophe, founded *Original Plumbing* in 2009 and collaboratively edit each issue. While the online presence including the website, Facebook page, Tumblr, and Twitter, include a range of transgender identities, both trans-masculine and trans-feminine, the print magazine is dedicated exclusively to trans* men. Each issue of the print magazine is themed, focusing on one aspect of trans-masculine experience. This thesis uses only the print magazine because the analysis is specific to the experiences of trans* men. The issues used for this study focus on work, fashion, school, environment, family, entertainment, athletics, heroes, and nightlife. Issues open with brief letters from Amos and Rocco, providing an introduction to the theme. The content of each issue is primarily comprised of interviews and narratives of and with trans* men. This provides

¹ See Terminology section for explanation of trans* notation

insight into how individuals make meaning of their own experiences in their own words. The

Original Plumbing website states:

We feel that there is no single way to sum up what it means to be a trans* man because we each have different beliefs, life experiences, and relationships to our own bodies. *Original Plumbing* gives the trans male community the opportunity to speak for and about themselves, taking the focus away from bodies and medical transition, and transferring it to a greater experience of their lives.¹

With this focus, *Original Plumbing* sets up a broader and more holistic understanding of trans* men's lived experiences.

Trans* Community Context

Terminology

This analysis utilizes the terminology of the trans* community. While some of these terms have been taken up in scholarly contexts, many are only recognized within the vernacular of the community. As such, my definitions pull from organizations and resources working directly with trans* people. Recognizing that these definitions are dynamic and that new terms are constantly emerging, I highlight these terms as relevant to understanding *Original Plumbing* as a text.

Transsexual – According to the National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE), transsexual is “an older term for people whose gender identity is different from their assigned sex at birth who seeks to transition from male to female or female to male.”² Some see transsexual as an overly clinical term.

Transgender– NCTE defines transgender as “an umbrella term for people whose gender identity, expression or behavior is different from those typically associated with their assigned sex at birth, including but not limited to transsexuals, cross-dressers, androgynous people,

genderqueers, and gender non-conforming people.”³ This term can be shortened to “trans” and is also used in the context of describing transgender or trans men, people who were assigned female at birth and identify as men, and transgender or trans women, people who were assigned male at birth and identify as women. In this way, the term “transgender” is both an umbrella term and a reference to a specific identity.

Genderqueer – “A term used by some individuals who identify as neither entirely male nor entirely female.”⁴ People who identify as genderqueer tend to use the term in very varied ways. Thus, it is difficult if not impossible to point to general markers of genderqueer identity.

However, genderqueer identities speak to a conception of gender beyond the traditional binary. One example of how this manifests is through the invention of sets of pronouns alternative to the traditional masculine and feminine sets. Two of the more common alternative pronoun practices are using they, them, and theirs to refer to a single person and using ze, hir, hers as a completely new set of pronouns.

*Trans** - This is a term developed in social media and online transgender communities and is gaining usage in many community organizing contexts. Because of the term’s ties to social media, the most accurate definitions come from these sources. Author of *The Social Justice Advocate’s Handbook: A Guide to Gender* explains on his blog the nuances between trans and trans* saying “Trans (without the asterisk) is best applied to trans men and trans women, while the asterisk makes special note in an effort to include all non-cisgender identities.”⁵ Trans* is a way of differentiating the umbrella term and the specific identity reference outlined in the definition of transgender. Particularly in the context of *Original Plumbing* which focuses on trans* men, this terminology and notation is used to denote the range of ways individuals can identify as trans* men.

Cisgender – This term refers to someone whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth align. In other words, an individual who does not fall within the trans* umbrella term as defined above is cisgender.

Community Context

Because trans* identity is not accounted for in most population surveys (such as the census), it is difficult to have an accurate idea of numbers regarding the size of the trans* community. Though trans* people have been part of the queer community and queer activism for quite some time including being some of the prior instigators of key moments in inciting the gay rights movement such as the Compton Cafeteria Riot and the Stonewall Riots, trans* participation is often overlooked. Over the past decade, however, local and national organizations and conferences have emerged providing resources to the trans* community and increasing trans* advocacy and visibility. The National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) was founded in 2003 with the goal of bringing trans* issues to the national political dialogue. In their 2011 report on the state of transgender discrimination entitled “Injustice at Every Turn,” NCTE reported dramatically higher rates of poverty, suicide, harassment, physical assault, and sexual violence in comparison to the general population.⁶ NCTE’s advocacy work seeks to reduce the disparities between trans* individuals and their cisgender counterparts.

National conferences give insight into the complexities and diversity within the trans* community. The two largest conferences are the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference and Gender Odyssey founded in 2002 and 2001 respectively. The Philadelphia Trans Health Conference focuses on re-envisioning health within the trans* community. This conference has a unique approach in that it “recognizes the interconnections among all aspects of our well-being; including health, safety, education, employment, housing, and social support.”⁷

Interconnectedness and intersectionality are key themes that emerge from the structure of this conference. Past conference schedules have included workshops and keynotes intersecting with race, religion, sexuality, size and many other facets of identity. Gender Odyssey has a larger scope, but is also grounded in ideas of intersectionality. Gender Odyssey highlights trans* diversity through organizing some of the workshops into tracks. Tracks in 2013 included people of color, partners, genderqueer, youth, and elders.⁸ These conferences provide insight into the trans* community because they are primarily targeting trans* identified people and people who are already strong allies. They highlight intersectional perspectives that are present in much of the trans* community.

Literature Review

Magazines

Walk up to almost any newsstand in this country and there will be a plethora of magazines littered with gendered messages. Some, such as *Gentleman's Quarterly* or *Seventeen*, have explicitly gendered content. For many more, the gendered aspects are less announced, but just as prevalent. It is no wonder that these magazines have become the subject of numerous scholarly gendered analyses. In addition to being analyzed as a site of constructing feminine identity,⁹ *Cosmo* has been analyzed for its portrayal of male and female sexualities¹⁰ as well as its representation of sexually transmitted infections.¹¹ Critical scholars have analyzed *Seventeen* for its construction of consumerist identities,¹² representations of race,¹³ and representations of masculinity.¹⁴ Men's magazines have been analyzed for their construction of male attractiveness,¹⁵ body image particularly as it relates to ethnicity,¹⁶ and male sexuality.¹⁷ These

magazines as a part of mainstream culture become a tangible part of the dominant discourse of gender.

In addition to these mainstream magazines, lesser-known and independent magazines also participate in these gendered constructions, often in alternative ways. Phillips offers *Voice Male* as a “male-positive, pro-feminist, and open minded” publication that is effectively engaging men’s voices in a conversation of gender violence.¹⁸ *Ms. Magazine* touts the tagline “more than a magazine—a movement!” Saucier and Caron build off studies of mainstream magazines, investigating representations of gay men and constructions of gay masculinity in gay magazines such as *OUT* and *The Advocate*.¹⁹ Magazines have the potential to create both dominant and subversive discourses surrounding gender. As such, they become a productive site of inquiry.

The gendered messages evident in magazines is productively complicated by the rise of transgender visibility. GLAAD, a leading lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) media organization produced a timeline of transgender visibility spanning from 1952-2012. Recent mainstream media highlights include Chaz Bono and Janet Mock publically coming out in 2009 and 2011, respectively, as well as inclusion of transgender contestants in *America’s Next Top Model* and the Miss Universe competition.²⁰

In addition to this increase in mainstream media representation, transgender communities continue to create and participate in independent media and community building. Online communities such as Genderfork.com founded in 2007 provide community support spaces that extend beyond geographic barriers.²¹ Independently produced and published zines offer a unique platform for transgender individuals. Quoted in an article published on alternative news website AlterNet in 2006, Red Durkin explains the importance of zines in transgender communities:

Zines are an almost perfect outlet for us. Being trans is personal. There's no instruction manuals. I think the failing of any broad sweeping analysis is that it could never encompass all of us. The only way for all of us to be heard is for each of us to have our own voice, and that's what the zine world offers.²²

The self-representation of transgender alternative media provides insight into transgender identity and community construction that mainstream media representations cannot provide. At the same time, analysis and criticism of gender representations in mainstream media provide a framework for understanding the mediated, gendered messages in transgender alternative media.

Masculinity in Magazines – Much of the current discourse surrounding masculinity in magazines highlights two themes: (hetero)sexuality and male bodies. While analyses of gay identity and masculinity in magazines exist, it is exclusively in the context of magazines targeting gay men. When limiting the scope to mainstream men's magazines, the analysis of sexuality is only that of heterosexuality. This limited scope is only explicitly recognized in some studies, yet for most all of them, it exists. In an analysis of two articles in a men's lifestyle magazine, *For Him Magazine (FHM)*, Conradie notes the construction of sexuality in such contexts is contingent on distancing men's sexuality from homosexuality as much as possible. Further, he sees depictions of sexuality removed from any larger relationship context, highlighting the sexual act as the relationship to masculinity.²³ Women's bodies are seen as allusions to male sexuality causing the object of desire to define sexuality rather than the man's body.²⁴ A key tenant of hyper-masculinity is an emotionally distant relationship to women and sexuality.²⁵ Interestingly, these representations are also present in magazines targeting women audiences. Contemporary representations of men in *Seventeen* emphasize “the callous and insensitive male.”²⁶ Magazines also serve as both explicit and implicit validation for “proper” sex defining this as prioritizing heterosexual penetration and orgasm.²⁷ Additionally, men's magazines depict an ideal male body image focusing on a muscular chest with broad chest and

narrow waste.²⁸ Pompper, Soto, and Piel see these magazines as contributing to the construction of an “ideal man.”²⁹ Taking these pieces together, the “ideal man” becomes defined by an adherence to the ideal body and a calloused sexual relationship to women’s bodies. In looking to the complications and subversions of this standard, it is imperative to understand this as the dominant discourse.

Gay Magazines – While mainstream men’s magazines define masculinity in contrast to gay men, magazines targeting gay men are surprisingly congruent with many aspects of mainstream masculinity and markedly different in many others. In analyzing images from magazines targeting gay men over four decades, Schwartz and Andsager note the privileging of lean, muscular male bodies.³⁰ This description is markedly similar to that of mainstream men’s magazines. In the late 1990’s the gay magazine *Hero* emerged with the intention of countering the predominant sexualization of the gay and lesbian community. Warner views *Hero* as the epitome of homonormativity, or forcing queer, specifically gay, identities and culture into a mold that fits more easily within heteronormative structures.³¹ This highlights the tension regarding sexuality. While the vast majority of mainstream men’s magazines utilize heterosexuality as a defining feature, gay magazines are split between those that have explicitly sexualized gay content and those that preserve homonormativity through a sterilized representation of gay identity. A particularly interesting case for comparison is that of *Details* magazine which switched from a gay-targeted magazine to a men’s lifestyle magazine targeting straight men. Draper finds that *Details* preserved many elements of “domesticated masculinity” from the original gay magazine in the transition to a predominately heterosexual audience. This had the result of highlighting and legitimizing many aspects of masculinity for straight men that other mainstream men’s magazines largely ignored.³²

Zines – Zines are the do-it-yourself version of a magazine typically associated with radical and other underground communities. They are independently produced and distributed often hand-drawn or written, photocopied, stapled, and left in coffee shops and other community spaces or distributed online. Piepmeier praises the importance of zines for their individuality, often quirkiness, and perhaps most significantly the subversion that zines provide as an alternative media.³³ Brouwer claims zines are a form of counterpublicity because they perform representational and political interventions such as in the case of HIV/AIDS community, which produced zines such as *Diseased Pariah News* and *Infected Faggot Perspectives*.³⁴ Despite a more polished and organized appearance, *Original Plumbing* is zine-like through its decidedly independent production and distribution.

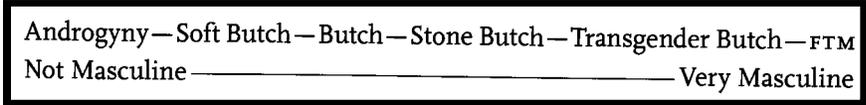
Trans-masculinities as a Theoretical Framework

I am proposing trans-masculinities as a theoretical framework most closely tied to Halberstam's conception of female masculinity. The critical distinction between female masculinity and trans-masculinities is that they emphasize different experiences. Female masculinity emphasizes those who are female-bodied and perform many aspects of masculinity in their lived experience. The key is that these people retain some element of a female identification, specifically rejecting male identification such as preferring to be referred to by feminine pronouns and often correcting those who use masculine pronouns in reference to them.³⁵ Butch identities epitomize female masculinity. Trans-masculinities, by contrast, highlight those who are female-bodied, perform many aspects of masculinity in their lived experience, and reject the female identification they were assigned at birth on some meaningful level. Recalling the earlier discussion of trans* notation, this does not necessarily imply a fully

male identification, but there is a significant rejection of female identification in favor of masculine identification. Ultimately, the lines are easily blurred between these two constructions, yet the difference in focus is significant in application.

The plural construction of trans-masculinities is intentional. Halberstam references a common understanding of the relationship between butch and transgender identities and masculinity. The idea is that there is a continuum from androgynous through various categories of butch ending with female-to-male transsexual that corresponds linearly from least masculine to most masculine (see Figure 1).³⁶ The plural construction of the term attempts to deconstruct this notion through an implied understanding that masculinity can take many forms and trans-masculinities is not tied solely to embodiment of hegemonic masculinity. For example, the experience of a trans* man who is particularly feminine, perhaps even identifies as femme, is still relevant to the concept of trans-masculinities.

Figure 1



Androgyny—Soft Butch—Butch—Stone Butch—Transgender Butch—FTM
Not Masculine—————Very Masculine

Trans-masculinities are most productively understood in relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Masserschmidt call on Gramsci’s definition of hegemony and say his “writing focuses on the dynamics of structural change involving the mobilization and demobilization of whole classes. Without a very clear focus on this issue of historical change, the idea of hegemony would be reduced to a simple model of cultural control.”³⁷ Hegemony is significant in trans-masculinities as the basis for comparison in showing what trans-masculinities are reproducing and subverting. For the purposes of these comparisons, I will employ a simplified understanding of hegemonic masculinity as the conflation of male sex, man gender identity, and heterosexuality. While this collapses many of the nuances of how hegemonic

masculinity functions, it is the reliance on a seamless mapping on of the three concepts that is critical for understanding the often complexities of the relationship between hegemonic masculinity and trans-masculinities. In contrast to this definition of hegemonic masculinity, Connell and Messerschmidt understand masculinity as “not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.”³⁸ This broader understanding of masculinity provides a context from which trans-masculinities emerge. The practices of trans* men that make up trans-masculinities are shaped by and in resistance to the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity. Connell and Messerschmidt’s definition of masculinity dovetails with Butler’s conception of performativity. Butler asserts that utterances, and other symbolic communication such as clothing choices, perform an action as they are communicated.³⁹ In other words, the “configurations of practice” Connell and Messerschmidt refer to are performative. The repetition of these performative instances creates the social norms and expectations that ultimately construct hegemony. In turn, the repetition of subversive, performative acts alter the social norms, creating what Foucault coined as a reverse discourse.⁴⁰ Trans-masculinities are thus the performative acts of trans* men that reproduce and subvert hegemonic masculinity.

Critiques of performativity claim that performativity overlooks the embodied lived experience by focusing exclusively on a created discourse. Halberstam notes prominent performativity critics “Jay Prosser (Prosser, 1998), Ki Namaste (Namaste, 200), Henry Rubin (Rubin, 2003) and even Stephen Whittle (Whittle, 2000) and others associate performativity and constructivism with playfulness and abstract theory while they want to claim serious and deep commitments to the gendered body.” Halberstam further asserts “whether we are talking about a

transsexuality that emerges from the mismatch of sex and gender or a transgenderism that announces itself as an infinite array of gendered bodies, we are not really using a Butlerian framework.”⁴¹ These critiques look to ground trans* identity in the body, diminishing the importance of discourse and performativity.

For an understanding of trans-masculinities, both perspectives are useful as they represent partial truths. I am still operationalizing trans-masculinities as the performative acts of trans* men that reproduce and subvert hegemonic masculinity. Embodied experience becomes significant in looking at how these acts relate to hegemony. While many trans* men may reproduce significant portions of hegemonic masculinity, I argue that trans-masculinities always have a level of subversion because of the bodies performing these practices. While Connell and Masserschmidt claim that masculinity is not tied to a specific kind of body,⁴² hegemonic masculinity is directly tied to a cisgender-male body through the conflation of male sex and man gender identity. There is inherent subversion in a trans* man’s body imitating hegemonic masculinity. The body is central in how trans* identity and experience is discussed. Thus, the trans* body is directly tied to discourse. The discourse that surrounds trans* bodies constitutes the embodied experience. It is therefore imperative that trans-masculinities hold both perspectives of embodied experience and performative reverse discourse equally.

Methods

McKerrow describes the process of rhetorical criticism as “uncovering the ‘dense web’ (Mosco, 1983, p. 239), not by means of a simple speaker-audience interaction, but also by means of a ‘pulling together’ of disparate scraps of discourse which, when constructed as an argument, serve to illuminate otherwise hidden or taken for granted social practices.”⁴³ As a text, *Original Plumbing* is unique in that it functions less as a singular, cohesive text and more as a

conglomeration of loosely connected narratives presenting the experiences of a multitude of trans* men in their own words. While Rocco and Amos could have made the editorial decision to mandate a consistent trans* vocabulary across these narratives, they did not. Instead, the diverse terms used to reference trans* experience (eg. trans*, transsexual, transgender, men of trans experience) are left unedited. This creates a less cohesive publication, but it makes the publication a more accurate representation of the diversity within the trans-masculine community *Original Plumbing* seeks to reflect. In particular, this highlights the discursive differences across race, class, geographic location, and generational subcultures. The approach of this study draws from Ivie's conception of a "productive critic who enriches the social imaginary for the purpose of enhancing human relations. Such a critic develops theory as a rhetoric of social relations by drawing on rhetoric as a source of invention."⁴⁴ In other words, a productive critic is one who connects their rhetorical analysis to everyday experiences both in terms of the origin and implications of the analysis. The structure of *Original Plumbing* represents the everyday experiences of many diverse trans* men in their own words. Thus, using *Original Plumbing* as a base grounds this analysis in these everyday realities. I do not seek to collapse the diversity of experience found in *Original Plumbing* into a monolithic, theoretical analysis. Rather, I seek to draw from these diverse and often contradictory experiences in order to reveal the complexities and tensions of trans-masculinities.

This study is based on the close reading of issues four through twelve of *Original Plumbing*. Due to the independent nature of the publication, it is particularly difficult to find archived issues of *Original Plumbing* other than through their website. It was not possible to obtain full copies of the first three issues of *Original Plumbing* because they were sold out, speaking to the relevance of the publication to many in the trans-masculine community. The

issues studied were published between the summer of 2010 and the fall of 2013. I did several readings of each issue, marking examples related to themes of embodiment, temporality, and kinship/community. My positionality in my understanding of *Original Plumbing* is notable in that as a trans* man, I read this text as both a critic and a member of its target audience.

The analysis that follows traces themes of embodiment, temporality, and kinship/community through the issues of *Original Plumbing* in order to make claims of how these themes function within the framework of trans-masculinities and in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Discussions of embodiment unpack the prevalence and implications of dominant trans* embodiment narratives and presents alternative narratives that some of the men featured in *Original Plumbing* take up in resistance to the dominant narrative. The section on temporality reveals a uniquely trans* experience of temporality, and emphasizes the role of transition in constructing that temporality. Finally, the section on kinship and community looks at the blurring of ideas of kinship into understandings some communities of trans* men as well as the material realities that constitute the kinship nature of such communities.

¹ “About,” *Original Plumbing*, Accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.originalplumbing.com/index.php/about>

² “Transgender Terminology,” National Center for Transgender Equality, Accessed October 8, 2013, transequality.org/Resources/NCTE_TransTerminology.pdf

³ “Transgender Terminology”

⁴ “Transgender Terminology”

⁵ “What does the asterisk in ‘trans*’ stand for?” Accessed October 8, 2013,

<http://itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2012/05/what-does-the-asterisk-in-trans-stand-for/>

⁶ “Injustice at Every Turn: A report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey”

National Center for Transgender Equality, September 2011.

⁷ “Philadelphia Trans-Health Conference,” Accessed October 8, 2013, www.trans-health.org

⁸ “Gender Odyssey,” Accessed October 8, 2013, www.genderodyssey.org

⁹ Marthinus Conradie, “Constructing Femininity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of *Cosmo*,” *Southern African Linguistics & Applied Language Studies* 29 (2011): 401-417.

¹⁰ Panteá Farvid and Virginia Braun, “‘Most of Us Guys are Raring to Go Anytime, Anyplace, Anywhere’: Male and Female Sexuality in *Cleo* and *Cosmo*,” *Sex Roles* 55 (2006): 295-310.

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- ¹¹ Juaane Clarke, "The Paradoxical Portrayal of the Risk of Sexually Transmitted Infections and Sexuality in US Magazines Glamour and Cosmopolitan 2000-2007," *Health, Risk & Society* 12 (2010): 560-574.
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- ¹⁴ Jaime Loke and Dustin Harp, "Evolving Themes of Masculinity in Seventeen Magazine: An Analysis of 1945-1955 and 1995-2005," *Journal of Magazine and New Media Research* 12 (2010): 1-21.
- ¹⁵ Cheryl Law and Magdala Peixoto Labre, "Cultural Standards of Attractiveness: A Thirty-Year Look at Changes in Male Images in Magazines," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 79 (2002): 697-711.
- ¹⁶ Donnaly Pompper, Jorge Soto, and Lauren Piel, "Male Body Image and Magazine Standards: Considering Dimensions of Age and Ethnicity," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 84 (2007): 525-545.
- ¹⁷ Feona Attwood, "Tits and Ass and Porn and Fighting Male Heterosexuality in Magazines for Men," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 8 (2005): 83-100.
- ¹⁸ Daniel Joshua Phillips, "Engaging Men and Boys in Conversations About Gender Violence: Voice Male Magazine Using Vernacular Rhetoric as Social Resistance," *Journal of Men's Studies* 20 (2012): 250-273.
- ¹⁹ Jason Saucier and Sandra Caron, "An Investigation of Content and Media Images in Gay Men's Magazines," *Journal of Homosexuality* (2008): 504-523.
- ²⁰ "Timeline: A Look Back at the History of Transgender Visibility," GLAAD, Accessed October 6, 2013, <http://www.glaad.org/blog/timeline-look-back-history-transgender-visibility>.
- ²¹ "Frequently Asked Questions About Genderfork," Accessed October 6, 2013, genderfork.com/faq/
- ²² "Zines Explore Transgender Culture Beyond Stereotypes," Published December 18, 2006, http://www.alternet.org/story/44986/zines_explore_transgender_culture_beyond_stereotypes
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- ³³ Alison Piepmeier, "Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community," *American Periodicals* 18 (2008): 213-238.
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- ³⁷ R. W. Connell and James Masserschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and Society* 19 (2005): 831.
- ³⁸ Connell and Masserschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 836
- ³⁹ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993): 17-23.
- ⁴⁰ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, 1976
- ⁴¹ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*
- ⁴² Connell and Masserschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity," 836
- ⁴³ Raymie E. McKerrow, "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis," *Communication Monographs* 56 (1989): 101.
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Dominant and Counter- Narratives of Trans-masculine Embodiment

Original Plumbing de-emphasizes medical transition to shift the focus from essentialized bodies towards a broader representation of trans*-masculine experiences. However, articulations of trans* embodiment are still present across the issues of *Original Plumbing*. These articulations are found woven into other aspects of trans* experiences. The format of *Original Plumbing*, featuring trans* men in their own words, provides insight into how trans* men conceptualize their own embodied experiences without being mediated by a cisgender interpreter.

Implications of a Metaphoric Perspective on Trans* Embodiment

Applying a metaphoric perspective to descriptions of trans* embodiment within *Original Plumbing* shows metaphors functioning not only to reveal an individual's experience of trans* embodiment, but as constituting the experience itself by evoking the dominant "wrong body" narrative. Franke asserts, "metaphor assumes a transcendental-hermeneutic function and reveals the world in the moment of its emergence as a linguistic creation or construction."⁴⁵ In other words, metaphor serves as a linguistic tool to constitute, rather than describe, an abstract idea. Thus, the metaphors of trans* embodiment reveal the emergence of a dominant trans* embodiment narrative. The concepts of "wrong body," "coming out," and "transition" are central to the dominant and normative trans* embodiment narrative. Simply, this narrative states that trans* people understand themselves to have been born in the wrong body. Through a moment of realization, trans* people come out, beginning a physical transition to correct their embodied state. This is a clearly over reduced narrative, yet it is useful to examine in terms of the

pervasiveness of the metaphors embedded in the narrative. Ivie describes the construction of a metaphor as “a term (or ‘vehicle’) from one domain of meaning acts upon a subject (or ‘tenor’) from another domain.”⁴⁶ “Wrong body,” “coming out,” and “transition,” can each be understood as a vehicle for an aspect of trans* embodiment. However, each of these terms is used with such frequency in trans* embodiment discourse that they are often overlooked in terms of their metaphoric significance. Ivie asserts, “the value of locating underlying metaphors is in revealing their limits or untapped potential as sources of invention, something that is far more difficult to accomplish when a generating term is allowed to operate without being explicitly acknowledged as such.”⁴⁷ As such, it is helpful to look at the vehicle clusters, or groups of similar metaphors, that surround each of these terms. “Wrong body” can be contextualized by the hiding cluster. Similar logic applies to “coming out” and the freedom cluster, and “transition” and the journey cluster. Applying a metaphoric perspective thus reveals the constitutive power of metaphor in the way the dominant narrative of trans* embodiment is taken up.

“Wrong Body”

The “wrong body” aspect of the dominant narrative is taken up in institutions, particularly those that serve as gatekeepers to access transition-related resources. Through the DSM-IV-TR, Gender Identity Disorder (GID) the “wrong body” narrative was part of the diagnostic criteria for Gender Identity Disorder: “the disturbance is manifested by symptoms such as preoccupation with getting rid of primary and secondary sex characteristics or belief that he or she was born the wrong sex.”⁴⁸ The DSM-V replaced Gender Identity Disorder with Gender Dysphoria, shifting the subject of the disorder from a transgender identity to the distress experienced by some with trans bodies. Despite the shift in focus, the diagnostic criteria remain

similar. Many doctors who administer transition-related services required a Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis and now require a Gender Dysphoria diagnosis. Mental healthcare providers are thus in a position of the gatekeeper, deciding who gets what diagnosis, and in turn, who has access to what resources and services. In a critique of the medical model of transgender embodiment, Dean Spade reflects on his own quest for transition-related services saying, “I learned quickly that to achieve that embodiment, I needed to perform a desire for gender normativity, to convince the doctors that I suffered from GID and wanted to ‘be’ a ‘man’ in a narrow sense of both words.”⁴⁹ By institutionalizing the “wrong body” narrative within the diagnostic criteria of the Gender Identity Disorder, that narrative serves as a gatekeeper to access physical transition resources. Within *Original Plumbing*, the idea of the “wrong body” is primarily seen indirectly, through metaphors that reference the core attributes of that temporal aspect of the narrative.

Many of the men featured in *Original Plumbing* associate notions of hiding with pre-transition embodiment. Pre-transition can refer to men before starting testosterone, before having transition-related surgery, or a time of living as a woman prior to transgender identification. The vehicles within the hiding cluster used to characterize pre-transition embodiment include: “stifling,” “didn’t want to be noticed,” “invisible,” “trapped,” “hold back,” “ghost ship floating on a dark sea.” Taken together, these vehicles form the hiding vehicle cluster. Each vehicle, individually, emphasizes a lack of personal agency. Embodiment is characterized as something that is done to the individual in ways that reduce authentic representation of the gendered self. In particular, vehicles such as “stifling and “trapped” construct pre-transition embodiment as wrong. These vehicles help to expose the metaphorical implications of “wrong body.”

“Coming Out” Embodiment Narrative

Post-transition embodiment is characterized through the freedom vehicle cluster. Post-transition refers most broadly to living as a man, and outwardly performing that identity to the world. More specifically, post-transition is often framed as after starting testosterone and/or having transition related surgery. The freedom vehicle cluster includes the vehicles “find myself,” “choosing to be the captain of my ship,” “blossomed,” and “liberating.” These vehicles associate post-transition embodiment with gained agency. The freedom cluster frames trans* embodiment in a distinctly opposite way from the hiding cluster. Given each cluster’s link to a temporal distinction in trans* embodiment that is marked by transition, the oppositional nature of the vehicle clusters creates a dichotomy in the experience of trans* embodiment that is hinged on physical transition. This metaphorically enforced dichotomy is seen most obviously as individual vehicles from each cluster are juxtaposed within a single narrative. Cooper Lee Bombardier does just that saying, “It was only after choosing to transition that I wanted anything from this life, that I was able to choose anything, to commit, to achieve. I was adrift before that, a ghost ship floating on a dark sea. In choosing to live, I was choosing to be the captain of my ship, to inhabit it.”⁵⁰ Through juxtaposing the two opposing metaphors, Cooper strengthens the dissonance of the two vehicle clusters.

“Coming out” is central language in understanding queer identity and experience both in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity. In the case of trans* identity, coming out is linked to embodiment in that it is often used to mark a qualitative change in a trans* person’s experience of embodiment. Despite pre- and post- transition being ambiguous terms that are used in varied ways, the distinction is often reduced to a singular moment of coming out.

Coming out as a metaphor requires leaving a place of hiding and restriction. Less restriction is linked to a sense of freedom. Benji's reflection on coming out mirrors this rationale. He says, "the main reason why I came out is because I believe in living my life to the fullest and not being out felt like I wasn't staying true to that."⁵¹ Coming out is thus understood as part of the freedom cluster. When the freedom cluster is framed in contrast to the hiding cluster, coming out becomes the moment of gaining agency. Structural, systemic, and pervasive transphobia complicates the reality in terms of the lived experience of this metaphoric connection. However, this disconnect between the reality of lived experience and the metaphoric implications speaks to the staying power of the metaphor. Despite the questionable, at best, connection between metaphor and reality in this case, coming out continues to be taken up as integral to understanding trans* identity and embodiment. Returning to Benji's reflection, he justifies the act of coming out through a movement to a greater sense of freedom. Benji frames his comments as a rationale, not as a reflection of the effects of coming out. This points to the power of coming out as a metaphor because there is an association with a movement towards freedom prior to seeing the reality of the implications. Thus, the coming out metaphor, like the "wrong body" narrative functions to constitute the experience of trans* embodiment rather than describe it.

"Transition"

Despite the intensity of the coming out metaphor in reducing distinctions in trans* embodiment to a single moment, a third vehicle cluster, journey, links clusters of hiding and freedom in a more temporally prolonged way. The journey cluster includes the vehicles "the road ahead," "quest," "different paths," "discovered," "exploring," and "navigate." The journey

cluster connects the hiding and freedom clusters in a way that disrupts the finality of the distinction between pre- and post- transition. The journey cluster does not deny intense bipolarity of the hiding and freedom clusters as a reflection of the experience of trans* embodiment. However, the journey cluster characterizes trans* embodiment through a turn towards the future. Transition is linked to the journey cluster in that it is dynamic and implies forward motion. The pervasiveness of transition within trans* embodiment discourse can be seen in that the hiding and freedom clusters are understood in terms of pre- and post- transition embodiment. It is impossible to engage with the discourse surrounding trans* experience without engaging with the notion of transition, such that trans*-ness is defined by transition.

Viewing transition as a vehicle within the journey cluster shows how trans*-ness becomes defined as continuously dynamic, moving from a place of hiding to a place of freedom. Rosi Braidotti writes of an embodied and embedded “location” as “not a self-appointed and self-designed subject-position. It is a collectively shared and constructed, jointly occupied spatio-temporal territory.”⁵² Braidotti’s conception of embodied location reveals the embodied subject position of transition as collectively constructed. This logic can be extended to the concepts of “wrong body” and “coming out” when they are framed as embodied subject positions. Further, this implicates these embodied locations within the dominant trans* embodiment narrative in that it reveals the dominant narrative as shaping the collectively constructed experience.

Counter-narratives

While many of the embodiment metaphors in *Original Plumbing* reference the “wrong body” narrative, there are significant counter-narratives put forth by several of the men featured.

Broadly categorized, these counter-narratives can be grouped as narratives of stealth embodiment and narratives of trans* embodiment as “meant to be”.

Stealth refers to individuals who choose not to disclose their trans* history and live passing as cisgender. Damien, who is stealth in many situations, describes his embodied experience saying, “mostly I’m comfortable in my own skin and that is all I need. Physically, I’m transgender. But mentally and emotionally I’m not. Mentally, I’m just a dude. Mostly, I’m just Damien.”⁵³ The “wrong body” narrative frames embodiment as a connection between physical and mental experience based on Dysphoria. By contrast, Damien frames his experience of embodiment as a separation between the physical and the mental. Dylan, who is stealth at his workplace, emphasizes the contradictions in his stealth embodied experience; “Just the other day my male co-workers said how great it was that there was another set of balls in our department (I laughed and cringed at the same time).”⁵⁴ In contrast to the “wrong body” narrative, which compartmentalizes contradictory experiences, Dylan’s narrative frames embodiment as simultaneous contradictory experiences. Though Damien and Dylan frame their experiences of trans* embodiment in very different terms, their narratives, taken separately and together, complicate the timeline associated with trans* embodiment put forth by the “wrong body” narrative.

Both the “wrong body” narrative and stealth narratives imply an inherent negativity in the experience of trans* embodiment. These narratives rely on transitioning across the gender binary as a means of relieving the dysphoria associated with pre-transition embodiment. Within *Original Plumbing*, there are also narratives that reject this negativity by framing trans* embodiment as something that was meant to be. To quote Harvey Katz at length:

I often think it was my hand in life to end up a trans person. I think if I was born a male assigned person, I would have ended up a trans-woman. I’m okay with it. I can’t

imagine not being a trans person. I feel lucky to have this journey. Being socialized female and spending my life ‘othered’ by this world gives me a unique perspective. In the past, this has felt like shit. In the present, it feels pretty good. In the future, I hope somebody loves me enough to watch me age ungracefully.⁵⁵

Harvey frames trans* embodiment as providing perspective that he could not have otherwise had. In this way, Harvey suggests that trans* embodiment as an experience of the right body which creates a unique opportunity. This perspective does not necessarily entail that an individual will not physically transition, but it deemphasizes physical transition as the crux of trans* embodied experience. Wyatt Riot evokes a similar narrative in what he would say to his ten year old self; “I know you’re obsessed with the ‘ugly duckling that becomes a swan’ story. You don’t exactly become the swan like you thought, but you will definitely come into your own kind of awkward, fat, faggy, femme, swan self.”⁵⁶ Wyatt counters the implications of the larger cultural narrative of the ugly duckling by changing the expectations of the swan. In doing this, Wyatt emphasizes personal comfort, as opposed to discomfort or dysphoria, as central to his experience of trans* embodiment.

Finally, because the “wrong body” narrative emphasizes physical transition, counter-narratives surface for individuals who cannot or do not wish to physically transition. Sanyu chose to draw on his binders, undergarments many trans* men use to flatten their breasts, as a way to come to terms with the reality that he likely would not be able to have surgery to remove his breasts. He reflects, “I told myself that I had to find something, something beyond the mundaneness of my binder that could make it almost as personal as flesh. I created a series of personalized binders that I’ve entitled ‘second skin.’”⁵⁷ In describing his binder as a metaphorical second skin, Sanyu naturalizes the present reality of his trans* embodied experience by extending the definitional limits of the body.

Each of these counter-narratives disrupts the dominance of the “wrong body” narrative. There are very real implications of the “wrong body” narrative in constituting much of the experience of trans* embodiment, apparent through the many references in *Original Plumbing* that can be traced to that narrative. However, the presence of counter-narratives is crucial within this context. They reveal a diversity of trans*-masculine experience that can only be conveyed by trans* men in their own words.

Implications

Trans-masculine embodiment highlights the disruption of the sex and gender conflation assumed in hegemonic masculinity. Superficially, this assumption is disrupted through the idea that a man can have what is presumed to be a female body. However, this understanding is an oversimplification of the dynamics at play that are wrought with contradiction.

The “wrong body” narrative in many ways upholds the sex and gender conflation. By naming the perceived female body as “wrong,” the narrative implies that there is a “correct” body for a man. Medical transition physically mimics the presumed male body in order to move from the “wrong” body to the correct one. However, to reduce physical transition to an imitation of a hegemonic ideal would be a misrepresentation of the embodied experience and the reality of gender dysphoria of the men featured in *Original Plumbing*. Further, an embodied trans* history does call into question the assumption that one’s presumed sex is deterministic in one’s gender identity. Medical transition destabilizes the sexed body as fixed. Hormonal and surgical interventions can alter the very criteria used to determine sex as immutable. This disrupts hegemonic masculinity’s reliance on the stanchancy of the sex and gender conflation.

Counter-narratives of the trans* body as “meant to be” present a different set of contradictions within the sex and gender conflation. These narratives most obviously disrupt the conflation through an emphasis on the lack of connection between sex and gender. However, the phrasing of these narratives as trans* embodiment as something that is “meant to be” can suggest that there are multiple sexed bodies that can be the “correct” body to coexist with a man gender identity. This understanding of the narrative also disrupts the specific conflation assumed in hegemonic masculinity. However, it does so by emphasizing multitude over singularity rather than an existence or non-existence of a connection. Non-medical, physical interventions such as wearing a binder without the intentions of having surgery to remove one’s breasts further complicate this relationship. Binders lead to the perception of a “male” chest without permanently altering the body itself. In this situation, an individual can physically mimic the presumed body of hegemonic masculinity while retaining a sexed body that directly counters the same presumed body of hegemonic masculinity.

⁴⁵ William Franke, “Metaphor and the Making of Sense: The Contemporary Metaphor Renaissance,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 33 (2000): 151.

⁴⁶ Robert L. Ivie, “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War ‘Idealists,’” *Communication Monographs* 54 (1987): 166.

⁴⁷ Ivie, “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention,” 167.

⁴⁸ American Psychiatric Association, “Gender Identity Disorders,” *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – IV-Text Revision* (2000).

⁴⁹ Dean Spade, “Resisting Medicine, Re/modeling Gender,” *Berkeley Women’s Law Journal* (2003): 24.

⁵⁰ “Jock Issue,” *Original Plumbing*, 39.

⁵¹ “Schooled,” *Original Plumbing*, 37.

⁵² Rosi Braidotti, “Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming,” (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 12.

⁵³ “Green,” *Original Plumbing*, 7.

⁵⁴ “Workin’ Stiff,” *Original Plumbing*.

⁵⁵ “Entertainment,” *Original Plumbing*, 31.

⁵⁶ “Entertainment,” 55.

⁵⁷ “Fashion Issue,” *Original Plumbing*.

Trans-masculine Specificity in Queer Temporality

Transgender Significance of Queer Temporality

The concept of queer temporality provides a framework for understanding alternative means of marking time and space. The queered conceptions of time and space that comprise queer temporality contribute to the ways queer people are able to live otherwise. Halberstam describes the connection between queer temporality and queer ways of living, saying, “queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.”⁵⁸ In identifying queer subcultures as salient in the production of queer temporality, Halberstam points the connection between community and temporality. Jagose further explains the significance of queer community in living otherwise while highlighting the tension that persists, asserting, “the logics of community can sometimes seem so elastic as to encompass at once the normative ideologies we’re trying to outrun and the transformed relationalities that we’ll be afforded if ever we make it.”⁵⁹ The emphasis of queer community and subculture within temporality shows the significance of looking at how temporality functions specifically with transgender identity and community.

Theories of transgender embodiment are central to temporal understandings of transgender identity in that embodiment becomes a way of living otherwise that can alternatively mark time. In proposing a trans*-inclusive, biological perspective of sex and gender, Roughgarden suggests gender “refer to the morphology, behavior, and life history of a sexed body.”⁶⁰ In emphasizing morphology and behavior, Roughgarden’s definition necessitates a

dynamic understanding of both embodied and performative aspects of gender. Change does not solely exist in a behavioral or performative realm, but is grounded in the sexed body. The trans* body can thus be seen as a physical marking of a queer temporality. In addition to the inherent queer time that can be attributed to a trans* body, the trans* body can be seen as an inherently queer space. Drawing on psychoanalytic ways of framing the body, Salamon claims, “the body one feels oneself to have is not necessarily the same body that is delimited by its exterior contours, and that this is the case even for any normatively gendered subject.”⁶¹ This tension highlights the queerness of defining the body, and while Salamon sees this tension as applicable to all people, it seems particularly relevant in discussing trans* bodies. Moreover, theories of transgender embodiment that point to queer temporality within the trans* body can be used as a starting point in understanding how trans* bodies queerly mark and are marked by external temporalities.

Temporality of Transition

Physical transition, in addition to being a means of constituting gender in and on the body, is a way of marking time on the body. Roughgarden likens physical transition to the morphing of bodies in evolutionary time.⁶² Changing bodies is a function of time, and thus, the intentionality of physical transition becomes a way of punctuating change and time. Further, physical transition is not merely a temporality of living otherwise. Rather, it is a temporality in resistance to the presumed unchanging nature of biology. If it is generally presumed that biological sex is immutable, a trans* man who injects testosterone to alter his secondary sex characteristics resists that assumption. When the schedule of testosterone injections or the physical changes that occur over time serve to mark time, this temporality also resists the presumed nature of biological sex. Questions of the material and performance-based

significance of trans* identities and bodies build a framework for the functioning of temporality in transition. While Salamon resists the idea that the materiality of a body is the grounding identity and subjectivity⁶³, there are very real implications of trans* materiality, less in the materiality of the body as a self-contained unit, but how that materiality has significance in the performance and lived experience of gender. Following this logic, the trans* body is temporally significant beyond the self-contained unit of the body. The trans* body also constructs an alternative temporality in gendered interactions and experiences.

Freeman introduces the concept of chrononormativity as a means of using time to orient people's lives in a way that stresses maximum productivity. Of particular interest, Freeman describes chrononormativity as "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts."⁶⁴ As chrononormativity highlights the ways time becomes bodily in the way it is innate, temporality tied to transition highlights the ways time becomes bodily in a way that emphasizes its construction. Two salient ways this construction of queer temporality shows up in *Original Plumbing* is through transition marking time in trans* men's narrations, and transition reframing traditional markers of reproductive time.

Transition Marking Time

As seen in the discussion of embodiment metaphors, men in *Original Plumbing* mark time into broad categories of pre- and post-transition. This demarcation operates on multiple levels to categorize, characterize, and constitute the marking of time. The sheer prevalence of this language emphasizes physical transition as both a temporal event and a temporal marker. Further, the language of pre- and post-transition serves to promote a temporal binary, yet remains ambiguous. The category of pre- and post-transition language includes explicit references to pre- and post-surgery, pre- and post- testosterone or T, as well as general reference that could hinge

the distinction on either or a different aspect of physical transition. This ambiguity is furthered in distinctions of pre- and post- testosterone. It can take months, if not years, for testosterone to take full effect. Measurement of “full effect” is also subjective as it can be based on a number of physical changes as well as comparative hormone levels. Despite this ambiguity, the pre- and post- language constitutes a clear distinction and allows transition to be metonymically reduced to a discrete moment.

For many men featured in *Original Plumbing*, physical transition plays an integral part in understanding their trans* identity. Even in these circumstances, transition experiences are narrated in terms of their larger significance. For instance, Joshua Riverdale narrates his experience with Canada’s one-year Real Life Experience requirement to access transition resources in terms of his experiences at work. Because he telecommutes, it was difficult for Joshua to fulfill the requirement to be fully “out” at work.⁶⁵ In Joshua’s case, the government-imposed temporality of transition came into sharp contrast with his own experience of the temporality of transition, highlighting the tension between personal and social implications of marking time through transition. Ian Harvie explains how physical transition has dynamic influence on his identities. Though there is often a firm divide between those who identify as Butch and those who identify as trans*,⁶⁶ Ian says, “I still identify as [Butch], along with trans and that’s not only my history, but my present.”⁶⁷ However, Ian notes that his relationship to butch community has changed since transitioning physically saying, “Sometimes I look at Butch/Femme couples a little too long for their liking, maybe making them feel a little uncomfortable. I want to reach out and say, ‘Hey, I know that you are, and I am, and we are.’”⁶⁸ While Ian’s experience with transition is closely related to identity, his reflection highlights the social implications in terms of access to visible Butch community pre- and post- physical transition.

Both of these cases demonstrate the multi-faceted implications of marking time through transition, even as transition is most directly linked to identity.

The temporality of transition is also evident as a way of marking personal changes in attitude. In a letter introducing the “The Jock Issue,” Rocco described the change in his attitude towards physical activity based on physical transition.

Uncomfortable with my physical self, I retreated from most physical activity. I didn’t want to do anything that rooted me in my body nor did I want anyone looking at me, especially in a locker room. After I started medically transitioning, I regained my interest in physical activity.⁶⁹

Physical transition allows physical activity to be comfortable for Rocco, changing the way he views the activity. Even as Rocco’s reflection emphasizes his own changing outlook, outside perception is significant in that Rocco did not want to be involved in athletics before transition in order to avoid being looked at in the locker room. It is thus implied that because Rocco is more interested in athletics post-transition, that outside perception has changed to at least some extent. Similarly, in the “The Fashion Issue” Griffen notes how his idea of his own sense of fashion has changed since starting testosterone, saying, “I’ve really noticed a rise in my level of fashion flamboyance since I started taking T and passing more.”⁷⁰ Of particular interest in Griffen’s comments is the relationship he describes between his increased flamboyance and taking testosterone as flamboyance is typically associated with effeminacy while testosterone is associated with masculinity. At the same time that Griffen reflects a change in his personal attitude, his reference to passing shows the role that others’ perception of him influences this change. Thus, Rocco and Griffen both demonstrate the difficulty in fully separating the personal and social temporal implications of transition, yet simultaneously emphasize the significance of transition in marking periods of pre- and post- transition within their personal history.

In contrast to the personal emphasis of Rocco's and Griffen's stories, Kye Allums, who came out as a transgender man while playing women's Division I basketball at George Washington University, notes others' responses to his starting testosterone to punctuate his experience. "Pre-T, people were saying, 'You aren't a man,' and after I started it, people were like, 'Oh, now you're a guy.'" ⁷¹ In Kye's experience, society only affirmed his identity after he started testosterone, thus imposing a separation between pre- and post- transition. However, Kye does not reflect the same distinction in his own way of thinking. He continues, "But I was a man before. A man can have a high voice, big boobs. Trans people like us, we're confirming the stereotypes by taking hormones. We feel we have to do this to be seen how we want. Even I'm doing that now. Why? Because I wanted to. I'm a grown-ass man." ⁷² There is a clear disconnect between the way Kye wants testosterone to mark time for him and the way others insist that testosterone marks him becoming a man. Following from this is the tension between Kye's beliefs about testosterone and his acts in using testosterone. In this way, Kye's comments also reflect the interplay of social and personal temporal implications of transition. Ultimately, both social and personal aspects of temporality show how transition is able to serve as an alternative means of marking time.

Queering the Markers of Reproductive Time

Much of queer temporality is understood as being constructed in opposition to reproductive or family time. Halberstam identifies markers of this reproductive time as events such as marriage and reproduction. Further, Halberstam asserts that reproductive time is not merely marked by events, but determines the way we structure our everyday lives. ⁷³ For instance, a working parent designating evenings and weekends as "family time" where they shift their attention from work in order to focus on their spouse and children shows how reproductive

temporality shapes everyday life. The idea that queer temporality is in opposition to reproductive time would seem to imply that the subjects of queer time do not experience the markers of reproductive time. However, many narratives in *Original Plumbing* suggest an alternative relationship between queer temporality and reproductive markers. As the trans* men featured in *Original Plumbing* narrate events typically associated with reproductive time such as birth and adoption of children, they frame transition as salient within those events. In this sense, the queer temporality does not come from an alternative set of markers, but rather through queering the reproductive markers themselves.

Queering of reproductive markers is perhaps most evident in the issue, “Family Matters.” The issue features an interview with Thomas Beatie, a transgender man who gave birth to three children after having legally transitioned from female to male. Even as Thomas participates in a primary marker of reproductive time, his transgender identity queers the act. Similarly to the way Kye’s narration emphasizes the social implications of marking time queerly, Thomas also focuses on the way the world responded to the prominence of his transgender identity in reproduction. Of particular interest is the backlash that came from within the queer community. Thomas describes getting large amounts of hate mail, specifically from within the queer community.⁷⁴ This response demonstrates the contentious nature of queering time, that there are multiple and conflicting ways of queering time, and that a queer identity does not entail an agreement on appropriate constructions of temporality. Further, Thomas as a pregnant man highlights the tension between trans-masculinities and hegemonic masculinity in terms of the conflation of sex and gender. Pregnancy is traditionally seen as an exclusively female embodied experience. Trans* men who choose to bear children not only disrupt the conflation of a male

body with a man gender identity, but also what embodied experiences are possible within a man gender identity.

“Family Matters” also features a story about Ky Platt and his journey to adopting his daughter with his partner. Ky describes deciding to postpone physical transition in order to focus on the adoption process.⁷⁵ This was largely due to the complications that would result from going through both processes simultaneously due to (cis)gendered expectations that govern the adoption process. In Ky’s story, transition, or more accurately lack of transition, became important in the adoption process because of normative systems meant to enforce gendered conceptions of family. Though these types of rules and regulations typically enforce normative conceptions including temporality, in Ky’s case, they highlight transition, making it a salient part of this family making. In this way, it is these systems that are the driving force in queering adoption.

Reproductive time, and the queering of it, is not limited to the creation of families. Reproductive time includes all of the ways that the process of reproduction affects how people construct and mark time. A high school reunion is a productive example of this. High school reunions are often dominated by discussions of family such as who got married and has kids. Wyatt Austin recalls the discomfort of his high school reunion, saying, “When I transitioned I joked that if my beard appears by my 10 year reunion, I will attend.”⁷⁶ For Wyatt, visible transition was a prerequisite for attending the high school reunion. After several uncomfortable interactions, Wyatt and his wife leave the reunion. Later, Wyatt “heard that the most exciting news of the ten year reunion was the divorces and the sex change.”⁷⁷ The high school reunion is queered as a marker of time in two ways. First, Wyatt does not see the reunion as an important marker of time because of the discomfort he feels in that space surrounding transition. Second,

transition is included in how others mark the reunion. Even as the comment has a negative quality to it, reinforcing normative standards, the recognition of transition as important can be read as queering the perception of the reunion. Once again, queering temporality has significant effect on both individual and social levels suggesting that as individuals mark time in queered ways, the social systems surrounding them shift in queer ways even as they reinforce normative markings of time.

Queer Memory

History, specifically queer readings of history play a prominent role in queer temporalities. In a roundtable discussion of queer temporality, the nine theorists involved all emphasized the historical significance of queer theory.⁷⁸ While these theorists focus on larger histories, the significance of reading queerly into the past as a means of establishing a queer temporality can be applied to personal history. Queer memory simultaneously queers past events and establishes the progress of a queer temporality.

Pictures as Queer Memory

In lieu of the letters from the editors that open each issue of *Original Plumbing*, the issue, “Family Matters,” opened with letters between the two editors’ mothers. The mothers discussed what they did with family pictures of their sons pre-transition. Amos’ mother described her pride in displaying photos of Amos since he has transitioned while most photos pre-transition are kept in albums. Photos allow the past to continue into the present. Amos’ mother’s decision is evidence of a queer back reading of Amos’ life and awareness of the queered implications of pre-transition photos in the present day. Rocco’s mother displays photos from both pre- and post-transition. She explains, “we are able to display so many pictures of Rocco when he was little because he looks like a little boy – he knew.”⁷⁹ Rocco’s mother’s justification of what pictures

she displays also represents a queer back reading. It is unclear to what extent either Amos or Rocco were involved in this decision making process, but their mothers' discussion of pre-transition photos points the queer memory functioning in the photos themselves. Further, the display of photos interact with reproductive temporality, particularly reproductive space, in important ways. The display of family photos works within a reproductive temporality framework in that they highlight the family as a primary unit organizing time and space. Because of this, engaging in intentional decision making around how to display pre-transition photos queers the very act of displaying photos and complicates the normative function of that act.

Pre-transition photos have become important outside of family display through social media such as Facebook. When asked how he feels about others' responses to pre- and post-transition pictures on Facebook, Damien said, "It's almost like their reactions are a way of acknowledging all of the energy I have put in to becoming who I am."⁸⁰ Damien's response emphasizes the affirmation that can result from these types of interactions, though these interactions can also be unwanted and uncomfortable. Both positive and negative experiences surrounding pictures via social media point to the way pre-transition pictures influence present experiences.

While both physically displayed photographs as well as photographs on social media point to social implications, pre-transition pictures can also retain personal meaning. Adrian Dalton was a model before he transitioned. Adrian talked about a pre-transition picture that he keeps on his wall. Reflecting he says, "If anything some of the old photos I've got of myself pre-transition make me feel sad for the person I was then. I was very lost and unhappy mostly,

trying to be someone I wasn't.”⁸¹ Even within a personal context, pre-transition pictures reveal something of the current self by bringing aspects of the past into the present.

Reimagining the Past

While most of the narratives featured in *Original Plumbing* recount true events of the past, some issues allow for a reimagining of the past. Typically, these stories come from the perspective of someone who has since transitioned creatively reflecting on their pre-transition self. In this process of reimagining, they insert overtly queer narratives when they did not exist at the time of the actual past event.

In “The Jock Issue,” Josh Klipp reflects on his frustration with having a younger brother who has the physicality to excel in athletics, but lacks the interest. Josh, on the other hand, is very interested in athletics, but felt ostracized because of his physique. Josh presents a list of what could have been different had he and his brother’s bodies been switched at birth. An example from his list: “In 6th grade, I would have been celebrated instead of mocked when I bench pressed more than my classmate Eric Anderson, who, up until then, had a crush on me.”⁸² This example is particularly interesting in that it highlights the gendered expectations of both physicality and sexuality. In bringing this to the forefront, Josh’s reflection queers both his own sense of self and the expectations in that moment. Josh goes on to reflect on what he would say to his younger self. Explaining the difficulty of speaking back he says, “to answer this question, I have to close my eyes and face that quivering little four year old, holding in all that hurt and fear, so aware of how unfair the world is at such a tender age.”⁸³ For the four-year-old version of Josh, queerness manifests in fear, hurt, and unfairness. The messages that Josh says he would share to his younger self have a very empowering tone. He reimagines the positivity in the queerness of his past.

Similar to Josh's narrative of speaking back to his younger self, the "Schooled" issue features a photo series of seven men in their twenties and thirties accompanied by captions in which the men reimagine their high school experience and give their high school selves advice from their current vantage point. In contrast to Josh's messages to his former self, which are framed by the intensity of his reality at the time, most of the messages in the "Schooled" photo series are lighthearted. For example, Scott's advice to his high school self was "you shoulda hit that."⁸⁴ In the same photo series, Tuck lists porn as something that would be in his locker and the picture features him reading playboy.⁸⁵ Each of these responses is exemplary of the confidence, sexual or otherwise, that many of the men in this series wanted to reimagine in a younger self. Though *Original Plumbing* features men with a variety of sexual orientations in other contexts, references to sexuality in the context of reimagining one's gendered past were exclusively heterosexual often emphasizing sexual dominance and the ability to act on sexual interests in women as a means to legitimize a male identity. This narrative directly reflects the conflation of gender identity and heterosexuality within hegemonic masculinity. Particularly in the case of heterosexuality as part of a reimagined past, this narrative deemphasizes the role of the sexed body and highlights the conflation of gender and heterosexuality as a means of participating in hegemonic masculinity.

Jae's advice to his former self is an interesting example in the way he mixes serious and lighthearted tones as he says, "It gets better! One day you will become a handsome man and escape to a land of beautiful and inspiring queers."⁸⁶ The first part of his statement references the popular campaign in preventing LGBT suicide and in doing so, suggests an intensity to his message. However, the second half part of the message is hopeful in a very lighthearted tone. In this way, he reframes the implied hardships of his high school experience with the positivity and

confidence of his current vantage. These messages show how emotional reframing, specifically inserting confidence into a situation where it did not exist, can queer the memory. While changing the emotional frame of the situation does not necessarily insert queerness where it did not originally exist, it does change the quality of that queerness and the way that it functions.

Implications

An analysis of temporality in *Original Plumbing* reveals the relationships between reproductive, queer, and trans* temporalities. While the oppositional nature of reproductive and queer temporalities provides a basis for understanding how temporality functions in *Original Plumbing*, the temporality functions in a way that is uniquely trans* because of the central role of transition. In this context, transition refers to shifts in personal gender identification as well as social response and perception influenced by medical and non-medical changes. Within this framework, transition should not be understood as a single moment that can be universally defined. Rather transition is used broadly to refer to a variety of events depending on the given narrative. Despite the ambiguous definition, transition functions across narratives as way to distinguish an individual's temporal experience into two broad periods most clearly seen in the use of pre- and post- transition language. This constitutes a uniquely trans* temporality because, generally, both pre- and post- transition temporal periods are characterized as queered from the norm. However, transition marks a shift in the queerness. Thus, conceptions of queer temporality are useful in understanding the way any given temporal event functions in relation to the normativity of reproductive temporality, but a notion trans* temporality is necessary to conceptualize the centrality of the shift in how queer temporality functions within a single narrative.

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- ⁵⁸ Judith Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies," in *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 2.
- ⁵⁹ Annamarie Jagose et al, "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13 (2007): 189.
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- ⁷⁷ "Schooled," 40.
- ⁷⁸ Dinshaw et al, "Theorizing Queer Temporality: A Roundtable Discussion" *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13 (2007): 177-195.
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- ⁸⁶ "Schooled," 31.

The Blurred Lines of Kinship and Community

Within queer experiences and reflected in queer scholarship, the boundaries between kinship, family, and community are often blurred. Weston's understanding of chosen family relies on a positioning of queer subjects in exile from traditionally biological notions of kinship and family.⁸⁷ However, narratives such as those in *Original Plumbing* suggest a more complex relationship as the trans* subjects featured in the magazine demonstrate the multiplicity of connections to and between a variety of types of kinship. Pidduck uses ambivalence to explain the strong and contradictory attitudes towards matters of kinship that are prevalent in queer communities, saying, "ambivalence captures the fraught affective and political stakes of kinship for queer subjects and communities."⁸⁸ Despite, or perhaps through, the fraught relationship in queer attitudes towards biological and chosen families, themes that define kinship more broadly begin to emerge. Freeman asserts that central to theories of kinship is the sense of belonging. Further, Freeman emphasizes the needs filled by the productivities associated with kinship in that it "delineates the caretaking activities that have not been socialized as services for purchase or as state entitlements."⁸⁹ By using a sense of belonging and caretaking activities as defining features, kinship can be traced not only across biological and chosen families but also through larger senses of community that fulfill the same needs. Additionally, in *Original Plumbing*, familial terms and metaphors are used across biological family, chosen family, and community contexts. Thus, along with a sense of belonging, and caretaking activities, familial referencing serves to mark and define kinship in *Original Plumbing* rather than a specific arrangement of relationships.

Care and Caretaking

Parents

While many narratives in *Original Plumbing* reference caretaking in non-traditional settings, there is noticeable representation of biological family as a source of caretaking, both directly and indirectly related to trans* identity. The issue “Family Matters” features a series of family profiles conducted at the Philadelphia Trans Health Conference. Given the context of a major transgender conference, it is predictable that these profiles would largely feature supportive parents and their trans* children. Beyond a mere display of supportive and positive biological families, these profiles highlight the caretaking relationships integral to supporting a trans* child. One mother of an adult trans* son reflected on being reassured of her changing relationship with her child by talking with other trans* men, saying, “one of my greatest fears was that my past with my then-daughter would be more or less erased. So it was especially wonderful to hear from the trans men about their post-transition relationships with their mothers.”⁹⁰ Both her uneasiness and her reassurance were centered on the relationship and connection with her child, placing this relationship at the center of her support. In a separate profile, Jacob, a trans man, described his relationship with his mother as “extremely close” going on to explain “we always were, but I think that transitioning brought us closer.”⁹¹ Jacob also centralizes the relationship, rather than specific actions, as key to support. Each of these descriptions moves caretaking from a mere series of actions to the affective qualities of a relationship.

Beyond support directly tied to transition, several narratives reference parental influences that are more indirectly tied to trans* identity. The “Fashion Issue” presented profiles of trans* men who intentionally use fashion to express various aspects of their identity. In describing what inspires his fashion, Glenn said that his mother inspired his “bold fashion

choices on a fat body.”⁹² Though Glenn does not explicitly name this as evidence of support from his mother, he is tracing the lineage of his self-affirmation to his mother, showing how her care is manifested in his trans* embodiment. Similarly, Geo references both his mother and father as inspiration for his desire to be a musician.⁹³ These narratives exemplify how parental influences can operate tangentially to trans* identity, yet still reference powerful connections of kinship.

Chosen Family

Like biological family references, *Original Plumbing* features a wide range of references to chosen family. While some explicitly reference the term “chosen family,” others describe family-like relationships in terms of caretaking roles without explicitly naming these relationships as chosen family. While there is no firm distinction between these implicitly chosen family and the relationships described in broader trans* community spaces, it is productive to separate specific relationships formed around caretaking roles from more diffuse community support.

The “Family Issue” features Enzi and Jay talking about their relationship as chosen family. Jay describes Enzi as his “brother from another mother.”⁹⁴ His use of the colloquial expression that relies on familial terms reinforces the familial bond that he is describing. In describing his larger chosen family, Jay says, “they are my support beam and I’m a part of theirs.”⁹⁵ Here, Jay emphasizes the role his chosen family plays, rather than the name he gives them. Finally, Jay points to the racialized aspects of kinship. He references acts of racism that he and Enzi, both people of color, experienced that intensified their relationship. He elaborates, “Minnesota is a predominantly white state – there aren’t a lot of out, queer, trans-masculine folks

of color. He is someone else in this small community that I could share thoughts and experiences with that I really couldn't share with anyone else."⁹⁶ In this sense, Jay is highlighting the intersectional elements of a sense of belonging.

In contrast to Jay and Enzi's explicit deployment of familial terms, the Faerie community represents the way a queer subculture can take on characteristics of kinship without using explicitly familial references. Justin Vivian, who uses the pronoun, V,² articulates both a sense of belonging and caretaking that occurs within the Faerie community. In describing V's first experience at the Radical Faerie Gatherings, Justin Vivian recalls, "it was the first time I had experienced both being myself and not being a spectacle."⁹⁷ For Justin Vivian, this represented an authentic sense of belonging. Further, Justin Vivian describes specific forms of caretaking within the Faerie community, saying, "there's a lot of intergenerational care-giving going on. Knowing that makes it a lot less frightening to think about getting old."⁹⁸ Intergenerational care giving is exemplary of the type of care-giving acts and relationships that constitute kinship. It is this specificity of the care-giving relationships in conjunction with the sense of belonging that allows this subculture community to function in many of the same ways that a chosen family or biological family does.

The Kinship Nature of Communities

Kinship as seen in biological and chosen families tends to be contained through discrete networks of relationships. However, as seen in the example of the Faerie community, the lines between these discrete networks and more diffuse communities can be blurred. Further, communities without the specified caregiving roles seen in the Faerie community can embody

² "V" is used as a gender neutral pronoun in place of she/her/hers or he/him/his

the nature of kinship through fostering a sense of belonging and network of support. In *Original Plumbing*, examples of these communities are seen arising out of needs for visibility and resources.

Community as Spaces of Visibility and Invisibility

Several narratives in *Original Plumbing* focus on spaces that bring people together in community based on creating a sense of belonging for trans* men. The “Party” issue focuses on nightlife as a site of community building and belonging. *Original Plumbing* used parties to raise the funds to begin publishing the quarterly magazine and throw release parties for each issue. In the introduction to the “Party” issue, Rocco and Amos share that through the first party “it was evident that our community didn’t just want a magazine to see their lives reflected in a positive way but also craved a physical space to celebrate.”⁹⁹ This reflection points to the various spheres in which community is constituted. Physical space becomes more than a backdrop for discourse. Hess traces this shift towards rhetorical scholarship conceptualizing a text that “does not only constitute the recording of speech; rather, the text has become something living, breathing, and operating within unique spaces and received by particular audiences.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, the physical spaces created by and referenced within *Original Plumbing* are rhetorically significant in the way they represented differently situated discourse that constitutes community for trans* men differently.

This sense of belonging fostered in these spaces is based on the duality of visibility and invisibility in a space. Justin Vivian captures this paradox in V’s experience at the Radical Faerie Gatherings, saying, “I discovered the luxury of invisibility that most people can tap into whenever they want...I’d like to feel that I can sometimes be myself without causing a

commotion.”¹⁰¹ The “luxury of invisibility” that Justin Vivian refers to is the ability to be visible in an authentic way as an individual while invisible by not standing apart from the community. This balance of visibility and invisibility is seen in spaces that bring communities together both regularly and for singular occasions.

The *Original Plumbing* parties demonstrate the intentionality that is possible in nightlife and necessary to community spaces. *Original Plumbing*’s resident DJ reflects on this intentionality, saying, “I think nightlife is integral to community building if that’s your goal with the space you intend to create. I think a lot of people assume club nights are solely intended for hedonistic pursuits, but that’s not always the case.”¹⁰² Community in nightlife is not inherent to the space, but the space provides the opportunity to create a sense of belonging for a community.

Nightlife plays a central role in community building for Bklyn Boihood, a group formed to address the lack of positive visibility of queer and trans* bois of color.³ Bklyn Boihood emphasizes the same intersectional dynamics of community that Jay and Enzi articulated in kinship. One of the leaders, Ryann, expressed this as “it’s really important for, especially, black and brown folks to have space. Then, on top of that, to be queer and trans* and living across so many spectrums, to be able to go somewhere where people not only look like you but they feel like you.”¹⁰³ Ryann’s reflection adds an intersectional dimension to the balance of visibility and invisibility in the sense of belonging.

Outside of nightlife, this balance of visibility and invisibility can be seen in spaces that bring community together around a work product. Specifically, this is true of businesses that primarily serve the trans* community and viewings of artistic products that reflect the trans* community. In introducing an interview with Jess who owns the boutique The Seventh Heart,

³ “Boi” is a term used in place of “boy” to emphasize alternative masculinities and the range of masculine identities beyond “male” or “man”

Amos described the store as “much more than just a clothing store, The Seventh Heart brings together the fashionably creative queer community in San Francisco, selling independently designed and produced t-shirts, zines, art books and comfortable fashion staples – all in one space.”¹⁰⁴ The Seventh Heart reflects the trans* community, making it collectively visible to the wider community while allowing trans* individuals a space in which they are not the anomaly. This is further reflected in the structure of the store as Jess removed gendered sections from the store. He says of this change, “It’s a lot easier now and I see that people just buy what they like and what looks good without worrying about it.”¹⁰⁵ By removing the gendered impositions inherent to how most clothing stores are organized, Jess makes The Seventh Heart a space that allows for fluidity without that fluidity standing out. In this way, the store is oriented towards community through a balanced sense of belonging that is not limited to specific structures of kinship.

Similarly, artistic works that authentically reflect trans* experiences orient the community around a shared sense of belonging. Silas Howard described his thought process behind the film *By Hook Or By Crook* as “I wanted to see a different story up on the screen, one that embraced those living on the outskirts of “normalcy” but dealt with universal struggles.”¹⁰⁶ The film itself embodies the balance of visibility and invisibility and forms a community around it based on this sense of belonging. The importance of the film in the community was tangible as Silas recalled the ten-minute standing ovation they received from the sold-out first showing at the Castro Theater.¹⁰⁷ Beyond the immediate community in that moment, Rocco, who interviewed Silas, reflected that the film was “the first film I’ve ever seen where trans characters existed but where it wasn’t the centerpiece of what the film was trying to tell you.”¹⁰⁸ The balance that the film achieved resonated with both the original and future audiences, suggesting

the sense of belonging could transcend a temporally bound event, reinforcing a deep sense of community not tied to specific relationships.

The characterization of these spaces as sites of visibility and invisibility points to how situated discourse constitutes community in particular ways. A physical space that brings many trans* men together allows for individuals to visibly recognize their own community without standing out as an individually visible trans* man. While the print magazine might promote visibility for trans* men in other ways, the visibility/invisibility paradox is unique to physical spaces because only physical spaces allow for the discourse that constitutes that conception of community.

Community as Access to Resources

Sharing access to resources, both physical and emotional, is central to many of the communities featured in *Original Plumbing*. In both formal and informal groups, individuals are brought together to this end. When asked about the trans* community in London, Adrian Dalton referenced trans* support groups that were important to him in the early part of his transition.¹⁰⁹ These formalized support groups show how individuals gravitate towards the tangible and intangible resources they provide, and Adrian's equating of these groups with the broader trans* community is telling of the central role they play in disseminating these resources. Formal support groups can also be the starting point for less formalized social groups that are built on shared resources. For example, several members of the trans Jewish punk band met at a trans-masculine support group. One band member, Simcha, emphasized the importance of his relationship with band-mate Nogga that came out of the formal group, saying, "at the time I was really religiously observant and felt awkward being religious, gender variant and queer and

Nogga helped me feel accepted by directing me to various resources and introducing me to other religiously Jewish trans folks.”¹¹⁰ While the support group facilitated the beginning of Simcha and Nogga’s relationship, it was the personal dynamic that operated on intersectional levels that allowed them to connect through the sharing of resources and ultimately strengthened their individual relationship.

Beyond the positive implications of resource-based groups for those directly involved, these groups impact the culture of the larger community. Adrian’s discussion of support groups as part of the wider trans* community emphasize these larger intra-community effects. Some narratives suggest that resource-based groups can positively alter the culture of the wider cisgender community. Benji, the founder of his school’s Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), articulates this effect in the need for GSAs, saying, “I feel like every school needs to have a GSA because just the presence of one already makes the school a safer and more inclusive place for everyone.”¹¹¹ The circulation of both tangible and intangible resources within a GSA, according to Benji, has the effect of circulating intangible resources such as feelings of safety beyond the boundaries of the group.

The effects of resource-based groups outside the confines of a group’s boundaries provides a framework for understanding the community-based implications of circulating resources that are not tied to a traditional group such as the distribution of print publications or online resources. “The Hero Issue” honors pioneers of the trans* community. Several of the individuals featured were tied to the organization FTM International, which was founded by Lou Sullivan and was the first organization for trans men in the world.¹¹² FTM International began publishing the *FTMI Newsletter* in 1987. Rocco and Amos describe *FTMI Newsletter* as “the most important community link that existed to connect trans guys and their information and

experiences with each other.”¹¹³ Jed Bell recalled the importance of the newsletter at a time when there was a complete lack of other ways to connect with trans* community. He describes receiving his first copy of *FTMI Newsletter*, saying, “and this composes the entirety of our knowledge of trans people in the world.”¹¹⁴ Without formal support groups or other physical spaces devoted to the trans* community, the circulation of this newsletter was the only way to disseminate knowledge and resources, and thus, it was the only means of orienting a community to one another. For Jed, the Internet became essential to expanding on what *FTMI Newsletter* was doing. He describes the Internet as “what makes us, a tiny embattled community, able to finally be big enough to join all these pieces together to be able to take shape.”¹¹⁵ The Internet further allowed the trans* community to become unified without a common geographic center. In this way, the circulation of resources formed the trans* community. As such, the significance of the *FTMI Newsletter* is not lost on Rocco and Amos in relation to their circulation of *Original Plumbing*. In reference to FTMI and the *FTMI Newsletter*, they say, “we thank them for setting the precedence for what it means to build a community through printed media.”¹¹⁶ Rocco and Amos’ statement emphasize how circulating resources, such as is done in *Original Plumbing*, continues to be the work of community building.

Both *FTMI Newsletter* and *Original Plumbing* constitute community through their circulation. Warner posits a conception of a public constituted by the circulation of a text saying of the public in question “not just that it is self organizing, a kind of entity created by its own discourse, nor even that this space of circulation is taken to be a social entity, but that in order for this to happen all discourse or performance addressed to a public must characterize the world in which it attempts to circulate, and it must attempt to realize that world through address.”¹¹⁷ *FTMI Newsletter* and *Original Plumbing* reimagine a place for trans* men in the world through their

circulation. This world-making work accomplished in each publication moves them from mere circulation to the constitution of a public. Further, in this capacity, these publications go beyond simply reflecting the lives of trans* men onto the pages of a magazine. Rather, they play an active role in shaping and reshaping the public constituted by their circulation.

The circulation of resources within the trans* community is seen as vital. In particular, these resources are understood as a necessity in preventing suicide. With the National Center for Transgender Equality reporting a 41% suicide-attempt rate within the trans* community,¹¹⁸ suicide prevention takes on a distinct sense of urgency within the community. When Jed Bell took charge of *FTMI Newsletter*, he described it as “a terrifyingly large responsibility... The people who passed [the newsletter] along to me all said, ‘There’s somebody who’s waiting for this to come to their mailbox every three months, and they might not make it if it doesn’t get there on time.’”¹¹⁹ Jed’s perception of his responsibility reflects the communal understanding of suicide prevention. The urgency of the publication, specifically, and the circulation of resources, generally, did not exist in isolated individuals, but as a notion central to those doing the work, and the community as a whole. This urgency is continued in elements of *Original Plumbing*. “The Jock Issue” features a full-page ad for their anti-suicide “Talk About It” campaign. The page reads “#TALKABOUTIT Share Solutions, End Isolation” (emphasis in original).¹²⁰ The premise of this campaign hinges on sharing resources in the form of personal solutions as a key to building community and ultimately decreasing suicide rates. The consciousness regarding the urgency of the message and the responsibility of the editors shows a departure from Warner’s conception of publics constituted through circulation of a text. Warner postulates that a public is constituted through “mere attention,” de-emphasizing the quality of that attention.¹²¹ While the intensity of the attention towards resources and suicide prevention messages do not discount

FTMI Newsletter or *Original Plumbing* from being a public in the sense that Warner is describing, that intensity does suggest that what is constituted through the circulation of these publications is qualitatively different from the associations of a public. Rather, the circulations of these publications constitute community.

While *Original Plumbing* focuses exclusively on the trans* male community in the other issues, “The Hero Issue” includes some trans-feminine individuals who have had and continue to have immense impact on the entire trans* community. One such individual is Kate Bornstein. Bornstein signs open letters to the trans* community as “Auntie Kate.” When Bornstein was diagnosed with lung cancer in March 2013, over two thousand people contributed to an online crowd funding campaign, raising over one hundred thousand dollars in six days to help pay for her treatment. These examples show Bornstein’s significance within the trans* community. She is known for the suicide prevention mantra she shares with people across the country, “do whatever it takes to make your life more worth living. The only rule is don’t be mean.” Bornstein describes her experience with lung cancer in terms of deciding to live. She says, “a large part of the reason I decided yes was because of our community and because of my place in it. I like being Auntie Kate. I love my nieces and nephews, I love my family, I love my tribe.”¹²² Bornstein uses the same familial terms used to describe biological and chosen families to describe the entirety of the trans* community. Her choice in using these terms, particularly in the context of intense messages of choosing to stay alive, grounds the trans* community in understandings of kinship. Her message exemplifies the intensity of the bonds, often between strangers, in the trans* community and the way kinship functions in the community beyond specific personal relationships. Rather, kinship functions throughout the diffuse community as individuals orienting themselves to a common sense of belonging and support.

Implications

While kinship and community are often treated as analytically distinct categories, tracing these two concepts through the issues of *Original Plumbing* reveals the inadequacy of understanding kinship and community separately in the case of trans* men. The kinship and community structures of trans* men resist the structures of normative kinship as well as dominant narratives regarding the expectations of trans* relationships to kinship.

Descriptions of chosen family most closely mimic normative kinship structures. Because of this, chosen families resist normative constructions of kinship in that they do not rely on reproductive family units, yet emphasize the strength of the familial bond. Chosen families push the definitional boundary of kinship by centering relational bonds and de-emphasizing familial origin as the defining quality. The resistance to normative kinship structures is further evident in communities that are kinship-like in terms of terminology and nature of relationships, but do not intend to create or mimic family units. It is the kinship nature of many trans-masculine communities that most clearly highlights the inadequacy of kinship and community as analytically distinct.

A dominant narrative imposed on trans* men is the expectation of biological family rejection. While it is indisputable that family rejection is a reality for many trans* men, the inclusion of narratives of family acceptance resist the universality of the expectation. A dominant expectation that trans* people will be rejected from their family serves to police a trans* person's access to kinship units. Biological family acceptance most directly resists this narrative and associated gate keeping. However, chosen family and the kinship nature of trans-masculine communities also resist this expectation by redefining kinship bonds in ways that makes kinship accessible despite the dominant narrative of family rejection.

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- ¹¹⁴ "The Hero Issue," 48.
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- ¹¹⁸ National Center for Transgender Equality, "Injustice at Every Turn."
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- ¹²⁰ "The Jock Issue," 50.
- ¹²¹ Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," 419.
- ¹²² "The Hero Issue," 20.

Conclusions

Trans-masculinities as the theoretical framework for this analysis of *Original Plumbing* emphasizes the complex relationships between trans-masculine narratives and larger discussions of masculinity and queerness. Trans-masculinities is significant as a concept because it emphasizes trans* specificity within broader understandings of queer experiences as well as the specificity of the trans-masculine spectrum as representing qualitatively different experiences than the trans-feminine spectrum. Temporality, embodiment, kinship, and community can each be understood through broader queer frameworks in ways that highlight deviation from normative frameworks. However, each of these themes functions in *Original Plumbing* in a way that is uniquely trans-masculine.

Trans-masculinities represents a particularly complex relationship to hegemonic masculinity in that trans-masculinities simultaneously undermine the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity while mimicking many of the values of hegemonic masculinity such as physical strength and sexual dominance. The framework of trans-masculinities allows the narratives in *Original Plumbing* to be understood in relation to hegemonic masculinity without losing the specificity of the experiences that make them unique to trans* men. The function of trans-masculinities in *Original Plumbing* is constructed both deductively from existing theoretical conceptions of hegemonic masculinity and inductively by beginning with the narratives of trans* men in their own words to construct an alternative lens of masculinity. This tension is productive in that it highlights the constraints of hegemony without necessitating that hegemonic masculinity be the lens through which one views a trans-masculine subject. These tensions also raise questions regarding the implications of trans-masculinities in terms of broader understandings of masculinity, beyond trans* men specifically. While the disruptions of

hegemonic masculinity represented by trans-masculinities have most direct implications for trans* men, the framework presents an opportunity for further inquiry into the implications of the disruption of a sex/gender/heterosexuality conflation for cisgender men and normative understandings of masculinity.

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